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APARN

ASIA PACIFIC ARTISTIC RESEARCH NETWORK CONFERENCE 2025

JULY 1–3, 2025

PROCEEDINGS

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Foreword

Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network (APARN) Annual Conference Proceedings, Chulalongkorn University, July 1–3, 2025

We are delighted to present the proceedings of the Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network (APARN) Annual Conference, which was held at Chulalongkorn University from July 1 to 3, 2025. This year, APARN met under the important theme of "Artistic Research for Creative Communities," seeking to recognize the power of artistic inquiry to inspire, engage, and transform communities across the Asia Pacific region and beyond. The vibrant academic setting and rich cultural backdrop of Chulalongkorn University offered a wonderful environment for exploring how artistic research can cultivate creativity, foster collaboration, and drive meaningful change in and beyond groups we already know.

The conference lasted three full days in early July and showcased the multitalented Indonesian artist Arahmaiani Feisal as its Keynote Speaker and the Thai premier of the Pichet Klunchun Dance Company's *No. 60* besides the 170 presentations and more than 300 attendees from more than thirty countries, along with several live performances. Throughout the pages of these proceedings, readers will find more than 100 papers as well as the abstracts of all conference participants. The diverse range of contributions that reflect the dynamic nature of artistic research in the Asia Pacific today. From interdisciplinary collaborations and experimental methodologies to community-based projects and critical reflections, these works illuminate the profound role that artistic research plays in shaping creative communities. The dialogues and debates that unfolded during the conference—spanning visual arts, performance, sound, media, and more—demonstrate how artistic practices can be harnessed to build bridges, encourage participation, and enrich the fabric of complex and changing societies across the region.

Our deepest gratitude goes to all participants, presenters, and organizers whose dedication and passion were instrumental in making this conference a resounding success. Special thanks are extended to Chulalongkorn University for their generous support and to the APARN leadership for continually championing the vision of artistic research as a transformative force for creative communities. We hope these proceedings serve not only as a record of this year's achievements but also as an inspiration for future initiatives, collaborations, and discoveries that will continue to nurture and invigorate creative communities throughout the region.

APARN 2025 Local Organizers Pornrat Damrhung
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Conference Program and Schedule

APARN - Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network Conference 2025
1-3 July 2025
Department of Dramatic Arts, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand
Time 08.00 a.m. - 05.00 p.m. (in Thailand)

Tuesday, 1 July 2025				
Time	**Sodsai Pantoomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts / Maha Chakri Sirindhorn (MCS) Building on the Chulalongkorn University campus**			
8:00 - 9:30	**Registration and Coffee** Sodsai Pantoomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts Foyer			
9:30 - 9:45	**Welcome Message and Introduction to APARN 2025 Conference** Pornrat Damrhung Sodsai Pantoomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts			
9:45 - 10:15	**Conference Opening** by Chulalongkorn University Administration Sodsai Pantoomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts			
10:15 - 11:00	**Keynote: Arahmaiani Feisal** "The Flag Project as Communal Environmentalism in the Asia Pacific: Re-interpreting Traditional Wisdom on Human-Nature Relations for the Contemporary World" Sodsai Pantoomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts			
11:00 - 12:00	**Round Table Discussion** Danny Butt, Kurniawan Adi Saputro, Gunalan Nadarajan, Kamol Phoasavadi, Piyawat Thamkulangkool Moderated by Lowell Skar Sodsai Pantoomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts			
12:00 - 13:30	**LUNCH**			
Time	**Room 1 (MCS 501/29)**	**Room 2 (MCS 501/5)**	**Room 3 (MCS 501/9)**	**Room 4 (MCS 501/13)**
13:30 - 14:30	ID02 The Climate Re-imagination	TP08 Researching the Stage: Creation and Critical Reflection	DM02 Ritual and Sacred Lineages in Dance	VA01 Art, Pedagogy, and Social Change
14:40 - 15:40	TP10 Crafting Performance through Movement, Mask, and Structure	CF01 Placemaking Through Art: Community, Collaboration, and Urban Identity	AE01 Art as Community Dialogue	VA02 Embodied and Visual Storytelling as Research
15:40 - 16:00	**BREAK**			
16:00 - 17:00	TP11 Mapping Space and Community in Performance Research	AE03 Artistic Research and Empowering Creative Communities	TP07 Performing Archives and Re-reading Institutions	VA03 Art, Place, and Cultural Memory

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Wednesday, 2 July 2025				
Time	**Room 1 (MCS 501/29)**	**Room 2 (MCS 501/5)**	**Room 3 (MCS 501/9)**	**Room 4 (MCS 501/13)**
9:00 - 10:00	MU01 Community, Critique, and Sonic Agency	ID03 Community Theatre, Empowerment, and Collective Voice	TP09 Embodied Collaboration: Feminist, Pedagogical, and Performative Practices	VA04 Rethinking the Collective
10:00 - 10:20	**BREAK**			
10:20 - 11:20	MU02 Music as Cultural Mediator	CF02 Creating Spaces for Community and Collective Imagination	DM05 Embodied Memory and Activist Dance	VA05 Ecological Memory and Artistic Regeneration
11:30 - 12:30	MU03 Embodied Inquiry and Cross-Cultural Flow in Musical Performance	CF03 Ethics, Facilitation, and Learning in Artistic Practice	DM06 Intertextual Bodies and Choreographic Hybridity	VA06 Archives, Memory, and Affective Resistance
12:30 - 13:30	**LUNCH**			
13:30 - 14:30	MU04 Immersive Sound and Local Worlds	ID01 Artistic Research and Empowered Voices	DM07 Embodied Heritage: Movement, Puppetry, and the Politics of Cultural Transmission	VA07 Heritage, Materiality, and Cultural Transformation
14:40 - 15:40	MU05 Heritage in Practice: Music Pedagogy, Performance, and Documentation	ID05 Performing Place and Possibility: Travel, Tourism, and Community Futures	DM08 Movement Histories and Cultural Archives	VA08 Myth, Mystery, and Multisensory Inquiry
15:40 - 16:00	**BREAK**			
16:00 - 17:00	ID06 Arts, Embodiment, and Well-being in Aging and Disability	ID04 Community Performance and Cultural Identity	DM09 Choreography Beyond the Stage: Dance, Media, and Representation	VA09 Art in Community, Space, and Legacy

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Thursday, 3 July 2025				
Time	**Room 1 (Sodsai Theatre)**	**Room 2 (MCS 501/5)**	**Room 3 (MCS 501/9)**	**Room 4 (MCS 501/13)**
9:00 - 10:00	TP06 Tradition, Immersion, and the Integrated Self	ID07 Ritual Reimagined and Embodied Memory	FM01 Digital Practices and Archival Agency	VA10 Reframing Cultural Heritage
10:00 - 10:20	**BREAK**			
10:20 - 11:20	TP05 Dramaturgies of Discovery Through Improvisation, Devising, and Directing	ID08 Performance and Social Justice: Art, Marginalization, and Queer Resistance	FM02 Mediating Memory and Identity Through Creative Forms	AE06 Embodied Pedagogies and Critical Somatics
11:30 - 12:30	TP04 Reviving Performance Legacies: From Regional Roots to Actor-Centered Craft	ID09 Performing Ecologies and Environmental Perception	FM03 Future Commons and Critical Technologies	AE02 Mapping Space and Self through Creative Practice
12:30 - 13:30	**LUNCH**			
13:30 - 1430	AE05 Experimental and Process-based Education	TP01 Speculative Performance and More-than-Human Futures	DM03 Artistic Research and Emerging Creative Ecosystems	AE04 Pedagogical Change in Higher Arts Education
14:40 - 15:40	DM04 Dancing With Place: Movement, Sound, and Environment	ID10 Heritage, Community, and Creative Expression	TP02 Theatre for Empathy and Self-Discovery	TP03 Performing Transformation and Emotional Presence
15:40 - 16:00	**BREAK**			
16:00 - 17:00	**Performances and Closing Remarks (Sodsai Theatre)** DM01 Dancing the Soul: Embodiment, Identity, and Living Heritage			
17:00 - 18:00	**APARN 2025 CONFERENCE CLOSING SESSION** APARN Conference Closing – Sodsai Pantoomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts Remarks by Sawita Diteeyont and Lowell Skar Special Performances			

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Conference Program and Schedule
APARN - Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network Conference 2025
1 July 2025
Department of Dramatic Arts, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand
Time 08.00 a.m. - 05.00 p.m. (in Thailand)

Time	Room	Session No.	Moderator	Session ID	Session Title	Presenter	Presentation Title
08:00 - 12:00	**Registration and Conference Opening Ceremony Sodsai Pantoomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts**						
13:30 - 14:30	**Room 1 (MCS 501/29)**	1	Parida Manomaiphibul	ID02	The Climate Re-imagination	Ruttikorn Vuttikorn	Climate Community Street Play: Cultivating Multispecies Networks of Care in Climate-Impacted Urban Neighbourhoods.
						Kurniawan Adi Saputro	Botanical Artists' Relationship with Vegetation: A Case of Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand
						Angela Ricasio Hoten	Creative Convergence across Art, Science and Culture in the Climate Crisis
	Room 2 (MCS 501/5)	2	Tanatchaporn Kittikong	TP08	Researching the Stage: Creation and Critical Reflection	Pornrat Damrhung	Designing Laboratories for Artistic Research
						Ashutosh Potdar	Production of Knowledge in Researching for a Performance Work
						Piyawat Thamkulangkool	Creativity under pressure: Reflection from contrasting stakeholders' gaze towards Thainess in Thai contemporary performing arts
	Room 3 (MCS 501/9)	3	Phakamas Jirajarupat	DM02	Ritual and Sacred Lineages in Dance	Kornkarn Rungsawang	Mali Bucha: Dance Offering
						Nadia Hazirah Nazren	Ajat Indu Menua Pakan: Embodying Dayak-Iban Female Dance Tradition
						Supphasin Ainphet	Studying the study of being a Nora Duangkamol Boonchu teacher in educational institutions: a case study of Nora transmission
	Room 4 (MCS 501/13)	4	Siriya Jitpimolmard	VA01	Art, Pedagogy, and Social Change	Ngoc Tran	Integrating Feminist Pedagogy in Vietnamese Graphic Design Education: Reimagine the Design Learning experience
						Tharinee Ratanasatien	E-Lerng Artists Collective: A Decade of Artistic Research in Community-Driven Transformation
						Joyce Lu	Social Justice in Playback Theatre

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Time	Room	Session No.	Moderator	Session ID	Session Title	Presenter	Presentation Title
14:40 - 15:40	**Room 1 (MCS 501/29)**	5	Alice Tsoi	TP10	Crafting Performance through Movement, Mask, and Structure	Rusharnon Whongkomonl	The Architect of Chaos: Physical Actor Training in Farce Through Mask Techniques for Bernard in Boeing-Boeing by Marc Camoletti
						Sawita Diteeyont	The application of traditional Thai play structures in the creation of modern Thai stage plays
	Room 2 (MCS 501/5)	6	Joe Pluemjit	CF01	Placemaking Through Art: Community, Collaboration, and Urban Identity	Kuntara Chaicharn	Arts, Place, and Identity: Translating the Samyan Lalanjai Model to Bang Saen Ploen
						Kusuma Venzky-Stalling	Building Creative Community Through A Collaboration Of Different Culture
						Nadhanant Uaesilapa	Bangsaen Plearn: Making Bangsaen city lively through its community art
	Room 3 (MCS 501/9)	7	Patsupang Kongbumrung	AE01	Art as Community Dialogue	Mary Grace Compuesto	Mindworks: A Cebuano Student Festival as Social Critic and Incubator of Performance Art
						Chutima Maneewattana	Playback Theatre as a Catalyst for Spiritual Growth: Exploring Buddhist Learning through Drama
						Pachaya Akkapram	Kaen Isan Wat: A Creative Theatre Space for Youth Utilizing Community and Local Culture as a Foundation to Connect the New Generation to Their Communities through Theatre Practice.
	Room 4 (MCS 501/13)	8	Sukumala Nithipattaraahnan	VA02	Embodied and Visual Storytelling as Research	Joan Marie Kelly	Embodied Narratives: Visual Storytelling as Ethnographic Knowledge
						Izabelle Louise Monteiro Penha	Embodied and Visual Narratives: Kinaesthetic and Photographic Practices for Reimagining Community
						Nomar Miano	A Hermeneutic of Collaboration: Curating Community-Engaged Work in UNESCO's Creative City of Design
15:40 - 16:00	**BREAK**						

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Time	Room	Session No.	Moderator	Session ID	Session Title	Presenter	Presentation Title
16:00 - 17:00	**Room 1 (MCS 501/29)**	9	Sawita Diteeyont	TP11	Mapping Space and Community in Performance Research	Lowell Skar	Mapping Networks of Performing Arts Research in Thailand: A Preliminary Survey of Some Artists' Performance Practices and Community-Building Processes
						Nattaporn Thapparat	Filling the Empty Space: People, Site and Experience
						Andy Miller	Making Space: On the Fragility and Force of Collective Research
	Room 2 (MCS 501/5)	10	Pim Pisalsarakit Niyomwan	AE03	Artistic Research and Empowering Creative Communities	Yilmaz Vurucu	From Manifesto to Method: Artistic Research, Community Voice, and the Reimagining of Energy Transitions
						Dangkamon Na-pombejra	Act Your Own Story: Enhancing Creative Skills for the Local Community to Develop Soft Power for the Nation
						Sakchai Iamkrasin	The Process of Developing Drama Students Holistically with the Enneagrams
	Room 3 (MCS 501/9)	11	Chutima Maneewattana	TP07	Performing Archives and Re-reading Institutions	Viorel Cojanu	Performing Archives
						Adrian TAN	OPEN END: Resonate, Re-Read and Re-Trace The Substation Archive
						Freda Fiala	The Sensing Fold: Research, Affect, and Asia-Pacific Performance Festival Ecologies
	Room 4 (MCS 501/13)	12	Joe Pluemjit	VA03	Art, Place, and Cultural Memory	Sheba Saeed	Preservation of Culinary Heritage of Vietnam via Art
						Pietro Lo Casto	Moist Maps: Reimagining the Mekong River Through the Materiality of Its River Weed
						Kunal Ray	Making Art in Goa - Subodh Kerkar's Collaborative & Community-based Art Practice

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Conference Program and Schedule
APARN - Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network Conference 2025
2 July 2025
Department of Dramatic Arts, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand
Time 08.00 a.m. - 05.00 p.m. (in Thailand)

Time	Room	Session No.	Moderator	Session ID	Session Title	Presenter	Presentation Title
9:00 - 10:00	**Room 1 (MCS 501/29)**	13	Anan Nakkong	MU01	Community, Critique, and Sonic Agency	Indrabakti Moch Hasrul	Bibitulit: People's Technology and Art as a Tool for Social Critique
						Michael Hansen	The Hear Us Through… Collective: A student driven community-based cacophony
						Anant Narkkong	New Sounds of ASEAN Music and Emerging Musicians in Southeast Asia
	Room 2 (MCS 501/5)	14	Sawita Diteeyont	ID03	Community Theatre, Empowerment, and Collective Voice	Manapee Khongrakchang	Using Art-Based Practice with Youth for Building up the Community of Environmental Justice Storytelling
						Saifon Faiseng	Creating Performances for Community Storytelling
	Room 3 (MCS 501/9)	15	Chavatvit Muangkeo	TP09	Co-Imagining Communities through Performance, Humor, and Crisis	Ingrid Cogne	Im/Materialities of CO-. From CO-researching to CO-imagining.
						Sweety Ruhel	Discerning the Role of Ritual Performance's Humour in Women Collectives as Disclosure of Community Prerogative Against Stereotypes or for Mere Entertainment.
						Abigail Billones	The Power of Theater and the Arts in Times of Crisis and Community Rebuilding
	Room 4 (MCS 501/13)	16	Pim Pisalsarakit Niyomwan	VA04	Rethinking the Collective	Erika Matsunami	On 'R' - intermediate 'R' and the collective as a unit
						Piyakorn Koowattanataworn	Breathe Critical. Poetic interaction with a performative installation to materialise ambiguous power in the presence
						Jaz Hee-jeong Choi	Awe in Immersive Art for Collective Change

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Time	Room	Session No.	Moderator	Session ID	Session Title	Presenter	Presentation Title
10:00 - 10:20	**BREAK**						
10:20 - 11:20	**Room 1 (MCS 501/29)**	17	Anan Nakkong	MU02	Music as Cultural Mediator	Xiaoshu Huang	The Integration of Motion Techniques and Choreography in Piano Transcriptions of Chinese Instrumental Music
						Yanpei Yi	Bridging Chinese Chanting and Piano Interpretation in Chinese Ancient Poetry Art Songs
						Junyu Yan	Cultural Continuity and Artistic Expression in the Performance of Yellow River Piano Concerto
	Room 2 (MCS 501/5)	18	Chutima Maneewattana	CF02	Creating Spaces for Community and Collective Imagination	Bin Youn	Reimagining Communities: Poetic Spaces of Light, Movement, and Language in Collective Experience
						Patcharin Rompochuen	Creative Dance Design to present the Identity of the Ban Phra Phloeng Mat Weaving and Processing Community Enterprise Group, Phra Phloeng Subdistrict, Khao Chakan District, Sa Kaeo Province: Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern
						Munin Suwanprasert	The Process of Presenting an Adapted Play as a Stage Reading Performance: A Case Study of The Country of the Blind
	Room 3 (MCS 501/9)	19	Patsupang Kongbumrung	DM05	Embodied Memory and Activist Dance	Yashoda Thakore	The Kalavantulu Body and Repertoire as Signifiers of Resilience
						Nataporn Rattanachaiwong	Dance-Drama as a Site for the Construction of Cultural Memory: A Case Study of the Guangzhou Dance-Drama Yingge
						Alfonso Benetti	Artistic research and activism: ecological and gender territorialities
	Room 4 (MCS 501/13)	20	Chanya Hetayothin	VA05	Ecological Memory and	Wanasak Padungsestakit	The Creation of Contemporary Art from the Salt Pan Cultural Ecology of Samut Songkhram

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Time	Room	Session No.	Moderator	Session ID	Session Title	Presenter	Presentation Title
					Artistic Regeneration	Nai Vongsuthep Wong Sowat	Karang Penyu The Investigation of Site Specific Installation as a Coral Garden.
11:30 - 12:30	**Room 1 (MCS 501/29)**	21	Anan Nakkong	MU03	Embodied Inquiry and Cross-Cultural Flow in Musical Performance	Wenqin Li	Exploring Rhizomatic Learning in Piano Performance: An Autoethnographic Journey into Artistic Research
						Rodrigo Cordeiro	Intercultural Hand Loafing
						Qionglin Li	Exploring the Influence of Ancient Chinese Poetry on the Performance of Western Romantic Piano Works
	Room 2 (MCS 501/5)	22	Chavatvit Muangkeo	CF03	Ethics, Facilitation, and Learning in Artistic Practice	Alex Gaja Ortega	Beyond the Classroom: Exploring Collaborative Learning and Student-Lecturer Dynamics in Practice-Based Design Festival
						Bagdonaviciute Julija	"Rethinking Instrumental Ethics: Changing Materialities as a Pathway for Engaging with the Community"
	Room 3 (MCS 501/9)	23	Phakamas Jirajarupat	DM06	Intertextual Bodies and Choreographic Hybridity	Zainadance Zidane Ijau Anak Lanyun	Intertextuality in Contemporary Dance "Quatrains of Hope": Movement and Iban Oral Literature as Text
						Nareeporn Vachananda	Intersubjective methodology for the interaction between traditional and contemporary practices
						Vorawan Pinrattanakorn	The creative research “Siamo-Portuguese Dance”
	Room 4 (MCS 501/13)	24	Parida Manomaiphibul	VA06	Archives, Memory, and Affective Resistance	Elysha Rei	Reimagining Memory: Paper Cutting as Affective Engagement with Japanese Internment Archives
						Adjani Arumpac	Watching the Photograph
						Worathep Akkabootara	Conjuring the Holy men : art activism and rearticulation of locality
12:30 - 13:30	**LUNCH**						

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Time	Room	Session No.	Moderator	Session ID	Session Title	Presenter	Presentation Title
13:30 - 14:30	**Room 1 (MCS 501/29)**	25	Pornprapit Phoasavadi	MU04	Immersive Sound and Local Worlds	Sutthiphong Ruangchante	Creating the Whispers of Hala Bala Soundscape Album
						Saranrat Sangchai	Fragility: An Immersive Acousmatic Composition
						Ardana I Ketut	Reproduction of Traditional Karawitan Gending with Hybrid Instrumentation For Community Revitalisation in Art Performances
	Room 2 (MCS 501/5)	26	Kuntara Chaicharn	ID01	Artistic Research and Empowered Voices	Jutaphit Usaha	Writing A Coping With Social Bullying: Creating Performance Art From Narratives Of Personal Experience
						Irfana MAJUMDAR	The Confluence of Leadership and Artistic Research: Insights drawn from Devising, Hindustani Music, and Creating Community
						Kiattipoom Nantanukul	Voice as a Site of Memory, Geography, and Identity: Toward a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy of Voice Training for Performers
	Room 3 (MCS 501/9)	27	Kanit Sripaoraya	DM07	Embodied Heritage: Movement, Puppetry, and the Politics of Cultural Transmission	Nimit Pipithkul	Education and Linking the History of East and West Puppet
						Lee Mei	Physical and Mental Nourishment and Social Effects of Dance Works on Community Dancers : A Case Study of Golden Peacock Art Troupe
						Ameena Aljerman Alali	Waves of movement through suspension then release: Finding the voice of Afro-Emiratis
	Room 4 (MCS 501/13)	28	Sukumala Nithipattaraahnan	VA07	Heritage, Materiality, and Cultural Transformation	Michail Semoglou	Algorithmic Interpretations of Epirote Silverwork: Digital Evolution of Cultural Heritage
						Dyah Retno Retno Fitriani	Sustainability in Ceramics: An Exploration of Waste Utilization and Communal Engagement through Baravia Pottery and Workshop

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Time	Room	Session No.	Moderator	Session ID	Session Title	Presenter	Presentation Title
						Yihui Liu	Tracing the Roots of the Morinda Red
14:40 - 15:40	**Room 1 (MCS 501/29)**	29	Pornprapit Phoasavadi	MU05	Heritage in Practice: Music Pedagogy, Performance, and Documentation	Jia can Sun	Multidimensional Analysis of the Integration of Chinese and Western Music in Guzheng: A Case Study of "Ding Feng Bo"
						Sameer Dublay	Creating a Community through Music – A case study of Pt. Jitendra Abhisheki Saghan Gaan Shikshan Kendra, Kankavali, Maharashtra, India
						Quy Nguyen	An Artistic Approach To Intangible Heritage Documentation In Vietnam: Xoan Singing
	Room 2 (MCS 501/5)	30	Pim Pisalsarakit Niyomwan	ID05	Performing Place and Possibility: Travel, Tourism, and Community Futures	Khalid Midam	Analyzing the Opportunities for Ban Laem Homestay to Develop Tourism Activities through a Performative Experience Framework
						Roy Huijsmans	Fanglao, Generation and Prefiguration: Building community and demonstrating futures through dance in Vientiane, Laos
						Jesse Todd	Getting there <---> Getting Lost: Sharing Stories Where Traveler Myths Meet Tourist Realities
	Room 3 (MCS 501/9)	31	Lowell Skar	DM08	Movement Histories and Cultural Archives	Miao Lian	The Dynamic Writing of "Boat Dwelling" Culture: A Study on Dance in the Danjia Culture of Beihai, Guangxi
						Yi jing Xue	The Presentation and Dissemination of Jin Merchant Culture through Dance in “Pingyao Again”
						Siwat Visuthirungsiuri	Developing a Conservation Guidebook for The Lion & Dragon Dance Team
	Room 4 (MCS 501/13)	32	Chanya Hetayothin	VA08	Myth, Mystery, and Multisensory Inquiry	Siriya Jitpimolmard	Might and Magnitude
						Nicha Chakchuande	Felines in Art and Ritual

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Time	Room	Session No.	Moderator	Session ID	Session Title	Presenter	Presentation Title
15:40 - 16:00	**BREAK**						
16:00 - 17:00	**Room 1 (MCS 501/29)**	33	Kiattipoom Nantanukul	ID06	Arts, Embodiment, and Well-being in Aging and Disability	Nutthan Inkhong	Developing A Choral Singing Project To Enhance Psychological Well-Being In Thai Elderly
						Adhitia Guspara Winta	The Wheelchair: The Agent to New Embodiment and New Role in the Living Experience of a Person with Paraplegia
	Room 2 (MCS 501/5)	34	Dangkamon Na-pombejra	ID04	Community Performance and Cultural Identity	Sukanya Sompiboon	The Image of Something Better: Methodologies of Transcultural Flows in Likay Performance
						Simon Lindblom	Keep it Slow, Make it Complex: Aesthetic Actions for Community at Konstlek på Råby
						Yulfianti Yola	Voices From An Urban Village: Negotiating The Ethnic Identity of Kalipasir Cikini Village Through Performing Arts
	Room 3 (MCS 501/9)	35	Phakamas Jirajarupat	DM09	Choreography Beyond the Stage: Dance, Media, and Representation	Srichalakom Sirithorn	"From Hopscotch to Diversity: The Creative Journey Behind the Dance Video Installation 'Step, Step, Hops!' at The Peninsula Bangkok"
						Padparadscha Kaewploy	Habitus: The Natural Characteristics of The Balletic Body
						Andrew Igai Jamu	From Rumah Panjai to the Entertainment Hub in Kuala Lumpur: Choreographing Contemporary Dance based on Iban Tradition
	Room 4 (MCS 501/13)	36	Siriya Jitpimolmard	VA09	Art in Community, Space, and Legacy	Nur Hikmah Fitriyah Binte Mohammad Rafiz	Visual Storytelling as a Catalyst for Health Equity and Community Empowerment
						melody yiu	Ecologies of Participation – a collaborative exploration across architecture, arts, and technology

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Conference Program and Schedule
APARN - Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network Conference 2025
3 July 2025
Department of Dramatic Arts, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand
Time 08.00 a.m. - 05.00 p.m. (in Thailand)

Time	Room	Session No.	Moderator	Session ID	Session Title	Presenter	Presentation Title
9:00 - 10:00	**Room 1 (Sodsai Theatre)**	37	Parida Manomaiphibul	TP06	Tradition, Immersion, and the Integrated Self	Sukumala Nithipattaraahnan	The Happiness Space: From Artistic Roots to Integrated Wisdom
						Hui gai Zhang	Fusion of Tradition and Modernity: A case study of "Dream of Red Mansions"
						Grisana Punpeng	When 'immersive' is not just a trend but a socially driven tool: Ila Raja is Me
	Room 2 (MCS 501/5)	38	Chutima Maneewattana	ID07	Ritual Reimagined and Embodied Memory	Weerinphat Booranasakawee	Reverse Artistic Engineering of Lanna Heritage: A Site-Specific Contemporary Performance Inspired by Nirat Hariphunchai
						Majid Sarnayzadeh	Embodied Memory and Subversive Performances: Reimagining the Veiled Body in Collective Action
						Jannatul Ferdous	Music, Dance, and Transformation: Funeral Rituals of Marma Buddhist Monks in Bangladesh.
	Room 3 (MCS 501/9)	39	Megan Wonowidjoyo	FM01	Digital Practices and Archival Agency	Zheng Wang	Community Making through Social Media and Artist Website in Chinese Media Art
						Renick Bell	Live coding as a Form of Critical Media
						Gian Cruz	Intimate, Performative and Everyday Affinities: Archiving Pop Culture from Southeast Asia, East Asia and Beyond as Artistic Practice and Research
	Room 4 (MCS 501/13)	40	Kanit Sripaoraya	VA10	Reframing	Riyaz Latif	Sultanate Monuments of Ahmedabad as Community Anchors

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Time	Room	Session No.	Moderator	Session ID	Session Title	Presenter	Presentation Title
					Cultural Heritage	Samah Ayesha	Beyond Orientalism: Islamic Social Justice as a Transnational Curatorial Praxis
						Noramin Farid	Malay Dance's Herotopia: Choreocurating Singapore's Malay Representation
10:00 - 10:20	**BREAK**						
10:20 - 11:20	**Room 1 (Sodsai Theatre)**	41	Nataporn Rattanachaiwong	TP05	Dramaturgies of Discovery Through Improvisation, Devising, and Directing	Pannatat Podhivejakul	The Aesthetics of Improvisation: A Case Study of Eastern and Western Devised Theatre Processes.
						Thanyarat Praditthaen	The creative work "Improv to Script: The Character Journey"
						Methawut Nualchawee	When Pretense Reveals the Truth: Directing Tragic Farce to Reflect Escapism
	Room 2 (MCS 501/5)	42	Dangkamon Na-pombejra	ID08	Performance and Social Justice: Art, Marginalization, and Queer Resistance	Sindhuja Suryadevara	Democratizing Art: Examining T.M. Krishna's Engagement with Marginalized Communities
						Patsupang Kongbumrung	Reframing Queer Stigmas Through Contemporary Gothic Musical Theatre: A Case Study on Directing Thrill Me: The Musical for Thai Audiences
	Room 3 (MCS 501/9)	43	Kanit Sripaoraya	FM02	Mediating Memory and Identity Through Creative Forms	Megan Wonowidjoyo	Invisible Connections: Exploring Intergenerational Trauma through Experimental Filmmaking
						Lutfia Sashi Kirana	Media Portrayals of the 30 September Movement in Indonesia: A Comparative Analysis
						Sutida Singharach	The Creation of Krai Kha Tia: A Mixed Media Stage Play for Actor Development and Personal Branding at Maiosiam Artist Management

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Time	Room	Session No.	Moderator	Session ID	Session Title	Presenter	Presentation Title
	Room 4 (MCS 501/13)	44	Urmimala Sarkar	AE06	Embodied Pedagogies and Critical Somatics	Olga Merekina	Balancing Power(s) in a Community-based Artistic Practice and Education
						Andrea Traldi	Becomebecome – A Transdisciplinary Method for Art Education/Incubation and Community Building based on Somatic Awareness, Somatic Intuition, and Somatic Psychology
						Kittirat Pluemjit	Reconnecting Humanity Through Arts and Cultural Learning: Cultivating Learning Creators for Cultural Action and Change
11:30 - 12:30	**Room 1 (Sodsai Theatre)**	45	Nadhanant Uaesilapa	TP04	Reviving Performance Legacies: From Regional Roots to Actor-Centered Craft	Ratchaneekorn Jantaharn	Contemporary Isan Storytellng Folk Songs (Lam Phueng) for Children and Youth
						Nisachol Prasatsuwan	Management of the Contemporary Folk Theatre Production 'The Red Ship Warrior' at the Eng Kor Festival 2025, Phanat Nikhom, Chonburi
						Sahatsawat Chotkhan	Exploring the Impact of Michael Chekhov's Acting Methods on Character Development in The Proposal
	Room 2 (MCS 501/5)	46	Lowell Skar	ID09	Performing Ecologies and Environmental Perception	Michael Hornblow	Human ecologies and hydro-cosmologies in Bangkok and Tokyo
						Sirithorn Siriwan	Performing Ricelihood - Kinesthesia and Animist Theatrics in Northern Thailand
	Room 3 (MCS 501/9)	47	Megan Wonowidjoyo	FM03	Future Commons and Critical Technologies	Thanut Rujitanont	Collective Animation as Well-being Creative Practice
						Annie Wan	Humanizing Technologies: A Survival Toolkit Navigating the Artificial Intelligence Era in Migration Studies
						Debbie Ding	Wasteland: Virtual Worlds as Urban Commons

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Time	Room	Session No.	Moderator	Session ID	Session Title	Presenter	Presentation Title
	Room 4 (MCS 501/13)	48	Kuntara Chaicharn	AE02	Mapping Space and Self through Creative Practice	Josephine Turalba	PROJECT PANATAG: Subjective Mapping of the Philippines Consolidated Field Notes
						Eleonora Cavallini	Hortus ăpertus
						Paiboon Sophonsuwapap	Transforming the Inner Self with Drama Programs for Learning
12:30 - 13:30	**LUNCH**						
13:30 - 14:30	**Room 1 (Sodsai Theatre)**	49	Roy Huijsmans	AE05	Experimental and Process-based Education	Lleah Amy Smith	Agitating towards Flourishing: Fermentation Intelligences in the Para-Pedagogical
						Vincent Roumagnac	Discipline-Fluidity and Artistic Research (As) Ecosystem: Re-Commoning Through Hybrid Thinking-Making-Sharing
						Nikorn Sae Tang	Read Listen Go (Process of writer+actor refreshing and Audiences development)
	Room 2 (MCS 501/5)	50	Kiattipoom Nantanukul	TP01	Speculative Performance and More-than-Human Futures	Thanaporn Saen-ai	Lanna Performing Arts and Natural Conservation: Exploring Pathways and Possibilities in the Digital Age
						Melina Scialom	Non-anthropocentric dramaturgies as a possibility for engaging with more-than-human communities.
	Room 3 (MCS 501/9)	51	Piyawat Thamkulangkool	DM03	Artistic Research and Emerging Creative Ecosystems	Phakamas Jirajarupat	Exploring the Developing of an Artistic Ecosystem in Thai Dance Education: A Case Study of SSRU Thai Dance Theses
						Mohd Zhafir Muzani Mohamad	Curating the KonTra Series as a Heterotopic Platform for Emerging Malaysian Choreographers
	Room 4 (MCS 501/13)	52	Dangkamon Na-pombejra	AE04	Pedagogical Change in	Tanatchaporn Kittikong	Creative Curriculum: Rethinking Performing Arts Education in Thai Higher Education

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Time	Room	Session No.	Moderator	Session ID	Session Title	Presenter	Presentation Title
					Higher Arts Education	Simo Kellokumpu	Embedding/Embodying Artistic Research in Dance and Performance Master's Programs: Challenges, Strategies, and Community-Building
						Bun Rith Suon	Exploring Arts Education in Cambodia: A Case Study
14:40 - 15:40	**Room 1 (Sodsai Theatre)**	53	Kiattipoom Nantanukul	DM04	Dancing With Place: Movement, Sound, and Environment	Sineenadh Keitprapai	Moving with Nature: The Way to Reconnect with Nature
						Kanit Sripaoraya	Improvisation: Aesthetic Dialogues between Sound and Movement of Southern Thailand
						Urmimala Sarkar	Delhi Dancescape: Dancers navigating presence and representation
	Room 2 (MCS 501/5)	54	Nataporn Rattanachaiwong	ID10	Heritage, Community, and Creative Expression	Siri Rama	The Singapore Indian Fine Arts Society (SIFAS), a case study on reimagining artistic communities through a shared heritage
						Andrew Stiff	The side glance: Creative film practice as a medium to reveal the intangible heritage of peripheral flow in Ho Chi Minh City
						Narumol Thammaprukksa	From Balinese Cultural Heritage to Lanna Wisdom: Creating Performing Arts through Devised Theatre
	Room 3 (MCS 501/9)	55	Parida Manomaiphibul	TP02	Theatre for Empathy and Self-Discovery	Chanut Pongpanich	Using Dramatic Arts to Enhance Empathic Communication Skills of Thai Medical Students
						Anna Lorena Schaeben	Alone in the Crowd: An artistic approach to Loneliness, Anonymity, and Transit Spaces in Tokyo
						Ubonwan Moonkanta	Stage of Self: Empowering First-Year Students through Theatre-Based Self-Discovery

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Time	Room	Session No.	Moderator	Session ID	Session Title	Presenter	Presentation Title
	Room 4 (MCS 501/13)	56	Patsupang Kongbumrung	TP03	Performing Transformation and Emotional Presence	Laura Hayes	Playing with Gender
						Marian Poom-on	From Projecting to Radiating : Reimagining Energy in Solo Acting
						Vasan Mahakiattikun	Playwriting “Tales from the Hospital”: Inspired by Mementos from the Hospital by Dhepsiri Suksopha and Integrating Drama Therapy Concepts to Portray the Emotional Healing of Medical Personnel
15:40 - 16:00	**BREAK**						
16:00 - 17:00 with closing remarks	**Room 1 (Sodsai Theatre)**	57	Tanatchaporn Kittikong	DM01	Dancing the Soul: Embodiment, Identity, and Living Heritage	Padung Jumpan	Learning to Dance Khwan: Experiments with Embodying the Spiritual DNA of Isaan Culture
						Natthakan Bunsiri	Dancer as a Tool: Dynamics of Creation and Performance Implementation
						Pongsatorn Yoddamnean	Embodying Isan Identity: Developing Folk Performance Practice through Community-Based Artistic Research
17:00 - 18:00	**APARN 2025 CONFERENCE CLOSING SESSION** **APARN Conference Closing – Sodsai Pantoomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts**						

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Original Conference Call for APARN Papers – January 2025

Faculty of Arts – Chulalongkorn University Bangkok, Thailand and the Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network (APARN)

#APARN2025 — "Artistic Research for Creative Communities" - Bangkok, 1-3 July 2025

Faculty of Arts – Chulalongkorn University Bangkok, Thailand

Hosted by The Department of Dramatic Arts and the Faculty of Arts, with support from the Office of Research Affairs (ORA), Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

The Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network (APARN), a Special Interest Group of the Society for Artistic Research (SAR) invites proposals for presentations at its upcoming 2025 conference, *Artistic Research for Creative Communities.*

Conference Theme

The conference will explore the interplay of innovative approaches to research in and through the arts and the formation of creative communities. It asks for contributions that consider how various modes of artistic research can enrich community life and how communities contribute to new ways of artistic knowing and doing. We invite proposals that engage a range of artistic practices, concepts and research methods, and connect to, affect, generate, challenge, and reconstitute community life.
Taking an inclusive approach to artistic research, this conference welcomes contributors working in modes of artistic practice such as architecture, design, fine art, media and digital arts, music and performing arts, creative writing, circus, and inter- and trans-disciplinary work. We encourage proposals from diverse voices and perspectives, whether from academic institutions, artistic collectives, civil society organizations, or independent researchers or artists, particularly those from the Asia Pacific region. We seek contributors to share their innovative modes research and practice, help to foster critical dialogue and collaboration, and to explore the transformative potential of Artistic Research for (re)generating thriving and sustainable communities.
Conference participants will be able to participate in workshops with local artists, arts researchers and to attend performances in Bangkok.

Proposals are invited on topics that engage with these issues:

- **Artistic Research for Creative Communities**: How can artistic research engage, inform and transform creative communities?

- **Art Practices for Place–making and Community Building:** How can place-based, community-driven, arts-based projects serve as catalysts for social innovation in a changing environment?

- **Transdisciplinary and Hybrid Artistic Research for Reimagining Community**: How can inter-, trans-disciplinary and hybrid work of artistic research help to rethink forms of collective life and action to address critical societal, economic, and environmental challenges?

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- **Connecting Artistic Knowledge to Resilient Communities**: How can local artists use their knowledge and practice to generate resilient communities?
- **Learning to Create with Communities**: How can educators, artists, and communities collaborate to revitalize and empower communities?
- **Artistic Research and Innovation Ecosystems**: How to integrate artistic research into larger research and innovation ecosystems to drive social innovation?
- **Art Transformng Communities:** How can collaborations between artists, activists and communities produce creative alternatives and social change?
- **Imaginaries of a Better World:** How can collaborations among artists, cultural workers, researchers, and communities contribute to building more just and sustainable futures?

In addition to the above, we also hope to receive proposals engaging related themes such as: Placemaking through the Arts, Community-Led Arts Projects, Artistic Collectives, Artistic Heritage Communities, Curating Culture with Communities, Arts Festivals, Artistic Research and Communal Knowledge

We encourage submissions from diverse voices and perspectives tied to the arts, research, and communities, particularly those from the Asia Pacific region, we welcome both those based in the Asia Pacific region and those outside who have an interest in the region.

We are seeking proposals from (but not limited to): Artistic Researchers, Community Organizers, Cultural Workers, Performers, Scholars, Curators, Media Workers, Installation Artists, Social Scientists, Filmmakers & Videographers, Creative Writers, Designers, Architects, Ethnographers, Philosophers, Visual Artists, Industry Practitioners, Activists, and Art Collectives — especially those with a focus on the interface of art, research, and collective life.

Submission Guidelines

Please submit a 300-word abstract (including the title) and a short biography (100 words) by **March 31, 2025** at this Google form: https://forms.gle/uToSi94fMYzHEvaP8

All presentations will be 15 minutes plus 5 minutes Q&A onsite in Bangkok, and creative formats are encouraged here.

Proposals will be selected by a committee of peers based on their originality, clarity, relevance to the conference theme, and potential to contribute to a stimulating and diverse intellectual exchange. Acceptances will be notified by **April 24, 2025**.

Publication options

All #APARN2025 presenters will also have the opportunity to publish their presentation in the APARN channel in the Journal for Artistic Research (these are editorially reviewed but not peer reviewed).

Academic papers from the event may be submitted for potential publication in an issue of ***Manusya: Journal of Humanities*** being arranged by Pornrat Damrhung and Lowell Skar.

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Graduate students whose programs may require them to speak at an international conference and to have their paper for the conference peer reviewed and issued in a publication with a DOI number will also be able to do so.

Join the Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network Special Interest Group

We invite interested artistic researchers working in or from the Asia Pacific region to join the APARN Special Interest Group. To join, please subscribe to APARN's Google Group at https://groups.google.com/g/ap-arn

Questions? Please contact the team at: APARN2025BKK@gmail.com

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Opening Speech by Prof. Pornrat Damrhung,

Introductory Remarks for APARN Conference 2025, with the Artistic Research for Creative Communities theme
Pornrat Damrhung, Department of Dramatic Arts, Faculty of Arts Chulalongkorn University

President Wilert Puriwat, Dean Suradech Chotiudompant and Dean Kumkom Pornprasit

Convenors of the Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network (APARN)

Arahmaini Feisal, our Keynote Speaker artist,

Esteemed guests, colleagues, and friends,

Saswadee kha. Good Morning and Welcome to APARN 2025**!**

It is a great honor and immense pleasure for me to welcome you to the Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network conference 2025, hosted at Chulalongkorn University.

- Let me first extend my heartfelt gratitude to the APARN convenors for asking us to host this remarkable gathering of artists, researchers, and scholars this year. Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Arts, working through the Department of Dramatic Arts, has collaborated with the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts to make the meeting real.

- Our ambition and energy could not have been achieved without the funding we received from the university's Office of Research Affairs (ORA). The collective cooperation and generous support have allowed us to organize the APARN 2025 international conference on July 1-3, 2025.

- They also show the university's commitment to ensuring that the arts and humanities remain crucial parts of the research base of knowledge and practice in the university and for the wider society. The conference fosters creative exchanges and dialogue in the Asia Pacific region in a way that stems from and inspires us to reach out to others who are committed to research through the arts.

This connects to the theme of APARN conference, which is "Artistic Research for Creative Communities." The theme was chosen to highlight how artistic activities depend on and contribute to a wide range of communities, as a kind of bridging process. It invites us to explore both artistic practice in research, and the transformative impact that research through the arts can have on the communities we inhabit and nurture.

Artistic research, by its nature, transcends traditional boundaries of academia, and embraces the fluid, dynamic processes of creativity, imagination, and experimentation. This bridging work is important since it helps us to think and feel differently in a collective way, so we can act differently, too, as part of a long-term commitment to sustainable collective creativity.

At its core, artistic research inquires through artistic practices that are both individual and shared. It is not just about discovering answers to questions, but also about embracing common questions—questions that challenge, provoke, and inspire those who engage them. We ask and try to answer questions in order to become bridges. As Arahmaiani Feisil, noted several times

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and in several ways since we met yesterday: we work as bridges to connect, and when we connect, we are doing our work together.

This form of research is deeply personal, yet inherently communal, as it draws from individual experiences and turns them into shared expressions that resonate across different cultures, languages, and identities.

What sets artistic research apart is its refusal to separate creating from understanding. Instead, for artistic research, knowledge emerges organically, shaped by the act of making something new and unique, so it becomes a kind of shared, embodied feeling.

Among communities in the Asia Pacific region, artistic research has a unique and vital significance. This region, rich in its diversity, is a cloth woven from countless cultural threads—each with its own traditions, stories, and artistic expressions. Artistic research here becomes not just a tool for understanding but a bridge to cross differences and to connect those who are not like us.

It allows us to honor local heritage and wisdom while simultaneously fostering collaboration and innovation for tomorrow.

Artistic research provides us with a lens to view these phenomena in ways that are both analytically powerful and deeply empathetic. It enables us to preserve the wisdom of the past while crafting visions for the future.

Artistic research also provides a platform for those voices that might otherwise go unheard. It empowers marginalized communities, giving them the tools to express their narratives and to assert their identities in a world that can sometimes overlook them. In this way, artistic research becomes an act of resistance, resilience, and renewal—a vital force for shaping inclusive and creative communities.

The Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network (APARN) has long been a bridge-building organization. It met for the first time in 2019 at the Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI) or Indonesia Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta through the efforts of its founding members: Danny Butt of the University of Melbourne, Kurniwan Adi Saputro of ISI, and Gunalan Nadarajan of the University of Michigan. APARN decided to hold annual regional artistic research conferences in a different Asian Pacific city (so far in, Yogyakarta, Melbourne, Cyberjaya and now Bangkok), and continued in hybrid form during the COVID pandemic. The growing importance of APARN is shown by it becoming a Special Interest Group of the Society for Artistic Research (SAR).

While with Lowell Skar and I attended the APARN 2024 Conference at the Multimedia University, Cyberjaya, Malaysia organized by Roopesh Sitharan, we met with the other APARN Convenors and decided to host APARN 2025 Conference at Chulalongkorn University.

We wanted to do this for two main reasons.

- First, we wanted to introduce more Thai people to artistic research as an innovative and flexible framework for understanding the many ways that the work and practices of artists is research.

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- Second, we wanted to introduce APARN to the diverse artists and artistic practices and types of artistic research in Thailand.

We were exciting for the exchange opportunities between Thai and international artists, researchers, and students and were surprised by the large number of those who want to learn more about artistic research and to see some of the creative vitality of artists in Thailand and from abroad.

APARN annual conferences build on a simple network model where artist-researchers find ways to join the conference on their own expense.

This year, we are excited to have the wonderful internationally renowned and respected contemporary Indonesian artist Arahmaiani Fesial as Keynote Speaker. The conference has over 170 presenters from 20 countries in 57 panels on a wide array of topics and arts practices over three full days.

To accommodate the three-day conference schedule, we will conduct four parallel sessions to enable participants to present and share their insights and research on artistic work. Five main areas will be covered by presenters in the APARN this year: drama and theatre arts, music, visual arts, films and media arts, arts education, and environment and communities.

The diverse presentations at this year's conference would not have been possible without the Department of Dramatic Arts and the Faculty of Arts, who are hosting this conference. Just as importantly, this conference would not have been possible without the cooperation and assistance of the networks of artists, art teachers, and artists from different fields across Thailand and in other countries.

In light of the conference theme, it is important to speak about the important international networks that made this conference possible. Besides the APARN Convenors, we received great encouragement and full support from two deans, Dean Suradech of the Faculty of Arts and Dean of Kumkom of the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts of Chulalongkorn University. Their inspiration gave us energy to begin preparing for the conference.

But it was endless energy and practical sensibility of Dr. Piyawat Thamkulangkool, head of the Department of Dramatic Arts, who took it upon himself to oversee and organize the APARN Conference at all levels. In organizing the conference, we also received great cooperation from Thai artistic networks, including those from the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts:

Professor Kamol Paosawat, Head of the International Visual Arts Postgraduate Program

Associate Professor Dr. Pornprapit Paosawat, Deputy Dean for International Affairs and music researcher.

In addition to the networks at Chulalongkorn University, a network of artistic researchers from the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Khon Kaen University, Hat Yai University, Burapha University and Silapakorn University have all helped in big and small ways to create this conference. This network of artist-researchers in Thai universities collaborated as a team to evaluate papers and moderate the conference with 170 international participants from all over the world.

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As we embark on the discussions and explorations that APARN 2025 promises to ignite, let us remember the profound importance of research through the arts in our Asian communities.

Artistic research is more than a methodology; it is a way of seeing, a way of connecting, and a way of becoming. It challenges us to think beyond conventional frameworks and invites us to understand the world through the languages of form, color, sound, and movement.

In closing, I urge each of you to embrace ways that artistic research can change us and the worlds we live in— not just as scholars or practitioners, but as active participants in the communities we seek to engage.

Let us commit to fostering creativity not as an isolated pursuit, but as a collective endeavor that uplifts, inspires, and connects. Through artistic research, we have the potential to shape a future that is as vibrant and diverse as the region we call home.

Thank you, and may this APARN 2025 conference continue the bridge-building needed to generate creativity, collaboration, and community in the Asia Pacific., Thank you.

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Welcome Speech by Prof. Dr. Wilert Puriwat

Welcome Speech for the Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network (APARN) Conference 2025, July 1-3, 2025

by Prof. Dr. Wilert Puriwat, President of Chulalongkorn University

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed colleagues, honored guests,

It is my distinct privilege to welcome each of you to Chulalongkorn University and to the Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network conference, here in the vibrant city of Bangkok. On behalf of our institution, I extend my deepest gratitude for your presence and your commitment to advancing artistic research within our university as part of similar efforts done at other parts of this dynamic region and in the world.

When art and research are paired together, they help fulfill key aims of our university, which seeks to be a center for academic learning and professional excellence for Thailand and beyond. Artistic research has a unique power to shape life narratives, challenge conventions, and spark innovation in ways that resonate far beyond academic and creative communities. This conference, being held in July 1-3, 2025, comes at a pivotal time when global interconnectedness demands that we look both inward to better understand our local identities, and outward to embrace shared challenges and opportunities. The conference is one of the first to have support from our university's new Office of Research Affairs funding initiative for hosting international conferences, which enhances the global visibility of our diverse research efforts. In joining the arts and research around these creative efforts, the APARN 2025 conference offers unique pathways to overcome our challenges and to benefit from our opportunities. The Asia Pacific region, rich in cultural diversity, creativity, and tradition, offers fertile ground for such exploration, and Chulalongkorn University is delighted to support a conference toward that end.

As we gather here today, I am reminded of Chulalongkorn University's mission to foster, disseminate and apply knowledge and to do so in ways that are creative, by educating students with diverse forms of professional know-how and research skills, while also remaining connected to the arts, culture, and values that animate Thailand and resonate with those found elsewhere. They do not only serve academic excellence, but also enrich society and contribute to cultural vitality. Two key Faculties of our university which focus on achieving the cultural and value-centered public mission are the Faculty of Arts, led by Dean Suradech Chotiudompant, and the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, headed by Dean Kumkom Pornprasit. Their joint efforts have helped to bring this mission to fruition in the APARN 2025 Conference. This conference represents a confluence of perspectives—artists, scholars, practitioners, and visionaries—who are not only reshaping the boundaries of artistic research but also redefining its relevance in addressing urgent social, environmental, and cultural dialogues.

Over the next three days, as we delve into the myriad collaborations, methodologies, and expressions that define artistic research, I encourage each of you to embrace the spirit of curiosity and engagement. From our noted Indonesian Keynote speaker, to 57 thought-provoking panels to innovative presentations and original performances, let this gathering be a catalyst for new ideas, partnerships, and pathways forward.

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Let us take a moment to recognize the remarkable efforts that have come together to make this event possible. I wish to express my sincere thanks to the international APARN convenors, the local organizers in the Faculty of Arts and its Department of Dramatic Arts, along with the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, and the many contributors who helped to curate and assemble such an inspiring program. Your dedication reminds us that artistic research thrives not in isolation but through collective effort and open dialogue on a global scale while depending on being rooted in local sites such as Chulalongkorn University.

In closing, I hope this conference will inspire us to transcend boundaries, to imagine boldly, and to connect deeply. At Chulalongkorn University, we are honored to host this gathering of creative minds and talents, and we look forward to witnessing the ripple effects of your work long after these proceedings have concluded.

May this conference be a resounding success, and may it foster meaningful exchanges that carry forward the transformative power of art and research.

Thank you, and welcome to the Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network conference at Chulalongkorn University.

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Welcom Speech by Dr. Suradech Chotiudompant

Welcom Speech by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Associate Professor Dr. Suradech Chotiudompant

Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network (APARN) Conference, July 1-3, 2025

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests, Esteemed Colleagues, and Friends,

Good morning to everyone. It is both an honor and a pleasure to welcome you all to the Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network 2025 Conference. As the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, which is hosting APARN 2025, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all of you who have traveled from near and far to join us in exploring the transformative power of artistic research in fostering civic forms of creativity. I would like to give special thanks to President Wilert Puriwat and the university Office of Research Affairs for their support, along with Dean Kumkom Pornprasit and the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts for their cooperation and assistance in realizing APARN 2025.

The theme of this year's APARN conference, "Artistic Research for Creative Communities," resonates deeply with the values, both of Chulalongkorn University, and of our faculty, which remains committed to enhancing links between the arts and humanities for diverse publics. Research in this field provides a rich framework for those practicing and researching through the arts, and enables them to become pathways toward understanding and enriching what people can know, think, and feel. By engaging creatively with artists and their many communities, artistic research is a vibrant part of humanities practice, enabling us to explore culture, identity, and shared narratives in ways that transcend conventional boundaries. We aim to make our arts and humanities research more creative and more public. The synergistic connections made within our university, between our university and others, as well as the bonds we form with different communities enables our research to matter to people in the world.

This can be seen in this conference. Artistic research transcends disciplines, and merges inquiry with imagination and creativity which is done for people. Rooted in a *new humanities* that recognizes our relations to digital living and environmental dependency, yet which is not locked up within the walls of the university, the artistic research done at APARN 2025 forms a working space where ideas evolve, where individual passions meet collective aspirations, and where creative practice leads to societal impact, ranging from our Faculty and university, to Bangkok and Thailand, and finally to our regional and global connections. From the movements of dance that tell untold stories, to visual art that challenges our perspectives, to performances that stir emotions and ignite action—each is a testament to the power of creativity to connect us to communities and to inspire progress.

This conference serves as a lively meeting ground for diverse voices and practices from across the Asia Pacific region and beyond. It is a platform for artists, researchers and practitioners to share their unique perspectives, challenge each other's notions, and forge new partnerships. Together, the APARN 2025 Conference will explore how artistic research, as part of a new humanities, can empower communities to not only express themselves, but also to thrive in the midst of adversity, to innovate in response to evolving societal needs, and to imagine futures that are inclusive and sustainable.

At Chulalongkorn University, we believe that artistic research is not confined to academia or galleries, but are integrated into the fabric of society. It is found in classrooms where children

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learn to imagine, in public spaces where murals tell stories, and in performances that bring people together. As we embark on this conference, let us keep in mind that our work is not just about our research or practice—it is about its impact on the communities we serve and the connections we forge through shared creative endeavors.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank the international APARN convenors and the organizers of APARN, especially our Department of Dramatic Arts, and the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, for their vision and dedication in bringing this conference to life. Your tireless efforts have created a space where creativity flourishes and where ideas can transform into action.

As we begin this journey of learning and experience in the coming three days, I encourage each of you to engage deeply, to share openly, and to dare to innovate boldly. Let us celebrate the diversity of artistic research in the Asia Pacific, and let us work together to engage communities that are not only creative, but also compassionate, connected, and grounded in innovation that depends on a vibrant type of humanities.

Thank you, and I wish you all a fruitful and inspiring conference.

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Invited Keynote Speaker: Arahmaiani Feisal, Indonesia

Keynote Title:

The Flag Project as Communal Environmentalism in the Asia Pacific: Re-interpreting Traditional Wisdom on Human-Nature Relations for the Contemporary World

APARN 2025 Keynote Speaker, Aramaiani Feisal Biography

Arahmaiani is a well-respected Indonesian contemporary performance artists. She was born in Bandung in 1961 and has based in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. She became widely recognised in the 1980s and 1990s as one of Southeast Asia's pioneer activists and performance Art. She usually collaborates and works closely with communities, using her works to raise critical awareness of environmental issues and the injustices of violence against women. Arahmaiani combines direct action that promotes intercultural and interreligious dialogue with artistic disciplines like performance, painting, music, poetry, and dance.

Arahmaiani's artwork has been presented extensively around the world at places like, the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne, the Asia-Australia Arts Centre in Sydney, the Singapore Art Museum, the Lasalle-SIA College of the Arts in Singapore, the Der Rest Der Welt in Pirmasens, Germany, the World Social Forum, the Impakt in Utrecht, the Netherlands and the Hokkaido Asahikawa Museum of Art in Japan. Recently, in November 2024, Her installation and performance *Burning Country (1999)* was exhibited and performed for the first time at Tate Modern, London.

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Abstracts of All APARN 2025 Presenters

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Non-anthropocentric dramaturgies as a possibility for engaging with more-than-human communities

Melina Scialom

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Abstract

The Anthropocene is a term that emerged in the year 2000 being coined by Crutzen and Stoermer who proposed the term to understand the epoch where humans excerpt a centre role in shaping materialities and ecologies that are all dependent on a normative understanding of the human in a hierarchical relationship with other species. In times where the Anthropocene faces humanitarian, environmental and even a performative crisis, questions about art making and its relevance in such a paradigm shifting time has become recurrent and relevant. As an artist scholar that has been nurturing a longstanding interest in ecoperformance, dramaturgy and philosophy, I too began to develop an interest into investigating art making that not simply question the Anthropocene, but transform que questions into the very possibility of performative action. In this paper I propose to share some of the practices that I have been investigating and discuss the ways in which they can foster an inclusive and dialogical performativity, or perhaps community, among humans and more-than-humans. These practices are informed by my studies in dramaturgy, Somatics and theories of attunement. Through a Somatic-Performative Research framework I have been activating inquiries and praxis that ignite a practice-as-research journey into the possibilities of co-creating non-anthropocentric dramaturgies in crossovers with ableism, aesthetics and authorship.

Keywords: Ecoperformance, Non-Anthropocentric, Ecodramaturgy, Somatic-Performative Research, More-than-Human

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Mapping Networks Of Performing Arts Research In Bangkok: a Preliminary Survey of Some Artists' Performance Practices And Community-Building Processes in The Thai Capital

Lowell Skar

Abstract

This paper explores artistic research in Bangkok as a heterogenous assemblage of specific methods and situated practices that contemporary performing artists develop in and through the performance projects and in relation communities of those who care about the nonmainstream performing arts in Bangkok. It will provide a tentative mapping of some parts of this assemblage tied to performance research and their supporting artistic communities of practice. This mapping emerges from direct observation, document research, interviews and surveys with artists, academics, and researchers in the performing arts. The paper first locates how some contemporary performing artists in Bangkok seek new insights and embodied ways of feeling and moving that to share with others. The paper seeks to locate the diverse, intertwined modes of knowledge making through performance practice by using of examples from various performing arts traditions and disciplines in Thailand's capital. It relates them to the communities supporting artistic research and links the work of artists, academics, cultural workers and community actors. Together, they work to organize, design, create, and evaluate performances in Thailand's capital in ways that engage, challenge, and form communities of those who care about the contemporary performing arts. The paper addresses how performance practice research done by artists, academics and cultural organizers engages and shapes communities and how communities affect research done in performance-making processes.

Keywords: Performing Arts, Artistic Research, Bangkok, Community-Building, Performance Practices, Devising Theatre, Object Theatre, Embodied Knowledge, Minor Theatre, Contemporary Thai Performance

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Invisible Connections: Exploring Intergenerational Trauma Through Experimental Filmmaking

Megan Wonowidjoyo

Abstract

This project "Home Sweet Home" (2024) investigates the invisible connections between mother and daughter, exploring how trauma can silently pass through generations. The catalyst for this inquiry was a deeply personal discovery — both my mother and I became single mothers at the age of 39. This uncanny repetition led me to question whether unseen forces, inherited memories, or subconscious patterns bound our lives together. Drawing on memory studies and consciousness theories, the project examines concepts like postmemory, transgenerational trauma, and hauntology. Marianne Hirsch's postmemory theory suggests that the trauma of previous generations can be inherited through stories, emotions, and behaviors. Cathy Caruth and Freud argue that unprocessed trauma may unconsciously repeat itself through the "return of the repressed", while Derrida's hauntology implies that unresolved histories can "haunt" the present, shaping lives in unseen ways. Additionally, scientific studies in epigenetics reveal that environmental factors can alter gene expression, passing emotional responses like fear or anxiety to future generations.

Methodologically, I employed experimental filmmaking to trace these invisible connections. I documented my mother's daily life over two years as she moved across Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, searching for a permanent home. This observational process unfolded alongside my own reflections as a single mother. Home videos, personal diaries, and intimate interviews became sites of memory, revealing echoes between our lives. The editing process embraced stream-of-consciousness techniques, weaving past and present through associative memory. Intercutting scenes from our lives highlighted emotional parallels, while nonlinear storytelling blurred temporal boundaries, creating a space where memories linger and repeat.

Through this film, I seek to understand how memories — both personal and inherited — shape our identities and life choices. The work offers a poetic exploration of mother-daughter bonds, intergenerational trauma, and the invisible threads that connect us across time.

Keywords: Experimental Filmmaking, Mother–Daughter Relationship, Transgenerational Trauma, Postmemory, Hauntology, Inherited Memories

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Visual Storytelling As A Catalyst For Health Equity And Community Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

Medical animations are valuable tools for patient education, helping to bridge knowledge gaps in health literacy. However, unlike didactic animations, narrative-based patient education allows audiences to learn from patients' lived experiences. These stories go beyond medical facts, exploring the emotional, social, and mental aspects of illness, fostering empathy and influencing attitudinal and behavioural changes. Despite their potential, research on narrative animations in patient education remains limited, particularly in the fields of cancer and genetics. This study investigates how animated patient narratives can improve genetic literacy and engagement among racially diverse communities. Two animated narratives were developed through an interdisciplinary, iterative production process involving animators, clinicians, and patients. Each film featured characters from different racial backgrounds navigating hereditary cancer predisposition syndromes. Simplified diagrams were used to explain genetic inheritance and disease symptoms, to overcome health literacy barriers. Cultural motifs were incorporated to enhance relatability, and shared local elements, such as public transport (MRT), military service, and public housing (HDB), ensured that narratives transcended racial boundaries. Crucially, the narratives concluded positively to reinforce self-efficacy and encourage proactive health behaviours. The study, which involved 260 participants, assessed engagement, knowledge retention, and perceptions of racial representation. Findings showed increased understanding and interest in genetics, with audiences responding positively to racial representation and expressing openness to learning from characters outside their backgrounds. The results presented in this paper highlight how artistic storytelling can foster cultural specificity and shared understanding, positioning narrative animation as a powerful tool for inclusive health communication. This research contributes to the broader discourse on artistic research in public health, demonstrating its potential to shape more informed, resilient, and empathetic communities.

Keywords: Animated patient narratives, culturally sensitive patient education, Health equity, Visual storytelling

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

Mary Grace C. Compuesto

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Abstract

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

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

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

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

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Being A Nora Teacher In An Educational Institution: A Case Study Teacher Duangkamol Boonchu

Supphasin Ainphet

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the identity and role of Duangkamon Boonchu as a Nora teacher who has inherited and revitalized the traditional Southern Thai dance drama within a formal educational context. The study focuses on her pedagogical methods in teaching Nora at Kangpla Witthayakhom School in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. Duangkamon Boonchu was selected as the case study due to her outstanding role in preserving Nora while adapting it to the constraints and opportunities of modern education. Her ability to integrate cultural heritage into the lives of young learners makes her a significant example of a local teacher who sustains living traditions in contemporary society.

The research employs a qualitative methodology, incorporating in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and descriptive content analysis. Key informants include the teacher, students who participated in Nora learning, and community members who hired student performances. The findings reveal that Duangkamon Boonchu effectively designs flexible and context-sensitive teaching approaches—such as repetitive practice, small group instruction, video-assisted learning, and off-class rehearsals at sacred sites like Wat Kang Pla.

Moreover, the teacher successfully motivates students to develop a deep sense of appreciation, understanding, and pride in Nora. Many students are able to perform confidently within a short period—such as one school term, or even one week in some cases. The study highlights the importance of "being a Nora teacher" as a culturally rooted educator who plays a crucial role in preserving intangible cultural heritage through formal education. Her pedagogical practice presents a sustainable model for transmitting traditional knowledge to future generations.

Keywords: Being a Nora teacher, Nora transmission, local teacher

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The Process Of Developing Drama Students Holistically With The Enneagrams

Sakchai Iamkrasin

Abstract

Many new acting students today focus mostly on technical skills, like voice or movement, but often overlook emotional and social skills. These "soft skills" are just as important for becoming a strong performer. This study looked at how Enneagram theory, a personality system, can help acting students grow in a more complete way. Using a method called Practice as Research, the study had two goals: (1) to see how the Enneagram can improve acting training, and (2) to understand how it supports personal and artistic development.

The research involved 45 third-year students in a directing class. They took part in a 60-hour program that combined Enneagram learning with acting exercises and hands-on experience. Researchers gathered information before and after the training using surveys, classroom observations, and informal interviews. The results showed that the Enneagram helped students better understand the characters they play like the character's goals, emotions, and behavior. It also helped students grow in four key areas: (1) being physically ready to perform, (2) working well with others in different situations, (3) building emotional, mental, and personal strength, and (4) developing key professional skills for an acting career.

This study also offers a new way to design acting lessons that support both artistic skills and personal growth, helping students succeed both on stage and in life.

Keywords: Acting Skill, Enneagram, Holistic Development, Character Analysis, Drama Student

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Sustaining From Within: Community Art As Decentralized Social Infrastructure In The Absence Of Cultural Policy

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Abstract

This article explores the E-Lerng Artists Collective, a community-based art group in Bangkok, Thailand, as a model of sustainable community art practice. In a country where no national art council exists, where public art policy is absent, and where governmental support for community-based arts remains minimal, E-Lerng has sustained its work for over seventeen years through grassroots collaboration, cultural resilience, and adaptive practice. Drawing from both scholarly research and the author's firsthand involvement as a founding member, this article offers a rare insider's perspective grounded in long-term experimental engagement. The paper analyzes the collective's organizational structure, community-driven methodology, and adaptive strategies across social, cultural, economic, and digital domains. It argues that the E-Lerng model provides not only a case study of local resilience but also a foundation for a new theory of sustainable community art—one that is autonomous, co-creative, and context-responsive. This theory, distilled from E-Lerng's work, can be adapted by art initiatives in other parts of the world, especially in regions facing similar structural limitations.

Keywords: E-Lerng Artists Collective, Community Art, Sustainable Practice, Participatory Art, Cultural Policy, Thailand

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Using Art-Based Practice With Youth For Building The Community Of Environmental Justice Storytelling

Manapee Khongrakchang

Abstract

This paper examines how diverse art-based practices facilitate youth in Mae Ngao village, northern Thailand, in engaging with environmental justice (EJ) storytelling through participatory research. In the context of the Bhumibol Reservoir Inflow Augmentation Project and its contested Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), the village has experienced systemic silencing of its traditional knowledge, livelihood loss, and ecological concerns.

We document three forms of art-based practice: (1) community-based art exhibitions opposing the dam, (2) youth drawing competitions, and (3) personal art journaling during intergenerational field explorations. These activities differ in style, structure, and impact, yet collectively contribute to a resilient storytelling ecosystem. Rather than prioritizing artistic output, this study centers on the processes of learning, transforming, and building solidarity.

The findings highlight how art bridges relationships between youth and elders, as well as between individuals and communities, silence and voice, while offering varied emotional entry points for youth with different capacities. By tracing how young people transform marginalization into action, this paper argues that art-based storytelling is not only a mode of resistance but also a practice of cultural care and environmental stewardship grounded in place-based knowledge and intergenerational ties. This research contributes to broader discussions on youth agency, participatory art, and plural forms of environmental justice.

Keywords: art-based practice, storytelling, environmental justice, youth

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Alone in the Crowd: An artistic approach to Loneliness, Anonymity, and Transit Spaces in Tokyo

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Abstract

This paper explores the interrelation between loneliness, anonymity, and urban life, focusing particularly on Tokyo as a paradigmatic case of hyper-modernity. Drawing from psychological, sociological, neurobiological, and cultural perspectives, it examines the structural and individual dimensions of loneliness in contemporary society. Artistic research complements this investigation: through the lens of a painterly work, the author reflects on her own experience of loneliness. The study considers how creative processes can transform isolation into productive solitude, and it highlights the cultural specificity of social expectations. Ultimately, it questions whether loneliness is inherently negative or if, under certain conditions, it may also be a generative state. Through aesthetic expression and embodied interaction, the painting fosters not only self-reflection but also shared resonance—making visible the invisible and connecting the disconnected. In doing so, the work demonstrates how artistic research can activate creative communities and serve as a catalyst for collective understanding, empathy, and discourse in the face of one of today's most pervasive emotional experiences.

Keywords: artistic research, urban loneliness, anonymity, Tokyo, Transit spaces

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Media Portrayals Of The 30 September Movement In Indonesia: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

This study explores the contrasting media portrayals of the 30 September Movement in Indonesia across two regimes. The 30 September Movement occurred in 1965, during which six military generals and one lieutenant were kidnapped and killed, allegedly by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). In line with Barthes' concept of myth, this study argues that the media plays a crucial role in constructing myths about the 30 September Movement and identifies significant differences in media portrayals between the New Order and Reform eras. Employing the content analysis method, this study analyzes the film *Penumpasan Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI*, which was disseminated during the New Order era, alongside four works from the Reform era, including documentary films *The Act of Killing* and *Eksil*, as well as two novels, *Gadis Kretek* and *Cantik Itu Luka*. Research findings indicate that due to the militaristic nature of the New Order era, media portrayals of the 30 September Movement emphasize the heroic actions of the military while portraying PKI as brutal savages. Conversely, non-fiction media portrayals during the Reform era focus on humanizing the members of PKI by highlighting the mass killings of alleged communists in 1965-1966. The fictional media portrayals of the movement also tend to present more empathetic views of the Indonesian Communist Party members. However, the fictional works analyzed in this study often depict left-leaning characters as shallow and easily influenced. Additionally, this study found that media portrayals during the Reform era actively tried to construct new, more humane myths regarding the Indonesian Communist Party.

Keywords: 1965 Communist Purge, 30 September Movement, Cold War, Indonesian media.

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Developing A Conservation Guidebook For The Lion And Dragon Dance Team

Siwat Visuthirungsiuri

Abstract

This research develops a conservation guidebook as a documentation tool to support community-led conservation for Lion and Dragon Dance communities. While some aspects of the tradition are preserved in institutional collections, much of the living heritage remains in community spaces, often undocumented or without formal conservation support. The template created in this project is designed to work with Lion and Dragon dance communities, offering a flexible approach that records the physical condition, stories, and cultural context of objects. The guidebook aims to empower communities to document, care for, and sustain their heritage in ways that are meaningful and practical for the community.

Keywords: Conservation, Conservation Guidebook, Lion and Dragon dance, Community-led conservation, Documentation tools, Living heritage

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Collective Animation As Well-Being Creative Practice

Thanut Rujitanont

Abstract

The paper presents two participatory animation workshops - *Scratch Your Anger and Flip It!* (2021) and *On the Other Way Round* (2022) – conducted in Thailand with high school students, university students, and members of the general public. These workshops explore how animation-based artistic practices can promote emotional well-being, self-reflection and interpersonal exploration. Utilising 'scribble art' and 'collective drawing' as experimental animation techniques, the workshops aimed to reframe animation as a process of well-being creative practice and community engagement. The first workshop responded to the internal impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown, integrating animation and mental health support through expressive, individual drawing exercises. The second workshop expanded the boundaries of animation beyond industrial production by facilitating collaborative charcoal animation and shared sensory observation, emphasising perception, embodiment, and collective creation. Drawing on participant reflections and group discussions, the paper examines the affective and relational dimensions of these creative processes. Participants reported emotional release, a sense of engagement, and enhanced well-being through their involvement. These findings suggest that animation, when approached as a collaborative and reflective practice, holds significant potential for fostering emotional expression and social connectedness. The research contributes both practical methodologies and theoretical perspectives to the field of animation studies, proposing drawn animation as a participatory medium for artistic research, emotional well-being, and participatory cultural practices.

Keyword: Animation, creative practice, artistic practice, well-being

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Bibitulit: People's Technology and Artistic Practice as Instruments of Social Critique

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Abstract

This article discusses the *Bibitulit* interactive installation series, which uses people's technology—particularly the TOA—to examine the relationship between sound, technology, and power in Indonesian public spaces. Employing a practice-led research approach, *Bibitulit* recontextualizes the TOA as a symbol of sonic domination and a tool of social control, creating participatory experiences that reveal hidden power dynamics in daily life. The eight works produced between 2017 and 2023 combine readymade objects, sensors, and microcontrollers to explore issues such as sonic control, symbolic obedience, information distortion, and the representation of minority voices. Installations such as bowing TOAs and layered sound distortions go beyond technological aesthetics, functioning as social critiques of inequalities in public sound hierarchies. This article shows how people's technologies like TOAs can be transformed into agents of critique within contemporary art practices, creating spaces for reflection on who speaks, who listens, and how sound mediates power relations.

Keywords: TOA, people's technology, interactive installation, sonic domination

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Voices In Consonance: Crafting Asean Identity Through Music, Culture, And Youth Collaboration

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Abstract

This article explores the formation of a musical community within the ASEAN context through the case study of "C ASEAN Consonant," a contemporary ensemble composed of young musicians from all ten ASEAN member countries. Founded under the motto "In Music We Share, Through Music We Change," the ensemble aims to promote cultural collaboration, the integration of shared identity, and the development of regional awareness of cultural values. The study highlights the role of music as a cultural tool capable of crafting a shared emotional and cultural space within ASEAN. Music is presented not merely as an "art of sound" but as an "art of coexistence," a platform that empowers the younger generation of Southeast Asia to carry forward the cultural legacy in creative and sustainable ways.

Moreover, the article points out that over the course of more than a decade (2015–present), the C ASEAN Consonant project has faced multifaceted challenges : social, cultural, economic, political, and public health-related; particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely impacted cultural mobility in the region. Nonetheless, the project has remained resilient, inspiring both musicians and audiences across Southeast Asia.\

Keywords: musical community, ASEAN, contemporary music, transnational culture, C ASEAN Consonant

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Intercultural Hand Loafing

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Abstract

In the impossibility of talking about music, sound is the immateriality that plays from a distance. The projection of the Other is the desire to dialogue and create porous spaces for a common future. This is the voice that challenges itself in the face of the incompleteness of the Other, of creation and the labyrinth of emotions. Inscribed in a historical and cultural context and imbued with diversity and epistemological complexity, the approach of vibrant bodies is the cadence for listening to the sound worlds of our contemporary times.

Keywords: Listen to the Other; Epistemologies; Decolonization; Worlds in Sounds; Contemporary Percussion;

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Democratizing Art: Examining T.M. Krishna's Engagement with Marginalized Communities

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Abstract

Art has always been a powerful means for communities to share their stories and address challenges they face. Creative traditions are used to question inequality, break barriers, and bring people together. Art helps reimagine what communities can be and do- that embrace diversity, inclusivity, and shared purpose while inspiring change and fostering understanding. One such endeavour in this direction that this research explores is T.M. Krishna's groundbreaking work with marginalized communities, specifically his engagement with the Jogappas, a transgender folk tradition, and the Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha, a festival that promotes inclusivity.

T.M. Krishna is a renowned Carnatic vocalist, writer, and activist. This research offers a critical lens on T.M. Krishna's philosophy of cultural inclusivity and its broader implications for decolonizing art and promoting social equity embedded in India's cultural practices. The study employs Discourse Analysis to unpack Krishna's rhetoric, media narratives, and performances, highlighting the transformative power of his artistic interventions. His initiatives showcase a dual strategy: collaborative co-creation with communities, such as the Jogappas, and building platforms for traditionally marginalized groups. This approach aims to democratize art forms, broadening access and representation in spaces historically reserved for elites.

Framing the study within the lenses of Intersectionality and Postcolonial Theory, it critically examines the entangled influences of caste, class, and gender in maintaining cultural hierarchies. The focus lies on Krishna's efforts to challenge and disrupt these structures through art. By engaging with marginalized communities as equal collaborators rather than mere subjects of representation, he redefines the relationship between art and social justice. Krishna's work not only enriches the artistic realm but also advances the discourse on social equity, pushing boundaries in both cultural and societal spheres.

Key words: Inclusivity, diversity, collaboration, engagement, hierarchies

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Reverse Artistic Engineering of Lanna Heritage: A Site-Specific Contemporary Performance Inspired by Nirat Hariphunchai

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Abstract

This research project, "Nirat Hariphunchai: The Creation of Contemporary Lanna Performing Arts", applies the concept of Reverse Artistic Engineering to reinterpret and revitalize classical literature into a contemporary cultural performance. The study begins by deconstructing the ancient Lanna poem Nirat Hariphunchai-an emotional journey embedded with Buddhist philosophy-into its fundamental narrative, emotional, and symbolic components. Through a systematic analysis of literary content, the research breaks down key artistic elements such as script, movement, costume, music, set design, and lighting. These components are then reassembled using mixed media techniques, with a strong emphasis on light, shadow, and projection mapping. The performance is designed as a site-specific experience, utilizing real historical locations such as temples and restored Lanna architecture to deepen emotional resonance and cultural authenticity. By transforming traditional narratives into immersive, multimedia performance, this work creates a new imaginative space for the audience. The outcome demonstrates that reverse engineering of cultural texts can effectively bridge historical heritage with modern expression. Furthermore, the project fosters cultural sustainability, creative tourism, and place-based development by merging artistic innovation with community engagement.

Keywords: Reverse Artistic Engineering, Nirat Hariphunchai, Site-Specific Performance, Contemporary Lanna Arts, Mixed Media Performance, Cultural Sustainability

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Ecologies of Participation – a practice-based research collaboration across architecture, arts, and technology

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Abstract

The Ecologies of Participation (EoP) collaborative began in 2024 with a common interest in participatory practices across fine arts, cultural studies, and architecture. Over the past year, we have held panel talks and methods workshops, inviting local and international arts practitioners and scholars to share their works and exchange ideas. The research question stems from disciplinary understandings about "participation" to seek common ground in interdisciplinary collaboration. This paper presents the research-creation process and the outcome of a prototype that involves multiple participatory methods, including field recording, urban mapping, generative AI, ethnographic artistic creation and VR world-building. Taking the vibrant Prince Edward Flower Market in Hong Kong as a study site, the prototype produces multiple alternative imaginaries of the area at risk of losing its character due to the anticipated government-led urban renewal plans. It demonstrates an ecological approach to understanding the agency of diverse actors, where both human and technology play a role as participant-creators. Recognising art as a social process of exchange, the initial findings suggest participatory practices as a collective form of knowledge production, and through technology to expand our imaginations of the city and everyday environment.

Keywords: Participatory Practices, Socially Engaged Art, Sound Art, Urban Space, Technology-enabled participation, Ecologies

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Fanglao, Generation and Prefiguration: Building community and demonstrating futures through dance in Vientiane, Laos

Roy Huijsmans

Abstract

Fanglao is a Vientiane, Lao PDR, based dance company run by and for young people in and connected to Laos. In this paper I draw on participant observation conducted in a number of Fanglao organized activities in 2019-2020 (dance festival, rehearsals, outreach activities, etc) and one-on-one interviews with key protagonists. Fanglao is one of the exponents of an emerging creative arts scene that has been developing in Laos over the past two decades or so, much in relation to the broader political and economic changes that have taken place in Laos. In this paper I reflect on the importance of Fanglao in contributing to building a creative and social community in the field of modern and urban dance. This is realized through the establishment of their own dance studio (venue), the various activities they host (both online and in person) and the cross-fertilisation with other forms of creative expression (i.e. visual arts) and actors in the broader creative arts scene. Conceptually, I highlight the notion of 'prefiguration', the act of realizing in the present a resemblance of a possible future, and how this matters from a generation perspective in a context in which most (aspiring) dancers are confronted with parental worries that excessive time spent dancing and with Fanglao might jeopardise their futures.

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Bangsaen Plearn: Making Bangsaen City Lively Through Its Community Art

Nadhanant Uaesilapa[1], Kittipan Chittep[2]

Abstract

"Bangsaen Plearn" is a festival that celebrates music, performing arts, exhibitions, and creative activities, all inspired by this vibrant tourist city's unique local wisdom and knowledge. The festival showcases the research findings from the project "Creative Bangsaen: Making the City Lively Through Its Community Art." The project's objectives are as follows: 1) To explore how Creative Placemaking and Cultural Ecology frameworks can guide participatory processes that foster community well-being and inclusive cultural spaces in Bangsaen. 2) To examine how collaborative learning in music and performing arts promotes social cohesion, intergenerational dialogue, and sustainable urban development in Bangsaen. This creative research employs qualitative and practice-based methods, focusing on three coastal communities in Bangsaen: Wonnapha, Bangsaen Beach, and Khao Sam uk. The data collection includes an analysis of academic documents, interviews, and field studies conducted with key community stakeholders. From February 14 to March 2, 2025, the research findings were presented through performances in community spaces in Bangsaen and at the Eastern Center of Art and Culture at Burapha University. This research produces four key creative outcomes: 1) Performances by researchers; 2) Performances by resident artists; 3) Aesthetic community activities for elementary school students; 4) Creative initiatives that connect various community spaces based on local data collection. These outcomes include a site-specific theater walk at Wonnapa, the Wandee@Bangsaen concert at Bangsaen Beach, and exhibitions featuring performances in Khao Sammuk, which showcase contemporary dance, shadow puppetry, and traditional Thai Nang Yai performances.

Keywords: Artistic Research, Creative Placemaking, Community Art, Performing Arts Festival

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Collective Empowerment and Solidarity Through Dance Among Indonesian Migrant Workers in Taiwan: A Participatory Artistic Research Approach

Anastasia Melati

Abstract

This study explores how Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan use dance not just as recreation, but as a powerful form of collective expression and social connection. In the face of isolation, precarity, and restrictive legal environments, these workers come together to form self-organized dance groups: spaces where friendship, identity, and mutual care are cultivated. Drawing on participatory artistic research, this paper approaches dance not only as cultural performance but as a shared practice of resilience and empowerment. Through ethnographic fieldwork, performance observation, and active collaboration, the research highlights how dance becomes a strategy for building community and affirming dignity. Whether performing during religious celebrations, public cultural events, or advocacy campaigns, these migrant-led initiatives transform dance into a vehicle for visibility, belonging, and voice. Their choreographies speak of lived experiences, aspirations, and solidarity, grounded in the everyday realities of migrant life. The study draws from social design theory, performance studies, and migration studies to argue that dance serves as both a form of research and grassroots activism. It becomes a method through which migrants reclaim agency, build social capital, and imagine alternative futures, on their own terms. By recognizing migrant-led artistic practices as vital, this research invites both scholars and policymakers to pay closer attention to the creative strategies of marginalized communities. In these dance practices, we witness not only art, but acts of care, courage, and collective hope.

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Live Coding as Critical Media: Asian Assemblages of Algorave

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Abstract

In this paper, we situate the practice of live coding as an articulation of critical media. This critical practice involves the real-time use of programming languages to address a range of creative challenges and communicative strategies through tactical improvisation. Despite its roots in the early 2000s, we observe that live coding remains a marginal creative practice. The literature on alternative media presents various modes of digital critical practice, including hacktivism, culture jamming, and others, yet live coding has received very little attention within this field. As a performance-based musical practice, algorave is a social movement centred on the performance of electronic music that re-centres human agency within an assemblage of sociotechnical relations. This critical practice challenges the logic of automation and generative AI by demanding human creativity and competence towards the creation of soundscapes. The nature of live coding decenters the use of programming away from its common institutionalized associations, particularly with neoliberal, STEM-based careers and education. Instead, live coding functions as a participatory practice to empower, subvert, resist, and transcend sociotechnical constraints. We see live coding providing experimental, experiential and pragmatic possibilities for marginalized and Global South contexts through a radical reframing of creative technologies which originate from the Global North. Our work highlights cases of live coding through algorave across Asian contexts.

Key words: live coding, critical media, algorave, alternative media, global south

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Community Making through Social Media and Artist Website in Chinese Media Art

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Abstract

Since the 1990s, China's rapid digitalization has transformed its technological and cultural spheres, reshaping how artists engage with one another and with society. Younger media artists—such as Cao Fei, Miao Ying, and Lu Yang—differ from earlier figures like Zhang Peili and Yang Fudong in their adept use of digital platforms for both artmaking and exhibiting. This shift has redefined traditional relationships between artists, audiences, and institutions, giving rise to a distinct digital visual culture.

While existing scholarship by Barbara Pollack and Ros Holmes has explored the themes and criticality of younger artists, less attention has been paid to the role of specific platforms—artist websites and social media—in shaping new forms of community. This study addresses that gap by identifying two key models of community making: (a) international digital collaboration via internal traffic channels such as group chats and online forums, which challenge academic and workshop-based traditions; and (b) institutional bypassing via external traffic platforms like social media and artist-run websites, enabling direct audience engagement and influence over circulation and interpretation.

Using artist interviews and visual analysis, this paper examines how these platforms foster critical, participatory networks that operate independently of institutional frameworks. However, it also acknowledges risks of co-optation by commercial or political forces. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving relationship between art and technology in China, and provides insights into how artists in digitally saturated societies create new publics and cultural agency through online community-making.

Keywords: Chinese art, social media, artist website, media art

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Artistic Research on Patterns of Perception and Action in the Context of an Aging Society.

Christina May Yan Carli[1], Ruth Mateus-Berr[2], Pia Scharler[3]

Abstract

This paper explores the outcomes of DEMEDARTS (Dementia. Empathy. Education. Arts.), a four-year transdisciplinary artistic research project undertaken in Austria from 2020 to 2024. As Europe experiences a demographic shift toward an aging population, dementia remains widely stigmatized and underrepresented in cultural discourse. DEMEDARTS confronts this invisibility through a hybrid artistic research methodology combining participatory art, co-design, and critical engagement with care communities. The project involved more than 70 co-created artworks—including customized rollators, wearable memory jewelry, and public installations—alongside over 40 multilingual educational toolbooks used across schools and caregiving institutions.

Through collaborations with people living with dementia, caregivers, schoolchildren, and artists, DEMEDARTS repositions dementia as a condition not of deficit, but of relational and creative potential. Drawing on artistic research frameworks, sensory engagement, and co-creation, the project reimagines care as a shared civic and aesthetic responsibility. The research was conducted in care homes, schools, galleries, and public spaces and documented through multimodal methods including photography, video, and participant reflection.

Key findings show that artistic processes promote agency and visibility for people with dementia and contribute to public empathy, educational reform, and policy dialogue. The paper highlights case studies such as *Taylored Memory*, *Cyclist*, and *Pinky*, emphasizing their symbolic and social dimensions. Ultimately, DEMEDARTS demonstrates that artistic research can reconfigure how communities understand vulnerability, aging, and collective.

Keywords: Dementia, Critical Design, Intergenerational, Empathy, Artistic Research

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Might and Magnitude

Dr. Siriya Jitpimolmard

Abstract

The *Might and Magnitude Video Installation* project is an attempt to apply the concept of the sublime in Kant to create an aesthetic experience via artwork. The latter illustrates an artificial storm with lightning and thunder as the subject through a 14 x 5 meters cycloramic screen with a video projection technique. The video continues in a slow zoom into a thunderstorm in an infinite loop, along with thunder sound effects and ambient sound. The project was inspired by a sublime experience when confronting with thunderstorm, thunderclap and thunder flash on top of a skyscraper. Such an experience unveiled a boundless trait of nature and its magnitude, while being veiled by a mighty power of nature, an exhausted feeling of terror as well as an anxiety of annihilation. This sublime occasion entails both a virtual creativity and an aesthetic experience, whereas a feeling of pleasure is apprehended in the work of art, and hence, in the free play of imagination. Throughout the article, the objective is to promptly synthesizes the process as following: clarifying the concept of the sublime; reviewing the procedures of the sublime and the related contemporary art- works; analyzing the sublime experience; applying the procedure as the creation of *Might and Magnitude Video Installation*.

The research result shows a successful application of the aesthetic philosophy to creative artwork. It was able to accomplish clarification of the subjective experience with the framework of Immanuel Kant's Dynamical and Mathematical Sublime system. This led to the systematic analytical sublime experience and created a concept for a creative artwork which aroused the imagination and the subjective feeling in the viewer.

Keywords: Aesthetic Philosophy; Might and Magnitude; The Sublime

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Performing Archives: Documentary Theatre and Digital Tools in Performing Romanian State Surveillance Archives

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Abstract

Performing Archives investigates how contemporary theatre can activate state surveillance archives through performative strategies that challenge institutional memory and foster civic engagement. Focusing on the CNSAS archive and the performance "Nostalgia Up&Down", the paper examines how theatrical re-enactment, multimedia interventions, and ethical reflection can render the distortions, silences, and contradictions within the Romanian secret police files. The research aims to understand the ways in which memory, testimony, and archival material can be ethically and creatively recontextualized in the post-communist present. Combining archival analysis with technological mediation, the project explores how theatre can function both as a critical apparatus and as a reparative civic gesture. This research demonstrates that documentary theatre, supported by digital tools and produced within a socially and politically engaged theatrical space such as Replika Center, can reactivate forgotten or hidden histories. Through its performative means, theatre becomes a space for inquiry and critical reflection on surveillance archives. The performance "Nostalgia Up&Down" illustrates how archival documents can be brought into the realm of living memory. Technology contributes to this transformation, amplifying the experience of witnessing. The archive is no longer merely a trace of the past, but a point of departure for civic and ethical questions rooted in the present. In this way, theatre emerges as a form of symbolic reparation and a gesture of solidarity with those whose voices were once silenced.

Keywords: performative archives, state surveillance, documentary theatre, digital dramaturgy, collective memory, ethical re-enactment

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The Wheelchair: The Agent to New Embodiment and New Role in the Living Experience of a Person with Paraplegia

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Abstract

For the person with paraplegia, the wheelchair is not merely a thing or a mobility aid to help people who cannot walk. The wheelchair is a mediator that allows persons with paraplegia to adapt to a new embodiment of themselves. The person with paraplegia is accepting and comfortable with the wheelchair as they imagine it is a new part of their body. The wheelchair is likely a representation of their legs, even though it is not a prosthetic device. In such a situation, a phenomenon occurs where a person with paraplegia experiences adapting their body from its existing embodiment to a new one, incorporating a wheelchair.

Design and technology are enabling wheelchairs to become agents for persons with paraplegia, opening up opportunities in their daily activities and social interactions. When the wheelchair is to be a part of their body and living situation, the person with paraplegia has a unique identity that is intrinsic to two conditions: liberation and limitation. A person with paraplegia can go travelling where they like as long as they use a wheelchair; at the same time, they face the problem of accessibility because this world, until today, is built without considering the circumstances of a person who uses a wheelchair to walk.

This artistic research delves into the complex and often overlooked embodied experience of a person with paraplegia when they decide to rise from a paralysed condition, specifically through the lens of the design and technology of mobility devices. All the participants involved in this research are persons with paraplegia from a traffic accident, work accident, or disaster survivors. The methods used to determine how to shift embodiment include ethnographic interviews, participant observation, and somaesthetic interaction design.

Keyword: Embodiment; Mobility; Paraplegia; Wheelchair

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PETA's Humanitarian Work and Resiliency Education through the Arts and Sustained Community Engagement

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Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA).

Abstract

The Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) first entered humanitarian work amid the 1991 Mt. Pinatubo eruption, which erased swaths of Central Luzon's rice lands and displaced thousands. With no relief funds but a wealth of skill in the arts, experience and immersion in cultural work, PETA's artist-teachers transformed Integrated Theater Arts Workshops (ITAW) into arts workshops for healing and mobile psychosocial support sessions for young evacuees, community members, and Aeta families. This pioneering effort revealed theater's power to process trauma and sow hope escalating Hazards & the "New Normal"

Since 2004, the Philippines has faced stronger typhoons, heavier floods, and more earthquakes. In 2009, Typhoon Ondoy (international name Ketsana) submerged parts of Metro Manila for months. PETA's Children's Theater Program responded by launching Lingap Sining (Nurturing Hearts through the Arts), a psychosocial support initiative for children, families, and communities.

Together with partners like the Philippines Against Child Trafficking (PACT), Medical Action Group (MAG), Save the Children, Plan International, and the Citizens' Network for Psychosocial Response, PETA held workshops in affected areas of Metro Manila, Laguna, Pangasinan, and La Union. Activities combined psychosocial sessions with relief, feeding programs, and medical missions.

When Typhoon Sendong (international name Washi) struck in 2011, PETA trained volunteers and educators on using Integrated Theater Arts for trauma processing, especially among children and indigenous communities.

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Research, Affect, and Asia-Pacific Performance Festival Ecologies

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Abstract

My contribution explores a recent shift in performing arts festivals across East and Southeast Asia, where curatorial infrastructures increasingly embed artistic research formats into their programming. Examples include initiatives such as ADAM (Asia Discovers Asia Meeting for Contemporary Performance) at the Taipei Arts Festival, Kansai Studies at Kyoto Experiment, and the Lab format at Asia TOPA in Melbourne. Framed as relational infrastructures, these programmes position research not as a preparatory or auxiliary activity but as a situated, sensory, and embodied practice – which enables new forms of knowledge production and collective attunement across geographic, disciplinary, and affective boundaries.

Foregrounding the sensual turn in performance and research, the paper draws on recent work in sensory anthropology and olfactory studies to consider how artists mobilise smell and breath as critical tools for urban placemaking. In particular, I examine works that engage with the atmospheric qualities of water and air — not just as environmental concerns, but as oral and olfactory portals of 'regional *Asian* dramaturgies.' As Nora A. Taylor (2022) reminds us, "hanging out" formed the basis of Southeast Asia's art worlds before the rise of digital connectivity. Today, such durational, porous modes of togetherness are being institutionalised through frameworks that support artistic research as both method and community-forming gesture.

Yet while these curatorial investments may cultivate new ecologies of artistic knowing, they remain entangled in the asymmetries of transnational infrastructures and the commissioning logics of the festival apparatus. This paper asks whether sensorial and site-based practices, particularly those engaging with environmental atmospheres such as air, water, and smell, can genuinely enact political or activist intervention, or whether they risk being circumscribed as symbolic gestures within the aesthetic and temporal economies of the festival. By framing these case studies as both critique and proposition, I consider how artistic research might not only foster resilient, affectively attuned communities of practice, but must challenge the limits of curatorial practice itself.

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Im/Materialities of CO-. From CO-researching to CO-imagining.

Ingrid Cogne

Academy of Fine Arts Vienna

Abstract

Co-processes are subject to formal and informal levels of structuring, in which i) forms of verticality and horizontality come into play and ii) perpetual re-/negotiation and transformation imply a constant openness and attention towards repositioning.

CO- is usually thought (of) as being merely a prefix and in terms of collaboration. CO-, for Cogne, calls the between and in-between "I"('s). Convinced that plural/ity is not only a sum of "I" (neither is "we"), one of the main approaches of Cogne is to "think bigger than oneself". Some of the questions addressed are: Can the CO- exist as such, without being imagined (as such)? How does this articulate between theory and practice, "vision" and "doing"? How does CO- relate to a *singular plural?* Is CO- an alternative to "we"? Can a CO- be as particular as it can be general?

Outside and beyond generalization that limits its potentialities, CO- wants to be thought as potentiality instead as a fixed concept.

Keywords : Expanded Choreography; Methodology; Situation; Practical Knowledge; Languages

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Conjuring the Holy men : art activism and rearticulation of locality

Worathep Akkabootara

Abstract

This article examines the Phi Boon ("Holy Men") movement in northeastern Thailand as a historical framework of resistance against Siamese centralized authority. Bangkok's administrative reforms during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries undermined traditional power structures in Isaan, generating significant socio-political tensions. The implementation of new taxation systems and regulatory frameworks was perceived as unjust, while economic challenges exacerbated existing vulnerabilities among the region's inhabitants.

The contemporary manifestation of this resisting impetus is analyzed through the "Ubon Agenda," a decentralized coalition of activists employing minimalist expressive strategies with do-it-yourself methods. Despite its informal structure, the movement effectively rearticulates narratives of marginalization while establishing communicative channels for historically disenfranchised communities. The study highlights how the movement's emphasis on localized micro-narratives contributes to the formation of multidimensional conceptualizations of regional identity and place-based consciousness within specific geographical contexts.

This article aim to point out how historical resistance frameworks evolve in contemporary sociopolitical environments, demonstrating continuity between traditional resistance movements and modern activist expressions. The findings suggest that decentralized resistance strategies effectively address regional marginalization by reframing collective identity through locally-resonant narratives.

Keywords: Holy Men, art activism, locality

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The Space of Happiness: Spirit, Body, and Breath — Integrating Visual Art and Contemporary Practice through Human Dialogues

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Abstract

This article focused on the study of "The Space of Happiness" through the art process which connected the cultural roots with the Contemporary Performance Art as well as the Healing Art. This study was conducted with the emphasis on the local participation and the roles of the artist as the facilitator and also performance artist during field researches at four provinces, including Nakhon Pathom, Chaiyaphum, Suphanburi and Nonthaburi Provinces. Also, as a part of the creative initiative entitled "Integration of Visual Art with Mixed Media: Performance Art and Digital Art," "Performance Art as Visual Art and Interdisciplinary Integration with Mixed Media: Spirit, Body and Breath" was aimed at exploring the potentials of Art in transforming mind and society, particularly summoning "Kwan (means consolation/encouragement/heartening)" and its linkages with Art, rituals, beliefs, and happiness of people in the targeted study areas. By contemplating on "Kwan" as the medium of spirit, local beliefs and rituals, this study significantly indicated the potentials of Art in healing, opening dialogues, and integrating interdisciplinary knowledge which all eventually led to the mind and social wellbeing. The artist's previous researches, for instance, "The Happinesses Space: Spirit of Kwan" (2023), "The Garland: Spirit of Kwan" (2024), "I'm My Own Queen: Spirit of Kwan" (2 024) และ "Spirit of Kwan" (2025), attested the creation of spaces for healing, communicating, and integrating interdisciplinary knowledge together.

Keywords: Contemporary Art, The Space of Happiness, local participation, Healing Art, Kwan, Visual Art, Mixed Media, Performance Art

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Creating The Whispers Of Hala Bala Soundscape Album

Sutthiphong Ruangchante

Abstract

The Whispers of Hala Bala Album presents a combination of soundscapes from the tropical rainforests of Southeast Asia with music created by AI, focusing on the natural sound from southern Thailand, especially the Hala Bala tropical rainforests in Narathiwat Province. The project aims, first, to foster a deep sense of connection between people in the communities and urban soundscapes, as well as the natural soundscape of Southeast Asia's tropical rainforest, and second, to promote environmental awareness of this unique tropical rainforest soundscape focus on the Hala Bala Wildlife Sanctuary in southern Thailand. The album, which focuses on four important points in Narathiwat Province, consists of eight tracks: (1) Awakening the City, (2) The Heart of the Forest, (3) Interlude of the Stream, (4) Echoes of the Ancients, and tracks five through eight, combining AI-generated music compositions with authentic ambient sound elements, including hornbills, siamang gibbons, dusky langurs, rough-sided frogs, rain, flowing water, and other natural acoustics, accompanied by contemplative melodies. The result is an engaging audio experience that takes listeners right into the sounds of Southeast Asia's tropical rainforest, helping them feel calm and more aware of their environment while they explore the related exhibits. The project not only celebrates the natural beauty of the region's soundscapes but also demonstrates the transformative potential of AI to create meaningful and deeply immersive listening experiences. We design these experiences to inspire reflection, promote mindfulness, and foster a renewed appreciation of the tropical rainforest in Thailand. We achieve this by seamlessly blending traditional and contemporary elements. It is important to note that music created by AI has certain limitations, and humans continue to be the most nuanced creators of soundscapes with music composition.

Keywords: tropical rainforest soundscape, Hala Bala, the Whispers of Hala Bala Soundscape Album

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Embodied Cartography in Masinloc, West Philippine Sea

Annelys De Vet[1], Josephine Turalba[2], Lyn Viado[3]

Abstract

Scarborough Shoal, locally known as Bajo de Masinloc or Panatag Shoal, has long served as a natural refuge for small-scale fishing boats. The shoal's natural formation, with its lagoon surrounded by reefs, has historically offered calm and safe shelter during stormy weather, which is the basis for its local name 'Panatag' (Lopez, 2024), meaning "calm" or "tranquil" in Filipino. The term holds both emotional and historical resonance for Filipino fisherfolk. However, this sense of refuge has been disrupted by intensifying geopolitical conflict in recent years.

220 kilometers off the Philippines' largest island, Luzon, Panatag Shoal sits within the exclusive economic zone and municipal fishing grounds. Its strategic location in the West Philippine Sea places it on a corridor carrying about $3.4 trillion in trade annually. Over the past two decades, China's aggressive military expansion in the region has prompted increased naval and surveillance activity from other foreign powers seeking to protect vital trade routes. Local communities now face restricted fishing, constant monitoring, and militarized waters, straining both their livelihood and their bond to the sea. In this climate, the right to represent one's place, to name and narrate it, becomes both an act of agency and survival.

Drawing on the Subjective Atlas framework's emphasis on lived, emotional, and sensory geographies, we organized a workshop with the fisherfolk as narrative-makers and visual co-authors of place. Memory, story, and embodied knowledge are validated through subjective mapping as essential ways of knowing, capable of challenging colonial and technocratic norms of representation. This participatory art-based approach engages in reframing its cartography, not as an extractive or imperial tool, but as a method of listening, reciprocity, and co-authorship.

The activity was part of Project PANATAG, led by artist Josephine Turalba. The workshop applied the Subjective Atlas methodology, developed through Subjective Editions as part of Annelys de Vet's design practice in critical and participatory cartography. Their joint *Subjective Atlas of the Philippines* brings this methodology into local contexts through collaborative visual mapping. This article reflects on the participatory mapping workshop held in Masinloc, Zambales, where our respective artistic research practices intersected through embodied cartography and subjective mapping. In Masinloc, we came together with fisherfolk, marine biology students, and local artists to co-create drawings and visual narratives that surfaced memory, cultural knowledge, and lived experience in the West Philippine Sea.

While building on the momentum from prior workshops in the context of the *Subjective Atlas of the Philippines*, the Masinloc workshop stood out for its immediate geopolitical relevance and emotional depth. While still being in the middle of the process, and eager to learn from our experiences, this article examines how participatory visual methods may contribute to place-making, narrative sovereignty, and political presence in contested maritime spaces. Through this reflection, we seek to understand how embodied cartography can become a tool for both representation and resistance.

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Karang Penyu: The Investigation of Site-Specific Installation as a Coral Garden.

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Abstract

In this study, a site-specific installation was constructed in an open location used as a studio, where the concept of objectivity or neutrality of knowledge is practiced. I was inspired by this space and created a site-specific installation using recycled materials sourced from the surrounding area. These materials were identified and examined through research methods that include literature analysis and documentary studies to ensure their safety in constructing a coral garden. This study aims to contribute to contemporary art discourse while strengthening the connection between art, science, the environment, and spatial context in artistic thinking.

Keywords: Site-Specific Installation, Assemblages, Artificial reef.

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From Hopscotch to Diversity: The Creative Journey Behind the Dance Video Installation 'Step, Step, Hops at The Peninsula Bangkok

Sirithorn Srichalakom

Abstract

This initiative integrates art into hospitality, demonstrating how it can improve cultural experiences and support the local economy. The Peninsula Bangkok Artist in Residence Programme connects artists with the public to foster relationships and inspire future art. It examines the potential of artist residencies in hotels, emphasizing creativity and community engagement. The primary aim is to offer an environment where artists can innovate and create works while interacting with guests. Sirithorn Srichalakom has been invited to participate in this residency program from May to August 2023, to conceptualize and produce a Dance Video Installation. Research and creation will occur within The Peninsula Bangkok. The process began with researching and observing the hotel's atmosphere and guests. This included exploring hotel spaces to identify opportunities for the main concept. The project involved defining the presentation format with the curator, finalizing details about the method and location of the presentation, the creative process, budget considerations, and coordinating with various hotel departments for installation and promotion. The exhibition "Step, Step, Hops!" features two Dance Video Installations inspired by Hopscotch, highlighting the diversity of movement by feet and fingers within The Peninsula Bangkok from July 18 to August 15, 2023. Participants shared their creative journeys with the audience through collaboration. The exhibition resulted in a series of dance videos that enhanced the hotel's aesthetic value and facilitated cultural exchange within the hotel's guest, art lover, dance social, and broader community.

Keywords: Dance Video, Video Installation, Artist in Residence, Hotel Arts, The Peninsula Bangkok

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Dancing the Identity of Mat Weavers in Sa Kaeo, Thailand: A Case Study of the Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern Project

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to (1) Study the identity of the Ban Phra Phloeng Mat Weaving and Processing community enterprise group to design and create performance called Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern. (2) Study the importance of the cultural values of the community in this performance. (3) Study the methods of using such performances to promote community tourism. This research is a participatory action research, by qualitative research methods and creative methods in the focus groups using information received from the community to jointly design and create dance moves, creating awareness with a focus on communities as key players, creative thinking, creative styles and cultural lifestyle symbol theory. The "Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern" dance which means a performance that conveys the art of mat weaving and the mat patterns that the weavers design themselves, which can generate income for the community. It has 17 dance moves and has creative forms: (1) Script (2) Performance style (3) Costume (4) Music and (5) Actors. The importance and the value of this performance to the community as follows: (1) Physical importance (2) Importance to the brain, memory system (3) Importance to the mind and (4) The importance of the spirit. (5) Social value (6) Cultural values (7) The Identity value (8) Educational value and (9) Aesthetic value. The methods of using such performances to promote community tourism as follows: (1) Community participation (2) Stimulate community awareness of values (3) Community members learn to respect themselves and others (4) Promote cultural tourism through public relations and dissemination through cooperation between researchers, communities, and the Phra Phloeng Subdistrict Administrative Organization

Keywords: Dancing the Identity,Mat Weavers,Fon Chak, Soi Roi Ngern

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Developing A Choral Singing Project To Enhance Psychological Well-Being In Thai Elderly

Nutthan Inkhong

Abstract

A researcher initiated a study on the psychological well-being of elderly participants in the choral singing project in 2020. Researchers found that the six aspects of Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing correlate with skills in choral singing activities. The researcher employed the findings to establish a choral singing project aimed at examining the relationship between psychological well-being and singing among Thai elderly people once more in 2024. This research seeks to create a choral singing program for the elderly, emphasizing skills that enhance psychological well-being. Findings suggested that the psychological well-being of elderly people who engaged in choral singing for at least four months, as per the project specifications, improved. The choral singing project is structured around six aspects of psychological well-being, including (a) Autonomy: Self-directed learning and evaluation conducted via Google Forms; (b) Environmental mastery: Recording your understanding of reading musical notation and the approach for vocalizing songs using symbols and language during practice sessions; (c) Personal growth: Accountability for training to improve vocal skills until mastery of the songs is attained; (d) Positive relations with others: The ability to engage in collaborative singing practice within the same vocal group, providing mutual support. (e) Purpose in life: The commitment to personal growth for effective teamwork; and (f) Self-acceptance: Recognizing personal errors and exhibiting openness to advice from the conductor and fellow singers for self-enhancement. Prior data indicates that understanding the relationship between musical activities and psychological well-being facilitates the creation and implementation of musical projects for the long-term advantage of individuals in society.

Keywords: choral singing, choral singing in elderly, psychological well-being

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Habitus: The Naturalness of the Balletic Body

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Abstract

Ballet is a distinctive dance form that merges elegance with technical precision. Although rooted in Western performing arts traditions, a central question remains: how can dancers from different cultural backgrounds meaningfully access and embody ballet? This study explores how the *"Naturalness"* of the *Balletic Body* can be developed within culturally specific contexts, using Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *Habitus* as the theoretical foundation.
The research employs document analysis alongside narrative interviews with three experienced Thai ballet teachers. The findings identify four key dimensions of *Habitus* that shape the *Balletic Body*: (1) *Everyday Life Habitus*, (2) *Cultural Habitus*, (3) *Practising Habitus*, and (4) *Stage Presence Habitus*. These interconnected dimensions illustrate how dancers internalise ballet not only through technique, but also through cultural values, daily behaviours, and performance attitudes.

This study contributes a new conceptual framework for understanding how the *Balletic Body* can emerge naturally in non-Western dancers. Its insights are valuable for ballet practitioners, educators, and researchers seeking to adapt ballet training across diverse cultural settings while preserving artistic and technical integrity.

Keyword: Habitus, Balletic Body

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Hortus Ăpertus

Eleonora Cavallini

Brno University of Technology

Abstract

In today's urban environments the connection between humans and the natural world has become increasingly fragile. This disconnection, intensified by technological saturation, fast-paced lifestyles and a loss of traditional knowledge, can have significant consequences in terms of mental and physical well-being.

In an attempt to rekindle this bond this paper presents Hortus Ăpertus—an ongoing project able to take different shapes depending on the city in which it is conceived and established. In accordance with the principle of a community garden, the developing project Hortus Ăpertus: Brno proposes an artistic return to tradition and a new way of living the community installed in the Moravian city of Brno, Czech Republic.

The artwork is not only an artistic installation but also a method of research that involves community-based learning, ecological awareness, and the healing potential of plants.

At the heart of this initiative is an exploration of how urban communities, particularly younger generations, can re-establish a deeper bond with the land while learning from elders and local experts, in a process that bridges generations.

Community gardens have been encouraging connections between citizens and nature for years—bringing history, tradition, and care into social gatherings; envisioning a space where people might engage in plant cultivation as intergenerational learning.

Keywords: Medicinal plants, Reconnection, Feminism, Environment, Traditions, Intergenerational learning

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Moist Maps: Reimagining the Mekong River Through the Materiality of Its River Weeds

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Abstract

Since 2023, I have participated in a series of collaborative and transdisciplinary research groups involving artists, activists, and local communities to explore the shifting landscape of the Mekong River in Thailand, impacted by upstream dam construction in China and Laos. The fieldwork included interviews, workshops, and sensory engagement with local women and men who harvest Kai, an endemic and ecologically vital river weed. Once central to the Mekong's life cycle and local economies, Kai now faces threats from erratic water levels and chemical pollution caused by dams. Drawing on Ala Plastica's definition of initiatives as artistic processes emerging through exchanges shaped by context and relationships, this research adopts a fluid, responsive approach. Handmade paper crafted from Mekong River weed became the foundation for a "moist map" that challenges conventional, neo-colonial mapping practices. Historically, maps of the Mekong served as instruments of power, reducing its complex ecosystems to static forms for control and resource extraction. In contrast, this counter-visualization highlights the river's inherent dynamism and the entangled relationships between human and non-human actors. The Moist Maps: Collaborative Map-Making Initiative brought together artists and activists, with Kai weed harvesters and local youth from Baan Had Krai (Chiang Khong) to co-create a series of maps using locally sourced Kai. This workshop fostered intergenerational knowledge transfer, amplifying micro-stories and diverse perspectives that shape the river's reality. Through embodied cartography, the research reimagines fieldwork as a relational, place-based method, advocating for alternative representations that resist extractive narratives while nurturing situated knowledge and ecological awareness.

Keywords : Mekong River, Kai Riverweed, Extractive Practices, Colonial History, Visualisation Techniques, Collaborative Map Making

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Reimagining Communities: Poetic Spaces of Light, Movement, and Language in Collective Experience

Bin Youn

Abstract

This research explores how transdisciplinary artistic practices foster communal experiences through light, movement, and language in immersive installations. Examining four case studies: *Projective Verse of* ㅇ (2023)*,* ㅁ *otherisland* (2022)*, Abyss* (2022)*,* and *Butterflying* (2023), the study demonstrates how installations function as transformative spaces encouraging collective engagement through embodied interaction. Projects incorporate Korean letters as visual anchors while extending beyond linguistic forms through light sculptures and collaborative structures. The research employs mixed methods combining practice-based research, participant observation, and digital ethnography, analyzing 179 Instagram stories. Drawing from Charles Olson's Projective Verse, Eastern concepts of qi (氣/ᄀᆡ) and Wayu (臥遊/**와유**), and theorists including Sarah Bryant-Bertail and Homi Bhabha, this work situates artistic practice as spatial and temporal reconfiguration. The study introduces "qi-time" as a framework for understanding non-linear temporal experience in digitally-mediated art. Findings reveal how installations create temporary collective experiences through shared vocabularies, embodied documentation, and cross-cultural dialogue, though not sustained communities. The research contributes to understanding how contemporary artistic practices bridge physical and digital spaces, offering models for reimagining social connection in an era of technological mediation.

Keywords: immersive installation, projective verse, theatrical space, dematerialization, cultural translation, collective experience

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Lanna Performing Arts and Natural Conservation: Exploring Pathways and Possibilities in the Digital Age

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Abstract

This research investigates the potential of Lanna performing arts as a medium for fostering environmental awareness and promoting community engagement. Drawing on artistic and practice-led research methodologies, it explores how traditional performance practices can convey ecological knowledge and respond to contemporary environmental concerns.

The study centers on two creative works rooted in Lanna traditions but differing in form and emphasis. Both integrate Lanna dance as a key expressive element. The first draws on beliefs in sacred forests, using bodily movement, traditional string instruments, and evocative silence to evoke the spirit of nature. The second presents local watershed knowledge through newly composed *phleng so* (Lanna poetic song), recorded community interviews, and images from Ban Ko village's creative process.

Comparative analysis reveals that Lanna performing arts can serve as a "language of nature"—a sensory, embodied form of storytelling rooted in rhythm, sound, memory, and cultural identity. These works demonstrate how art can function as a knowledge-making process grounded in lived experience, place-based practices, and cultural engagement.

The study also raises critical questions: Are digital platforms sufficient to generate meaningful impact? Can art become a sustainable tool for social transformation? While it offers no definitive conclusions, the research highlights how Lanna performance, when interwoven with local wisdom and digital innovation, can foster dialogue between humans, nature, and culture in the digital age.

Keywords: Lanna performing arts, Environmental Conservation, Artistic Research, Digital Media, Community Engagement

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Improvisation: Aesthetic Dialogues between Sound and Movement of Southern Thailand

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Abstract

This article explores the creative process behind contemporary performance art projects centered on *Nora*, a traditional performance form from Southern Thailand. Challenging conventional boundaries between music and dance, the project follows a three-phase methodology: *Decoding* examines the origins of *Nora*—its rhythms, soundscapes, movement, and costumes—to uncover its artistic essence; *Deconstructing* interprets its deeper meanings within religious, social, and cultural frameworks; and *Recomposing* reimagines its core elements into new expressions through music and dance, drawing on theories such as tone and colour, improvisation, choreography, and ethno-aesthetics.

The idea presents in three original performance pieces: *The Sorrow of Princess Nang Nuan Thong Samli*, a free-improvisation dance reflecting the princess's exile from a patriarchal society; *Silpa Song Thang: The Creation of Painting with Colour, Sound, and Rhythm*, a dialogue between Dr. Suchart Wongthong's paintings, live music, and dance gestures; and *Catalyst the Bliss*, an experimental performance inspired by the six traditional winds of Southern Thailand, symbolizing cultural fusion of this region.

The result shows that this project engages contemporary audiences while fostering a platform for artistic collaboration. It seeks to bridge traditional and modern performance practices, encouraging dialogue between traditional masters and contemporary practitioners. By transcending conventional artistic boundaries, this creative artwork can contribute to the evolving discourse on performance art, offering new possibilities for cultural reinterpretation and interdisciplinary creation.

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The Creation of *Krai Kha Tia*: A Mixed Media Stage Play for Actor Development and Personal Branding at Maiosiam Artist Management

Sutida Singharach

Abstract

Thailand's entertainment industry has grown into a dynamic and influential sector, with professional actors playing a key role in setting performance standards and driving success. To maintain excellence and prepare talents for diverse roles, enhancing their capabilities is essential. With the industry becoming increasingly competitive and fast-evolving, developing actors as personal brands has emerged as a strategic approach to captivate both domestic and global audiences. In response, Maiosiam Artist Management Co., Ltd. launched *Krai Kha Tia*, a mixed-media stage play aimed at strengthening the acting skills of its artists while reinforcing their brand identity. The production is directed by Professor Sutida Singharach, Head of Cinematic Arts and Creative Media (International Program) at the College of Communication Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. Scheduled for six performances on March 30–31, 2024, at The Street Hall (The Street Ratchada, 5th floor), the initiative serves not only as a platform for professional actors to showcase their talents but also as a learning opportunity for students to gain hands-on experience in stage production. This structured and strategic endeavor highlights Maiosiam's commitment to maintaining high production standards and nurturing its actors as both skilled performers and brand ambassadors.

Keywords : Thai entertainment industry , Actor development , Personal branding , Mixed-media stage play

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Agitating Towards Flourishing: Fermentation Intelligences in Para-Pedagogical Practice

Lleah Amy Smith

Abstract

This paper positions the para-pedagogical as a liberatory practice and theoretical orientation of 'learning beside'. It seeks to liberate pedagogy from the contextualising of objects and artefacts through the reimagining of learning, people and more-than-human bodies and energies as material. Building on a shared interest in interrogating how learning moves through mainstream education, the para-pedagogical in this context situates the work in direct relation with the gallery and museum sector rather than the university. Drawing from embodied research across diverse geographies and institutional contexts, it argues for fermentation as a methodological lens, articulated through a set of 'fermentation intelligences' that make para-pedagogical work possible. These intelligences—*contamination, queer temporalities, interspecies kinship, agitating towards stability*, and *preserving and transforming*—animate pedagogy as a site of relational learning, institutional reimagining, and sovereignty through the position of the beside. By shifting focus from outcomes to conditions, the paper repositions pedagogy as central, not to contextualise objects, artists, or exhibitions, but as a critical, sovereign force in its own right. It contributes to emerging discourses on para-institutionalism and pedagogical sovereignty, proposing new vocabularies and infrastructures through which institutions might re-world themselves amidst cultural and ecological precarity. This is not a model to scale, but a method to sit with: porous, durational, and alive with potential. The para-pedagogical, as articulated here, is both a vessel and an invitation to begin again, beside again, and again

Keywords: para-pedagogical, fermentation intelligences, institutional critique, eco-pedagogies, para-curatorial

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Reproduction of Traditional Karawitan *Gending* With Hybrid Instrumentation for Community Revitalisation in Art Performances

Dr. Sn. I Ketut Ardana, M.Sn.

Abstract

Traditional karawitan *gending* has a standard system for its performance. The system affects the quality of the performance. Adjustment models, game techniques, and types of gamelan instruments are interrelated elements that show that the system works. The interconnectedness of the three is a factor in the beauty and authenticity of karawitan. All three also traditionally require that traditional karawitan *gending* be served with many karawitan players. Thus, it is natural that every karawitan community must have many members of the players to play the karawitan *gending*. On the other hand, many karawitan communities today have few members, so they cannot play the karawitan *gending* ideally. Often, this community plays karawitan *gending-gending* with a reduction of (incomplete) instruments. It causes the performance to be inauthentic, and the resulting sound removes the characteristics of the gamelan beauty. Therefore, the phenomenon is one of the problems faced by the karawitan community, especially the art of karawitan related to Bali and Java. For this reason, the researcher tried to reproduce the traditional karawitan *gending* using hybrid instrumentation.

Hybrid instrumentation is a way to present *gending* with analogue and digital instrumentation. This hybrid instrumentation can be utilised, as Western music uses the same thing. The challenge is that karawitan has acoustic characteristics that are different from Western music. Therefore, this research is significant to be carried out, aiming to find the right formula for using hybrid instrumentation in traditional art. The purpose of this study is to find a formulation of the use of hybrid instrumentation in traditional karawitan art so that the karawitan art community can present traditional *gending* performances with good quality. This study uses the practice-led research method to find the formula. This practice-led research has a long history and has been reconsidered in many academic contexts worldwide.

Keynotes: gamelan community, *gending karawitan*, hibrid instrumentation, tradisionally.

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Voice From An Urban Village: Negotiating The Ethnic Identity of Kalipasir Cikini Village Through Performing Arts.

Yola Yulfianti[1], Aulia Detha Amalia[2]

Abstract

Urban villages in the middle of metropolitan Jakarta, Indonesia's capital city, face great challenges in maintaining their cultural identity amidst the pressures of globalization and social change. Kalipasir, a village in the Cikini and Gondangdia area of Central Jakarta, is a unique example of how a local community has survived more than a century in the midst of urban development. Despite being directly adjacent to an elite area, Kalipasir has maintained its distinctive character as a dynamic urban village. However, big questions arise: how do Betawi and non-Betawi identities survive in this space? How do immigrants who have lived here for decades negotiate their cultural identities?

The Community Service Program conducted by the Graduate School of the Jakarta Institute of Arts (IKJ) through arts training, especially performing arts, seeks to answer this question by facilitating a space for expression for residents. This program places at “Balai RW” as a community center where art is used as a means of maintaining, negotiating, and reconstructing cultural identity in urban life.

Kalipasir reflects a broader phenomenon in major cities around the world, where local communities struggle to maintain their cultural identity amidst urbanization. This performing arts training program is expected to serve as a model for similar initiatives in other urban areas, demonstrating how art not only functions as an individual expression, but also as a social tool in shaping more inclusive and sustainable spaces. As such, this activity not only contributes to the local community, but also to the global discourse on art, identity, and the production of urban space in the modern era. In addition, to further explore cultural identity, an oral history method was used with in-depth interviews with three generations of Kalipasir residents to reveal how their artistic identity evolved with social and spatial changes in the city.

Keywords: Betawi, Identity, Kalipasir Cikini, Theater, Performings Arts.

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Multidimensional Analysis of the Integration of Chinese and Western Music in Guzheng: A Case Study of "Ding Feng Bo"

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Abstract

Since modern times, the continuous influx of Western musical ideas has had a profound impact on the art of Guzheng, which is not only reflected in performance techniques and work creation, but also in Guzheng education, cultural dissemination, aesthetic concepts, and other aspects. The Guzheng Concerto "Ding Feng Bo", as a modern Guzheng work, not only retains the essence of traditional Chinese music, but also cleverly integrates Western music elements. This article will use three research methods, namely music analysis, case study, and interview, to analyze the creative background, melody structure, performance techniques, and harmony direction of the music itself, explore the application of Chinese and Western music elements in the work, compare two performance cases, analyze the handling methods of two performers and their reflection of the integration of Chinese and Western music, interview guzheng performers, composers, and music scholars to understand their views and interpretations of the integration of Chinese and Western elements in "Ding Feng Bo", interview audiences to understand their acceptance and feelings of the integration of Chinese and Western elements in the work, and discuss how to achieve the integration of Chinese and Western music in the guzheng work "Ding Feng Bo", Explore and understand the new directions and possibilities arising from the fusion of Chinese and Western musical elements in guzheng music, and reveal the cultural significance of this fusion and its implications for modern music creation.

Keywords: Guzheng; Ding Feng Bo "; Integration of Chinese and Western Music

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Beyond the Classroom: Exploring Collaborative Learning and Student-Lecturer Dynamics in Practice-Based Design Festival

Alex Gaja Ortega

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Abstract

This study explores Vietnam's National Architecture Student Festival as a model of collaborative, practice-based learning in design education, focusing on the dynamic partnership between students and lecturers. The festival brings together participants from various universities to engage in intensive, hands-on design challenges, fostering a unique environment where investigation, creative proposals, and learning function as interconnected processes. By examining how participants co-create, exchange knowledge, and navigate creative problem-solving within the festival setting, this study frames the event as a living laboratory for artistic research and community-driven design. It investigates how experiential, practice-based approaches strengthen design education, encouraging adaptability, innovation, and critical thinking. This research employs a qualitative, reflective approach, drawing on the author's first-hand experience at the 2024 festival in Hue, Vietnam. Primary methods include reflective inquiry – analysing personal observations and interactions – and semi-structured interviews with participating students and lecturers to capture diverse perspectives on collaboration and creative processes. Additionally, a review of festival materials will provide further context on projects and methodologies. The findings will contribute to discussions on artistic research, participatory education, and creative communities, offering insights into how collaborative learning models can be applied beyond the festival context. By positioning the festival as a site of artistic and architectural research, this paper aligns primarily with the theme of "Learning to Create with Communities", illustrating how multiple agents across education, community engagement, and creative practice can work together to shape more engaged, resilient, and innovative creative environments.

Keywords: collaborative learning, design education, practice-based pedagogy, student-lecturer collaboration, student festival

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Open End: Re-Tracing And Re-Reading The Substation Archive — A Acuratorial Methodology Of Activation

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Abstract

This paper examines OPEN END: Resonate, Re-Read and Re-Trace The Substation Archive as a curatorial and research-led project that reactivates the dispersed archive of The Substation—Singapore's first independent contemporary art space (1990–2021). Presented in 2024 at the Rotunda Library & Archive, OPEN END is situated within the wider context of the archival turn in contemporary art, drawing from theoretical insights by Sara Callahan, Diana Taylor, and Hal Foster, while foregrounding the specific institutional conditions of Singapore's art ecology. Through sonic interventions, textual installations, and performative re-readings by artists Chong Li-Chuan, Urich Lau, and the author, the exhibition approaches the archive not as a closed repository but as an open-ended site of resonance, resistance, and relational knowledge together with artistic production.

The paper argues that The Substation's legacy—like many artist-run initiatives in Southeast Asia—has been subject to partial remembrance and bureaucratic containment, particularly during the era of performance art restriction in Singapore. Recalling the landmark 2001 exhibition Open Ends, which was an exhibition that presented documented performance practices during a period of de facto censorship, this essay positions OPEN END (2024) as a continuation of that curatorial impulse: one that challenges dominant historiographies by activating the marginal, the ephemeral, and the affective. Drawing comparisons with Koh Nguang How's Singapore Art Archive Project, the essay reflects on the potential of counterarchives to reframe institutional memory and proposes curating-as-archival-method as a strategy for ongoing public engagement and historical re-imagination.

Keywords: The Substation, Archival Turn, Performance Art, Singapore Contemporary Art, Curatorial research, Counter-archives, Memory.

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Transforming the Inner Self with Theatre for Learning

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Abstract

This research article presents the experience of using drama knowledge to transform the perspective on life and alter the behavior of male juveniles in the context of a Male Juvenile Observation and Protection Training Center. This is part of a doctoral dissertation on developing a theater program for inner self-learning aimed at enhancing the self-esteem of male juveniles in observation and protection training centers. The content of the article presents experiences in designing drama activities to develop the inner self, delivering methods for using drama activities under the following principles: Drama is an activity that fosters learning to change the internal dimensions of human beings, promoting knowledge, attitudes, understanding, and meaningful behavioral changes through the creation of appropriate learning conditions leads to inner self-change through drama activities. Lessons are presented on the application of drama principles in the learning process, including principles of acting, directing, scriptwriting and analysis, theatre-making, and the use of drama as a tool to understand changes within individuals. The author believes that learning through drama practice will foster a connection to one's own life through emotional experiences. Awareness arises from seeing oneself and others. Learning through drama is like a life journey that helps you define your life and identity through action. This is an examination of what happens to you in a moment, which affects both your conscious and subconscious mind.

Keywords: Inner Self, self-esteem, Theatre Programs

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Balancing Power(s) in a Community-based Artistic Practice and Education

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Abstract

As the significance of community in artistic practice and educational settings continues to be recognized, shifting power dynamics—often shaped by generations of individual-centered approaches—can create contradictions. These tensions have the potential to jeopardize or frustrate community-led initiatives. Without acknowledging and addressing these areas of conflict, community-based artists and educators may struggle to navigate the balance between individual autonomy and the collective, ultrasocial needs of a community. Shared power does not always translate into shared responsibility, and while cultivating a sense of agency in individuals is essential, it doesn't necessarily foster an awareness of others' autonomy. In art academies, community-centered values can clash with institutional agendas, while in artistic projects, these values often confront socio-economic realities. Human culture is not simply a set of material objects, but is 'a collection of movement patterns' (LaMothe, 2015), learned and embodied through social relationships. Thus, the paradigm shift proposed by community-based artistic and educational projects does not automatically dismantle ingrained patterns of social interaction and learning. On the contrary, introducing new patterns, especially ones in conflict with established norms, may result in miscommunication, resistance, and even conflict. In this paper, I will share insights from my MA research project, *Balancing Powers in Somatic-Informed Dance Class: Pedagogy, Environment, and Capitalism*, as well as subsequent experience of developing the interdisciplinary course *Archives of the Future* for undergraduate art and design students. The discussion will highlight areas of tension within community-based projects and offer reflections on how artists and educators can better navigate and facilitate these complex power dynamics.

Keywords: embodied research, critical pedagogy, social somatics

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Algorithmic Interpretations of Epirote Silverwork: Digital Evolution of Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

This paper presents "Algorithmic Interpretations of Epirotic Silverwork," a collaborative digital art project that transforms traditional Greek silversmithing patterns into dynamic computational experiences. Developed through a partnership between the University of Ioannina School of Fine Arts, Tongji University's College of Design and Innovation, and the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation's Silversmithing Museum, the project addresses the critical challenge of preserving and revitalizing endangered craft traditions through digital innovation. Fourteen artists created interactive generative artworks using Processing and p5.js, each offering unique algorithmic translations of traditional motifs. Through embodied interaction design—incorporating hand tracking, face detection, and audio reactivity—these works transform passive viewers into active participants in cultural heritage. The project's impact extends beyond the digital realm through projection mapping installations in Ioannina's historic buildings, creating distributed cultural experiences that engage the broader community. Our findings demonstrate that computational approaches can extend rather than replace traditional craftsmanship, creating new pathways for cultural transmission while maintaining authentic connections to historical practices. This model offers valuable insights for similar heritage preservation initiatives globally, suggesting that the intersection of algorithmic thinking and traditional craft knowledge can generate innovative forms of cultural expression relevant to contemporary digital societies.

Keywords: digital heritage preservation, generative art, computational craft, interactive installation, Epirotic silversmithing, embodied interaction

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Prototyping Principles for Humanizing Technologies: Preliminary Research in Artificial Intelligence and Mixed Reality for Migration Studies

Annie Wan

Abstract

This paper presents the foundational inquiries of the interdisciplinary project Humanizing Technologies: A Survival Toolkit Navigating the Artificial Intelligence Era in Migration Studies, which seeks to address systemic challenges faced by first- and second-generation immigrants through innovative technological solutions. By integrating mixed reality (MR), artificial intelligence (AI), oral histories, and qualitative methodologies, the larger project aims to foster cultural resilience, bridge generational divides, and mitigate barriers such as communication gaps, career inequities, and multifaceted struggles within migrant communities. While this paper documents decision-making processes in early-stage research—such as formulating interview questions aligned with socially engaged design and MR storytelling—this work establishes provisional guidelines for scholars navigating similar interdisciplinary terrains.

Keywords: Mixed reality (MR), artificial intelligence (AI), migrants' history, cultural resilience, inclusive storytelling, research-creation

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Intersubjective methodology for the interaction between traditional and contemporary practices

Dr Nareeporn Vachananda

independent dance artist and researcher

Abstract

This presentation concerns a research methodology utilising 'intersubjectivity' as a principle of practice-as-research where traditional and contemporary artistic practices interact for knowledge generation or innovation. Focusing on the discipline of performing arts, this presentation refers to practitioners-scholars Joanne 'Bob' Whalley and Lee Miller who argue that a research project must be embedded with some form of 'intersubjective exchange'—a bodily and cognitive encounter between performer and watcher—in order to test new knowledge and innovation. This cognitive/bodily approach can bring the collaborators' attention to the actual process of the encounter. This presentation will examine an intersubjective methodology in my PhD practice-led research project *Improvising Time* in collaboration with Butoh-trained solo dancer Janette Hoe, culminating in a dance film *Solo Dialogue* (2021). In a series of shared practice sessions, Janette and I took turns to be performer and watcher. My practice of the repertoires from Noh theatre and improvisation witnessed by Janette catalysed a crucial somatic shift in my perception of temporality while performing. In this presentation, I will argue that, despite the complexity associated with artistic/cultural/philosophical differences, the intersubjective encounter can lead to a process of 'inching' towards the shared objectives of the participants. While this encounter might not yield a concrete knowledge generation or new innovative art form, the framework of intersubjectivity provides a research condition that brings about cognitive, somatic and paradigmatic shifts in the collaborators' experience. In addition, the methodology enhances peer-to-peer interpersonal relationships and enables further intersubjective experience for subsequent creative encounters.

Keywords: artistic encounter, cognitive exchange, inching, intercultural practices, somatic shift

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The Hear Us Through… Collective: A Student-Driven, Community-Based Cacophony

Mike Hansen

Abstract

To create an eco-futuristic community-based art project, PhD student Mike Hansen collaborated with high school art teacher June Sulley, and six of Sulley's students, to form The Hear Us Through… Collective, (HUTC). HUTC collectively developed ideas and constructed visual components to build The Cacophony Project – kinetic sound sculptures depicting a dystopian scenario in which the university's protected Arboretum acreage is rezoned for urban development. Prioritizing the mounting important of such protected areas in the face of climate change, the collective constructed works that are relatively eco-friendly, constructed with found, thrifted, and re-used materials. Ultimately, The Cacophony Project became a vehicle of caring that culminated in an expression of the students' environmental rights. This project allows the students a public art platform to express their own climate change stories through publicly displayed kinetic sound sculptures. The result is a kind of eco-futuristic fable. As H.J. Bickham stresses in *The Fable as Literature*, "a fable gets past the garrison of resident assumptions, the mind's defenses, to bring home its point or raise its questions: it is a tactical manoeuvre to prompt new thinking." (Bickham p. xi) In The Cacophony Project, HUTC presented an acoustemological approach to knowing that expanded the understandings of both the participants, and those who viewed the work. Incorporating an auto-ethnography methodology, by developing a Practiced Based Research (PBR) based on R. Lyle Skain's 2018 paper *Creative Practice in Research* model. The research is built on a process of documenting the process of the art works' developmental stages, as well as close scrutiny of my past works, through capturing the development of the sculptures through video recording, and interviews of the participants. Some of this material was included in a documentary video that chronicles and archives the project. These sculptures are a reflection of the reality these students are experiencing in the face of a provincial government bent on destruction of preserved areas in their home city.

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Breathe Kritisk: Ambiguous control to materialise entangled agency between human, body and technology

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Abstract

This paper presents *Breathe Kritisk,* an inflatable installation that explores the negotiation for control among clinical practitioners, clinical apparatus, and patients in medical settings. The installation aims to materialize the patient's experience of uncanniness and entanglement in agency at the encounter with biomedical technologies. It seeks to provoke visitor reflection on their personal experience and discussion among critical medical humanities and human-computer interaction (HCI) communities.

This article presents my process of creating a functional prototype that manifests a tangible experience of entangled control with an artificial self. The installation results from my practice-led research, which applies contesting control — a technique of estrangement in interaction design. The piece focuses on creating ambiguous control by switching between giving users control and giving it away to machines and internal organs that users do not have complete control over. Through interaction tests, I observed that this installation aesthetically constructed a poetic interaction, where users could not tell apart when they were in control of the inflatables and when they were not. Within this liminal territory, ambiguous control produces a never-ending grappling for control. Lastly, I reflected on ambiguous control as a framework for reflection and materialization entangled agency for practitioners working closely with tangible, participatory experiences.

Keywords: Interactive installation, Poetic interaction, Contesting control, Ambiguous control

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A Hermeneutic of Collaboration: Curating Community-Engaged Work in UNESCO's Creative City of Design

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Abstract

In 2019, UNESCO officially designates Cebu City as "Creative City of Design." With such designation comes the restructuring of city spaces which results in the displacement of dwellers from strategic metropolitan areas. One example of such displacement-inducing restructuring of space is the privatization of Carbon Public Market. But whereas local designers and artists opposed certain restructuring in 2013, they now collaborate with the local government in a corporate-led "modernization" project. The wavering disposition of artists and designers in Cebu shows that, per Michel Foucault, urban architecture functions to magnify the regulative dimension of power. It also demonstrates that civil society can work to undermine the promise for an inclusive community of co-makers; that urban design can serve social surveillance and control. This artist-led research offers a hermeneutic of collaboration. It examines the tensions between the "spatial practices" of creative experts and the marginalized by reflecting on community-engaged curatorial work in Cebu. This hermeneutic gesture is a counterpoint to the Foucauldian account of space in that, instead of reinforcing the panoptic reading of built spaces, it looks into the improvisatory tactics of dwellers which lend new possibilities of communitarian engagements that could contest the panoptic, albeit collaborative, instantiation of power.

Keywords: community-engaged art, urban architecture, spatial practice, civil society

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Writing A Coping With Social Bullying: Creating Performance Art From Narratives Of Personal Experience

Jutaphit Usaha

Abstract

This research constitutes an artistic inquiry that integrates interdisciplinary approaches between live performance art and theatrical arts. Its primary objective is to create a piece of live performance art through a multi-modal artistic approach while incorporating theatrical techniques such as storytelling and acting. These methods serve as tools to present performance art derived from personal narratives and memories. The central themes conveyed include reflecting on past experiences, understanding and reconciling with the past, healing, and recognizing the role of the "family unit" as a crucial element in establishing a safe space that enables individuals to navigate through difficult times.

The researcher anticipates that this live performance art—rooted in the principles of storytelling and theatrical expression—will effectively communicate and cultivate an experiential awareness in the audience, equipping them with strategies to cope with the distressing experiences of social bullying. The performance aims to inspire audiences while fostering social awareness, ultimately encouraging individuals to transcend their emotional suffering both in the present and future.

Keywords: Artistic Research, Interdisciplinary Integration, Performance Art, Theatrical Arts, Coping with Social Bullying.

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From Manifesto to Method: Artistic Research, Community Voice, and the Reimagining of Energy Transitions

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Abstract

This paper presents the PED Manifesto as a methodological and artistic intervention into energy transition discourse, emphasizing participatory, co-creative, and arts-based research practices to formulate social consent between stakeholders and citizens. Rooted in standpoint epistemology and informed by extensive fieldwork with Renewable Energy Communities (RECs) across Europe, the Manifesto emerges as both a process and a living document designed to aid in *democratizing energy governance*. Through collaborative workshops, artistic outputs (including films, games, and exhibitions), and iterative community engagement, the project repositions energy not merely as a technical issue but as a socially embedded and culturally meaningful practice. The research integrates creative methodologies to amplify citizen voices, challenge hierarchical structures in planning, and build tools for dialogue, inclusion, and local empowerment. Central to the Manifesto are five core demands and ten actionable recommendations aimed at fostering transparency, holistic integration, and place-based solutions in Positive Energy Districts (PEDs). This work demonstrates how artistic research, and co-creation can expand the epistemological scope of sustainability transitions. While the approach aims to present a participatory model for equitable and culturally responsive energy futures, these claims should be viewed as being exploratory in nature, requiring further validation. The proposed framework offers promising pathways toward inclusive energy governance, though its broader applicability and long-term impacts remain areas for future research.

Keywords: Energy Communities, Artistic Research, Community Engagement, Energy Justice, Participatory Governance, Co-creation

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Music, Dance, and Transformation: Funeral Rituals of Marma Buddhist Monks in Bangladesh

JANNATUL FERDOUS

Abstract

The indigenous Marma community of Bangladesh has a distinctive dance and music tradition that is intricately connected with Buddhist ceremonies. Among these, the Soi dance, Sying (drumming), and Eying (cymbal playing) are essential components of the funeral rites of prominent Buddhist monks. Unlike quiet Theravāda Buddhist funerals, the Marma funerary customs incorporate ceremonial dances and intricate musical performances, which serve as social acts of reverence and spiritual expressions. The funeral of a Marma Buddhist monk is a large-scale gathering where community members, dressed in traditional Marma attire, come together in tribute. The Soi dance, which is exclusively performed at funerals, reflects Buddhist philosophical teachings on impermanence and transition. Monks from across the Chittagong Hill Tracts, lay practitioners, and cultural organizations participate in the event. The rhythmic beats of the Sying drums and Eying cymbals accompany processions, while artistic structures and symbolic gestures—such as rocket fireworks launched toward the mortuary shrine—honour the deceased. In recent times, funeral programs have evolved, incorporating modern sound systems and fusion elements that reshape the sonic and performative aspects of rituals. By analysing the 2025 funeral of Venerable Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera, the Seventh Saṅgharāj of Bandarban, Bangladesh, this study explores the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity. The paper examines the relationship between Marma practices and conventional modifications of Theravāda rituals, placing them in the larger Buddhist traditions of Southeast Asia, which is where the majority of Marma monks receive their religious training. Through participant observations, oral histories, and textual sources, it investigates how Marma funerary dance and music maintain cultural identity while embracing modern influences.

Key words: Cultural adaptation, Funeral music and dance, Marma Buddhist ceremonies, Monastic traditions, Ritual performance.

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Watching the Photograph

Adjani Guerrero Arumpac

Abstract

This essay proposes critical information literacy (CIL) to counter disinformation. The methodology endeavors to complement the dominant paradigm of fact-checking in media literacy efforts while arguing for a broader understanding of information production and circulation within historical and political contexts. The main method in CIL is watching the photograph, defined by Ariella Azoulay as the "repeated observation of a photograph", through which the study traces and analyzes the virality of Raffy Lerma's 2016 photograph Pieta—a powerful image depicting the atrocities of the Philippine drug war. Building on archival and documentary principles, the interdisciplinary study reveals how the sustained visibility of Pieta was driven by activist engagement rather than algorithmic amplification alone, underscoring the necessity of proactive, critical engagement with networked digital media to challenge authoritarian disinformation and uphold historical truth. Ultimately, watching the photograph is framed as a method of care, resistance, and political intervention.

Keywords: critical information literacy, documentary, disinformation

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The Presentation and Dissemination of Shanxi Merchant Culture through Dance in "See Pingyao Again"

Yijing Xue , Chutima Maneewattana

Abstract

"See Pingyao Again" is a large-scale immersive situational experience drama that takes Shanxi merchant culture as its background and integrates dance, music, and visual arts to recreate the spirit of Shanxi merchants in the Qing Dynasty of China. This paper focuses on this drama and explores the role of dance in the presentation and dissemination of Shanxi merchant culture, analyzing how it presents the values of integrity and righteousness, as well as the sense of family and country of Shanxi merchants through dance segments, body language, costumes, props, and spatial interaction. In addition, the study also combines the characteristics of immersive performances and, through on-site observation and interviews, analyzes how audiences accept and understand Shanxi merchant culture under the free-wandering viewing mode. This research focuses on the practical significance of dance in the integration of culture and tourism and the revival of local culture, and explores its cultural dissemination value, providing a new perspective for modern cultural communication and inheritance.

Key words: Shanxi Merchant Culture, See Pingyao Again, immersive drama, cultural dissemination

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Sustainability in Ceramics: Exploring Waste Utilization and Community Engagement through Baravia Pottery and Workshop

Dyah Retno Fitriani

Abstract

The awareness of sustainable practices in the field of ceramics has grown significantly over the last decade, evidenced by a rising number of ceramic practitioners and institutions exploring material reuse and environmental responsibility. This study continues the author's previous research on ceramic waste reuse, including clay waste, glaze overspray, and glasswool insulation from kilns. The research integrates material experimentation and participatory design through the establishment of *Baravia Pottery and Workshop* in Yogyakarta. The studio functions not only as a production space but also as a pedagogical platform for sustainability-based ceramic practices, offering workshops and training modules to students and the broader community. Methodologically, the research follows a seven-stage approach combining experimental techniques and community engagement. The goal is to produce a replicable and inclusive model of sustainability in ceramics that supports environmental, educational, and economic dimensions. While results emphasize circular material use and collaborative learning, the study acknowledges the need for further quantification and long-term impact evaluation.

Keywords: sustainability, ceramic industry, waste utilization, material experimentation, community education

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Dynamic writing of "boat living" culture: a study on dance in Tanka wedding culture in Beihai, Guangxi

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Abstract

This study focuses on the dance in the Tanka wedding of Beihai, Guangxi, exploring its symbolic significance and social functions as a dynamic medium for "boat-dwelling" culture. Through field investigations, video documentation, and analysis of dance movements, the research finds that the Tanka wedding dance, through body language, ritual structure, and spatial fluidity, reenacts the identity and cultural memory of the water-dwelling community. The dance movements center around "wave-like" trajectories and simulated rowing motions, metaphorically representing the symbiotic relationship between the Tanka people and the sea; the dynamic performance of the wedding ceremony, through the transition from "boat to shore," reinforces the dual nature of ethnic boundaries and social integration. This study provides theoretical references for the protection of intangible cultural heritage and the study of maritime ethnic cultures.

Keyword : Tanka wedding; dance research; boat living culture; dynamic writing

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Siamo-Portuguese Dance: From Thai Communities to Innovative Economic Development

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Abstract

This creative research, "Siamo-Portuguese Dance: From Thai Communities to Innovative Economic Development," explored the cultural capital of Thai communities through Portuguese dance. Its objectives were to study this cultural capital, foster community participation in establishing creative communities using the dance, and develop it as a teaching medium for Thai school dance curricula. Applying the theory of artistic creation based on creative diversity, the study analyzed creative works across five aspects: their connection to people's way of life, nature, environment, and cultural processes; the influence of internal variables like belief and faith; the impact of external factors such as globalization, science, technology, and innovation; the capacity for learning, knowledge accumulation, transmission, and development; and the value derived from recipients' knowledge and artistic experience. The findings demonstrate how Siamo-Portuguese Dance can transform Thai community cultural capital into an educational medium and inspire community engagement to become a creative community.

Keywords: Siamo-Portuguese Dance, Creative Community, Creative Dance, Kudichin Community

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Piano as Material *Body*: Reconsidering Instrumental Representation in Contemporaneity

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Abstract

This article explores the transformation of the piano from a functional musical instrument into a hybrid, conceptually charged body within contemporary artistic practices. Traditionally associated with technical mastery, concert tradition, and cultural prestige, the piano in these contexts loses its conventional functionality and becomes a site for expanded meaning-making. Through the analysis of three artistic cases – Ross Bolleter's *Ruined Piano Sanctuary*, the author's own performances *Compost* and *Concerto and Installation for Piano and a Piece of Furniture* – the article investigates how altered, deconstructed, or contextually displaced instruments may affect the role of the performer and the structure of performative interaction. The analysis draws on Bruno Latour's actor-network theory and Jane Bennett's vital materialism, seeking to highlight how the material state of the instrument generates performative potentials beyond sound production. These perspectives suggest that the instrument can be understood as an active agent whose altered materiality encourages alternative strategies of sensitivity, adaptability, and embodied intersubjectivity. The piano ceases to be a neutral medium and instead emerges as a participant in a distributed network of meaning. The article proposes that the transformation of the instrument's status can contribute to a shift in the performer's identity and in the aesthetic and ethical value systems that shape musical experience.

Keywords: piano representation, new materialism, performance practice, interdisciplinary, ethics

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Act Your Own Story: Enhancing Creative Skills for the Local Community to Develop Soft Power for the Nation

Dangkamon Na Pombejra[1], Panuwat Intawat[2], Narit Pachoey[3], Piangdao Chariyaphan[4], Kuntara Chaichan[5], Chanat Phongpanich[6], Tharin Parinyakhanit[7], Chakorn Chamaai[8]

Abstract

In order to enhance creative skills in theater for a total of 103 participants from all four regions of the country in the project "Developing Innovators through Theatre Practice and Local-Contemporary Knowledge for Diversifying and Enriching Creative Thailand", who varied greatly in terms of age, profession, theatrical experience, life experience, and goals for attending the training, enabling them to create works that reflect issues they believe are important to their society and community, the first author, as a researcher, found that in addition to training the hard skills related to the creation of theatrical works, such as acting, scriptwriting, directing, and presenting performances, the group of instructors also needs to guide the use of soft skills in collaborating creative work with others for the trainees. The researcher learned that the most appropriate method is to use a "soft power" approach.

Keywords: The Development of Creative Skills, Teaching Scriptwriting, Acting, and Directing, Theater "Hard" Skills, Soft Skills, Soft Power.

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The KalAvantulu Body and Repertoire as Signifiers of Resilience

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Abstract

This paper investigates the embodied knowledge, historical erasure, and aesthetic resilience of the KalAvantulu women—hereditary performers from coastal Andhra Pradesh—through an ethnographic and autoethnographic lens. Using oral history as a foundational methodology, the research uncovers how the repertoire of the KalAvantulu, particularly through compositions like the padam, varnam, jAvali, and swarapallavi, functions as an archive of marginalized histories. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks from performance studies and feminist historiography, including the works of Diana Taylor, Susan Foster, and Uma Chakravarti, the study foregrounds the KalAvantulu dancing body as both a site of resistance and a medium of cultural memory. The repertoire is analyzed not merely as artistic expression but as an assertion of agency against colonial, nationalist, and patriarchal redefinitions of Indian classical dance. Through the author's embodied engagement with the repertoire and intergenerational knowledge, the paper presents a critical reclamation of a performance tradition that continues to challenge systemic erasure and re-inscribe matrilineal memory.

Keywords: KalAvantulu, embodied memory, devadasi repertoire, feminist historiography, performance studies

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On ‘R’ - intermediate ‘R’ and the collective as a unit

Erika Matsunami

Abstract

Wittgenstein's "Ethics and Aesthetics are one" is the starting point of this research. "In the Notebooks, Wittgenstein states that 'the world and life are one', so perhaps the following can be said. Just as the aesthetic object is the single thing seen as if it were a whole world, so the ethical object, or life, is the multiplicity of the world seen as a single object". (Diané Collinson, The British Journal of Aesthetics, Volume 25, Issue 3, SUMMER 1985, pages 266-272)

Art transcends boundaries of race, nationality and gender. It is a creative act of unifying in the context of humanity, from the subject to the various topics, by asking questions. This point is the lack of "reality" (dealing with reality) from a sociological perspective. But it is impossible to define humanity and reality based on sociological statistics alone–is my perspective of Wittgenstein's "Ethics and Aesthetics are one". Thereby, I examine 'world and life' from the 21st century perspective.

In current artistic research Metamorphosis - Ethics and Aesthetics are One - from a Neuroscientific Perspective II (2025), I am exploring two types of communication "near and far", on-site community and long-distance community. Here, I refer not to community, which is a social function, but to methodologically about the intermediate 'R' between social and meta-knowledge and its notion of the collective as a unit. - on ‘R’

Thus, I challenge myself to deal with Mental Imaginary (Bence Nanay, 2023,OUP) Ch. III. Multimodal Perception and IV. Cognition in the context of a Neuroscientific Perspective.

Keywords: transversality; interface (interact); post-conceptual; assemblage; spatiality; randomness;

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Beyond Orientalism: Islamic Social Justice as a Transnational Curatorial Praxis

Samah Ayesha

Abstract

This paper examines how Islamic social justice operates as a decolonial and transnational curatorial method to actively fight against the systemic marginalisation of artists. Taking the case study of My Name, Not Yours (MNNY) as a curated publication featuring Muslim artists from the UK, India and Kashmir demonstrates how Islamic core values can transform a field controlled by Eurocentric perspectives. This research questions the dominant orientalist epistemological violence present in curatorial practice historically and in contemporary times. It argues that a praxis formed with a theological perspective can create space for resistance, identity formation, and cross-border solidarities, thereby also increasing the accessibility of marginalised communities.

Keywords: Justice, Theology, Transnational, Curation, Islamic, Contemporary Art

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An Artistic Approach To Intangible Heritage Documentation In Vietnam: Xoan Singing

Nguyen Ngoc Quy

Abstract

This research explores generative art as a method for preserving Vietnam's intangible cultural heritage, specifically focusing on Xoan singing, a traditional practice combining ritual singing and dancing with significant communal value. Traditional archival approaches such as static video and audio recordings often fail to capture the dynamic and embodied nature of these cultural practices. Adopting a practice-led research methodology, this study investigated how generative art systems can document and interpret the intangible aspects of Xoan singing. Through artistic experiments, sound, dance movements, and ritual objects related to Xoan singing were transformed into dynamic, real-time visuals, emphasising the interplay between cultural symbolism and digital aesthetics. Instead of creating fixed archives, the project developed practical workflows that position generative art as a creative tool for cultural preservation. This thesis includes an analysis of case studies and experimental outcomes, illustrating how generative systems visually represent symbolic elements, such as repetition, cyclical patterns, and embedded ritual symbolism. It also explores broader implications, providing new methodologies for artists and cultural researchers and interactive educational tools for younger audiences. By prioritising artistic innovation over static preservation, this research contributes to discussions on the role of contemporary art in cultural heritage. This demonstrates how generative art can effectively bridge traditional expressions with digital practices, ensuring that intangible heritage such as Xoan singing remains accessible and relevant for future generations.

Keywords: Intangible heritage, Generative arts, heritage safeguarding

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Conception of SYS: The Smell Of A Mysterious Being

JEANETTE MUELLER

Abstract

This presentation explores the conceptual design process behind *SYS: The Smell of a Mysterious Being*, an arts-based research project within the broader framework of *Sensing Living Systems*. The work investigates how olfactory experiences can be reimagined as a medium for interspecies connection, sensorial imagination, and artistic inquiry. Departing from traditional visual-centric approaches, the project emphasizes smell as a powerful yet underexplored channel through which human beings can sense and relate to the living environment.

The design process integrates philosophical reflection, sensory experimentation, and spatial composition. Inspired by ecological thinking and post-humanist discourse, the project conceptualizes "SYS" as an ambiguous lifeform that exists through its scent rather than visual form. This approach challenges anthropocentric perspectives and encourages participants to engage with unfamiliar modes of perception. Through iterative prototyping and participatory encounters, the installation invites audiences to navigate a performative space where smell triggers emotional memory, curiosity, and a sense of presence.

By foregrounding olfaction as a central design element, *SYS* opens a dialogue between artistic practice, sensory research, and ecological awareness. The project not only proposes new ways of experiencing art beyond the visual but also reflects on how design can foster more intimate relationships between humans and other living systems. This presentation highlights the theoretical foundations, creative strategies, and experiential outcomes that shaped the work, offering insights into art as a mode of speculative sensing and environmental imagination.

Keywords : arts-based research, systems awareness, GST, senses, sense-ability, smell, multisensory scenography, democracy, voting processes, communities, present-oriented systems awareness, future-oriented collective intelligence, sustainability

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Management of Contemporary Folk Theatre Production: A Collaborative Theatre Production Between Community Members and Outsiders; Case Study: The Red Ship Warrior at the Eng Kor Festival 2025

Phanat Nikhom[1], Chonburi Province[2]

Abstract

The management of the contemporary folk theatre production The Red Ship Warrior is a practice-based research project. The objective of this study is to explore the methods and strategies used in managing a community theatre performance. This theatre project, The Red Ship Warrior, was a collaboration between people from inside and outside the community. We used this performance—which was part of the Eng Kor Festival 2025 in Phanat Nikhom, Chonburi—as a case study to explore how community theatre can be creatively managed. As the researcher also served as the production manager and is an outsider to the community, the research question was formed: How can we creatively develop and manage this theatre production in a way that truly reflects the community's stories and fosters a sense of pride among local people? The findings of this research revealed several key strategies used by the researcher in managing the production, as follows:
(1) redefining the role of the manager as a facilitator, (2) creating inclusive spaces for learning and co-creation, (3) managing resources with a focus on local capacity-building, (4) maintaining clear communication to foster unity, (5) budgeting with sustainability and community benefit in mind, and (6) shaping a shared artistic identity rooted in local voices.
These strategies highlight practical approaches for artists and cultural workers seeking to engage meaningfully with communities through theatre. The researcher hopes that this study will contribute to their own professional development by offering insights and experiences gained through the process. More importantly, it aims to identify effective approaches for managing community-based theatre productions that are co-created by both local and external collaborators. At the heart of this collaboration is a shared commitment to using theatre as a tool for personal and community development—empowering local participants and enhancing the long-term capacity for creative expression within the community

Keywords: Olfactory design; Artistic research; Sensory experience; Conceptual art; Ecological thinking

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Fusion of Tradition and Modernity: A case study of"Only Dream of Red Mansions"

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Abstract:

This study investigates the innovative integration of traditional culture and modern art from Dream of Red Mansions,Focusing on the modern art project Only Dream of Red Mansions, the research examines how traditional cultural elements can be creatively transformed and developed in contemporary artistic practices. This paper takes "There Is and There Is Not", "The Impermanence" and "Reader's Theater" as examples,as a case study, The multi-dimensional approach of the project is analyzed, including thematic interpretation, spatial design, technology application and immersive experience. The findings reveal that the fusion of traditional culture and modern art not only generates significant artistic vitality but also provides a model for fostering creative communities. By bridging historical heritage and modern expression, this research highlights the potential of artistic research to enrich community life, promote cultural sustainability, and inspire social innovation. The study contributes to the broader discourse on the role of artistic research in (re)generating thriving and sustainable communities, particularly within the Asia Pacific context.

Keywords: Fusion of Tradition and Modernity, Creative Communities,Dream of Red Mansions

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Becomebecome, a Transdisciplinary Methodology for Art Education/Incubation and Community Building based on Somatic Awareness, Somatic Intuition, and Somatic Psychology.

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Abstract

This article outlines a transdisciplinary framework and methodology for integrating somatic, intuitive, and psychological techniques into the creative process. It introduces a transpersonal and transcultural approach to art education and incubation that can be used to expand the agency of all the actors involved in the creation of artwork including the participants designated as authors/artists, the people who help the artists, the public, and other social entities. Furthermore, the Becomebecome method is presented as an example of how to combine cognitive science with embodied practices to unlock subconscious layers of the creative mind and generate new ideas. The techniques used to access this enhanced space for creativity also nurture wellbeing and empathy, foster collaboration and group-dynamics, and lower social and cultural barriers.

Keywords: Transdisciplinary, Art, Education, Somatics, Cybernetics, Subconscious

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Waves of movement through suspension Then Release

Ameena Aljerman Alali

Abstract

Since the documented history was and still is viewed mainly as autonomous, this essay attempts to challenge history's formal, disciplined approach with a narrative from the history of enslaved people rather than viewing slavery as an isolated event. The Indian Ocean slavery has not been documented as much as Atlantic slavery history, which led to a gap within the history of the Persian/Arabian Gulf countries. Moreover, the essay examines explicitly my family history as an artist, and the interest in documenting such history was to find ways to relate to and understand the afterlife of slavery. I raise questions regarding the reflection on the remembrance and presentation of enslaved people's history as part of the amendment process and as an attempt to fill the gaps in understanding history and the socio-political positioning of Afro-Emiratis. The essay unfolds with its suspension then release, in three main narratives titled: Fairuz, Dalma, and Zar, which took place in the last century. The methodology is mainly focused on weaving narratives, events, and heritage of Afro-Emiratis into a stepping stone to document further and present an unspoken history.

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Getting there ↔ Getting Lost: Sharing Stories Where Traveler Myths Meet Tourist Realities

Jesse Todd

Abstract

This artistic research project, conducted in Phuket, Thailand, investigates the potential of magical realist storytelling to disrupt conventional tourism practices, encouraging tourists to practice intimate and self-actualizing encounters. In a region dominated by mass tourism and commercialism, the project questions traditional touring approaches by inviting tourists to reflect on their travel choices and reconsider their relationships with public spaces. Through active touring, creative writing, and speculative storytelling, the project encourages tourists to engage in playful, imaginative encounters with their surroundings, using magical realism as a tool for personal and collective transformation. The project employs storytelling postcards as a writing tool to facilitate these encounters. Postcards become vessels for fragmented, magical realist narratives that blend the familiar with the unexpected, encouraging participants to connect deeply with their environment and creatively explore the spaces they inhabit. These postcards serve as both physical objects and narrative devices, blurring the lines between personal mementos, storytelling tools, and magical realities. Through writing experiments in public spaces, participants are prompted to "get lost" and craft stories that challenge conventional tourist experiences and foster a deeper connection to both the place and self. Drawing inspiration from Michel de Certeau's notion of a 'critical tourist', this research aims to transform touristic locations into spaces for active engagement and sharing, through the creative practices of touring, writing and storytelling. By blending art and tourism, the project fosters new ways of thinking about travel, cultural exchange, and the role of storytelling in shaping sustainable, engaging, and reflective travel practices.

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Stage of Self: Empowering First-Year Students through Theatre-Based Self-Discovery

Ubonwan Moonkanta

Bangkok University, Thailand

Abstract

This study examines the "Performing Arts for Self-Discovery" (PFA 108) course at Bangkok University, investigating how a seven-week intensive program uses theatre practice to help first-year students discover their identity, build empathy, and clarify their goals. The course combines acting techniques with contemporary digital media creation, reflecting the hybrid nature of modern performance and communication. Through action research methodology across multiple cohorts (2018-present), this study documents the transformative effects of experiential theatre pedagogy on student development. Data collection included facilitator field notes, student reflective journals, and focus group discussions. Results indicate three consistent outcomes: heightened self-awareness, strengthened empathy and trust, and enhanced sense of direction, with over 80% of participants reporting greater clarity about academic and career goals. The findings suggest that integrating creative, reflective theatre processes into early university curricula can accelerate students' psychosocial development and enhance their readiness for both artistic and non-artistic pursuits.

Keywords: theatre pedagogy, self-discovery, experiential learning, first-year students, identity formation, empathy development

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Embodied and Visual Narratives: Kinaesthetic and Photographic Practices for Reimagining Community

Izabelle Louise Monteiro Penha

Abstract

This joint presentation explores how kinaesthetic and photographic practices operate as non-hierarchical, community-driven methodologies that challenge conventional pedagogical and artistic structures. Through movement and visual storytelling, we consider how embodied and photographic practices foster agency, collective creation, and alternative epistemologies across cultural contexts.The first part, *The Art of Non-Directive Facilitation*, investigates how kinaesthetic suggestion supports inclusive movement practices. Using a practice-as-research approach, it explores how individuals – particularly those without formal dance experience – develop self-knowledge through non-instructive movement. Drawing parallels with Pichet Klunchun's blend of Thai classical and contemporary dance, this study frames movement as a tool for community resilience and creative reimagination beyond didactic norms. The second part, *Reimagining Community through Photography: Yuki Kihara's Collective Artistic Practices*, examines photography in the Asia-Pacific as both aesthetic and political resistance. Focused on Yuki Kihara's *Paradise Camp* (2021), it explores how recontextualizing colonial imagery centers Fa'afafine identity and queer Indigenous agency. Informed by theories of Indigenous Methodologies, Shared Creation and cosmotechnics, the work challenges dominant visual regimes and power structures. Together, these case studies highlight how embodied and visual methodologies can catalyze social innovation and cultural sustainability. They demonstrate how artistic research can build resilient communities, elevate lived experience, and offer transdisciplinary tools for imagining equitable and fairer futures. Through this lens, art becomes a powerful space for alternative ways of knowing, being, and creating in community.

Keywords: Pedagogical-Artistic, Methodologies; Collectiveness; Kinaesthetic Experience; Indigenous Methodologies; Shared Creation.

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Peripheral Flows: Creative film practice as a medium to reveal the intangible heritage of motion in Ho Chi Minh City.

Andrew Stiff

RMIT University Vietnam

Abstract

This paper presents initial findings of a research project that documents peripheral flow from a mototrbike, revealing the relations between the pavement, event and movement within Ho Chi Minh City. This research argues that peripheral vision constitutes a form of ephemeral and intangible urban heritage that is often overlooked yet crucial to understanding the lived experience of the city. By using mobile recording technologies, a series of motorbike journeys have been documented, shifting the focus away from the direct path ahead and instead emphasizing the peripheral view. This approach captures the spatial interconnectedness between the passenger and the city, highlighting the layers of urban life that are typically unnoticed in the fast-paced, motorbike-dominated streetscape. The project challenges conventional ways of framing urban experience by embracing movement, transience, and the fragmented perspectives that define everyday mobility in Ho Chi Minh City. Through this method, the research not only offers new insights into how the city is navigated and perceived through the 'zoning' of the urban streescape, but also asserts the importance of recognizing and preserving ephemeral urban heritage. This investigation contributes to broader discussions on urban cultural memory and the role of creative moving-image practices in documenting and interpreting city life, as knowledge artefacts that can inform a more inclusive urban governance.

Keywords: Motorbike, Peripheral Vision, Digital Video, Streetscape

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Exploring the Impact of Michael Chekhov's Acting Methods on Character Development in The Proposal

Sahatsawat Chotkhan

Abstract

This autoethnographic study explores the application of Michael Chekhov's acting techniques in developing the actor's performance skills through the rehearsal process of the character "Lomov" from Anton Chekhov's *The Proposal*. As a farce requiring emotional complexity and intricate timing, the play challenged the actor to access deep inner states. Through systematic experimentation, three specific exercises were identified as most effective: Staccato-Legato, Qualities of Movement, and Psychological Gesture. These techniques appeared to facilitate a more profound connection to the character's inner world, enabling fuller expression of emotions and dramatic energy. The research process revealed that Michael Chekhov's techniques can serve as valuable tools for character development, particularly in creating and maintaining complex, emotionally nuanced characters.

Keywords: Belief in character, Concentration, Autoethnography, Actor training

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From Projecting to Radiating: Reimagine Energy in Solo Acting

Marian Poom-on

Abstract

This article reflects on a discovery that emerged during the rehearsal and live performance of *Grounded* by George Brant, approached through the author's own experience as a solo performer. The initial aim was to cultivate a state of psychophysical readiness by integrating Qigong with the psychophysical techniques of Michael Chekhov and Rudolf von Laban, seeking to harmonize body and mind so that neither would lead nor lag. During the performance process, an unexpected question arose: must a solo actor always project energy outward, or can energy also radiate naturally without force? The longstanding principle of "sending energy to the back row" was reconsidered when the author noticed that pushing energy outward sometimes felt less effective than staying present and allowing energy to expand from within. A turning point came during stage rehearsals when director Jarunun Phantachat introduced the distinction between projecting and radiating energy, prompting exploration of a quieter, more grounded mode of presence. In the author's experience, Qigong supported energy flow through breath and internal stillness, while Chekhov's and Laban's methods offered ways to explore force and spatial dynamics. This reflective account suggests that "still but alive" energy may, in certain contexts, resonate more than "pushed but dry" intensity. Rather than presenting generalizable conclusions, the article positions itself as an autoethnographic reflection, offering a perspective on how radiating rather than projecting might provide an integrated and sustainable way of engaging body, mind, space, and audience, inviting deeper connection and recognition across distance and silence.

Keywords: performance energy, solo performance, psychophysical acting, Qigong, radiating presence

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The Architect of Chaos: Physical Actor Training in Farce Through Mask Techniques for Bernard in *Boeing-Boeing* by Marc Camoletti

Rusharnon Whongkomonl

Abstract

This research explores the application of masks in the training of actors within farcical performances, specifically examining the character of Bernard in Marc Camoletti's *Boeing-Boeing*. The study addresses the blend of specific physical training associated with masks Neutral Mask, Character Mask, and Commedia dell'Arte within the context of theatrical farce performance to hone the actor's precision and comedic timing. The approach to the research integrates practical mask techniques with rehearsal within the framework of Jacques Lecoq's mask techniques as a basis for theoretical analysis. As a researcher, I designed targeted mask training sessions to overcome challenges I personally faced in physical expression and comedic timing. Neutral masks provided barebones physical presence awareness while eliminating personal quirks. Character masks allowed thorough engagement with Bernard's traits, enabling him to respond and react in an exaggerated manner. Commedia dell'Arte masks of Arlecchino, Zanni, and Il Capitano specifically refined comedic timing and broad movement necessary for farce. The scope of data gathering encompassed self-assessments through in-depth reflections and analyses of one's own videos, external evaluation from 342 audiences over three public performances, and focus group interviews with six creative collaborators and one expert in mask techniques. The results indicate significant advancements in physical control and mobility, resulting in enhanced range of motion, agility, and fluidity. Independent evaluations corroborated these findings, with 57.9% of the audience recognizing natural movement and bodily control, and 66.7% acknowledging effective comedic timing. These insights indicate that mask training equips actors with heightened skills in physical mime, thus improving their ability to embody a character, especially those that require rapid emotional transitions and precise physical comedy. This research helps to fill the gap in the literature regarding the application of traditional mask techniques to contemporary actor training, especially for challenging comedic performances.

Keywords: Mask techniques, Farce Performance, Neutral Mask, Character Mask, Commedia dell'Arte, Actor Training

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Nurturing Third Places: Konstlek på Råby as Artistic Research and Practice for Resilient Creative Communities

Simon Lindblom[1], Wichanan Glunrawd[2]

Abstract

This paper showcases Konstlek på Råby, a decade-long community art space in Västerås, Sweden, as a case study in practitioner-led artistic exploration where ethics are integral from the start, not an afterthought. Portrayed and analysed through the co-developed Moral Aesthetic Action (MAA) framework—which embeds ethical imperatives at the heart of creative intervention—our Art in Action Research (AiAR) explores how Konstlek cultivates a liberatory 'third place' (Oldenburg, 1999). We articulate the 'Råbymodel,' a practice-derived approach revealing how core MAA principles—including morally driven disruption, fostering creative indeterminacy (Klinger, 2024), robust practitioner support, and principled 'ethical refusal'—are vital for building youth empowerment and community resilience. This research offers transferable, actionable insights for deeply embedding ethics within community art practice and generating impactful, practitioner-led knowledge.

Keywords: Moral Aesthetic Action (MAA), Råbymodel, Action Research (AR), Community Art, Aesthetic Action (AA), Third Place Theory

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Embodied Cartography and Community Resilience in the Context of the West Philippine Sea

Annelys De Vet[1], Josephine Turalba[2], Lyn Viado[3]

Abstract

Project PANATAG is an arts-based research initiative that explores how artistic practice fosters community, amplifies the voices of marginalized individuals, and reclaims agency in politically sensitive maritime spaces. This article stems from the broader development of the Subjective Atlas of the Philippines, a multi-sited mapping project initiated by the Artistic Research Center (ARC) of the Philippine Women's University in collaboration with Subjective Editions. While the larger mapping trajectory encompasses multiple sites across Luzon and the Visayas—including engagements at Casa San Miguel (CSM)—this article focuses specifically on one of the workshops, namely the Masinloc fisherfolk workshop in Zambales. This singular field site offers urgent insights into community resilience, territorial memory, and artistic co-creation within the context of the West Philippine Sea.

The name Panatag, meaning "calm" or "tranquil" in Filipino, holds both emotional and historical resonance for Filipino fisherfolk. Scarborough Shoal—locally known as Bajo de Masinloc or Panatag Shoal—has long served as a natural refuge for small-scale fishing boats. The shoal's natural formation, with its lagoon surrounded by reefs, has historically offered calm and safe shelter during stormy weather, which is the basis for its local name 'Panatag' (Lopez, 2024). Its calm lagoon and protective reefs once offered shelter during storms, hence its name. However, this sense of refuge has been disrupted by intensifying geopolitical conflict in recent years.

The continuing struggle for sovereignty over the West Philippine Sea, particularly around Panatag Shoal, has heightened the vulnerability of coastal communities. The region has become a geopolitical flashpoint in the broader Indo-Pacific, marked by increased maritime patrols, territorial assertions, and the presence of foreign coast guards that directly impact the daily lives of fisherfolk. Scarborough Shoal (under the names Pulo ng Panatag and Bajo de Masinloc), located approximately 220 kilometers (140 miles) west of the Philippine mainland, is claimed by the Philippine government as part of Masinloc's municipal jurisdiction. An estimated one-third of global trade passes through these waters, making it a vital commercial and strategic corridor (UNCTAD, 2023; Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, 2023). As a result, major powers such as the United States, the European Union, Australia, and China have heightened their visibility in the area, whether through naval presence, diplomatic positions, or infrastructure investment, further intensifying the pressure experienced by local communities. Livelihoods are increasingly threatened by militarization, surveillance, and ecological disruption. In this climate, PANATAG becomes more than a reference to tranquil waters; it signals a longing for stability, autonomy, and dignity. The right to represent one's place, to name and narrate it, becomes both an act of agency and resistance.

PANATAG engages with this terrain by reframing cartography—not as an extractive or imperial tool—but as a method of listening, reciprocity, and co-authorship. Drawing on the Subjective Atlas framework's emphasis on lived, emotional, and sensory geographies, the project invites fisherfolk not as data points but as narrative-makers and visual authors. Subjective Mapping validates memory, story, and embodied knowledge as essential ways of knowing, capable of challenging colonial and technocratic norms of representation.

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In the Masinloc workshop, participants engaged in embodied cartography through various activities such as drawing, storytelling, flag-making, and spontaneous songs. The group primarily consisted of fisherfolk (mostly men), female marine biology students interning at the Department of Tourism, and local artists. Together, they co-mapped their seascapes not as fixed geopolitical units but as lived terrains shaped by tides, dreams, losses, and traditions. While building on the momentum from prior PANATAG workshops, the Masinloc engagement stands out for its immediate geopolitical relevance and emotional depth.

The collaborations with Casa San Miguel and the Masinloc Department of Tourism were formative in building trust and ensuring meaningful community engagement. Casa San Miguel—an arts and education center established in 1993 and deeply rooted in Barangay San Antonio (village), approximately two hours from Masinloc—partnered with PANATAG through its year-long coastal festival, Zambulat 2025, which explores themes of migration, ecology, and cultural memory. Josephine Turalba, director of the Artistic Research Center (ARC) of Philippine Women's University and lead of Project PANATAG, was also a resident artist at CSM. She initiated the Masinloc outreach component and invited other CSM artists to join the workshop. This collaboration bridged ARC–PWU's research initiative with CSM's community-based artistic networks. Together with the facilitation of the local Department of Tourism, these partnerships enabled deeper local engagement, interdisciplinary exchange, and anchored the project in relationships of trust, reciprocity, and cultural familiarity

A conceptual anchor of PANATAG is the Mapa de las Islas Filipinas (1734), created by Jesuit priest Pedro Murillo Velarde and engraved by Filipino artist Nicolás de la Cruz Bagay. While often cited in legal efforts to assert Philippine territorial claims, the map is also a colonial artifact—one that fixed borders and projected imperial control. By juxtaposing this map with the community-generated visual expressions from Masinloc, PANATAG reclaims the right to draw—and to redraw. It repositions cartographic authority from the state to the sea's stewards, demonstrating that maps can emerge not only from surveyors' tools but from the hands of those who fish, remember, and resist.

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Making Space: On the Fragility and Force of Collective Research

Olivia Hamilton[1], Andy Miller[2], Jen Lynch[3]

Abstract

This paper explores the tensions between collaborative research practices and institutional constraints through a three-day event organised of Collective is Critical (CIC), an interdisciplinary creative practice research group based in Architecture and Urban Design at RMIT University. In late 2024, the collective hosted an "UnSymposium", adapting an "unconference" model into a three-day gathering that would foster an interconnected community through a participant-led program centred on shared creative inquiry, critical reflection, and ecological practice. Framed through the interrelated concepts of the minor, commoning, and the tactical, the UnSymposium sought to surface and value alternative modes of working that challenge dominant institutional frameworks and to connect a community of practitioners that shared interests and values. The Unsymposium revealed the difficulties and possibilities in challenging dominant frameworks that favour measurable outcomes over emergent, relational processes. Even in an external setting, and with strong commitment from core members, familiar patterns of engagement and institutional value systems surfaced alongside moments of experimentation and exchange. These dynamics reveal the ongoing complexity of creating the time, space, and resources necessary to support alternative modes of thinking and working. This paper critically reflects on how models grounded in connection, hope, and resilience can be nurtured and sustained within and beyond institutional environments, particularly during times of constrained resources.

Keywords: Commoning, ecologies, pedagogies, minor, tactics

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Botanical artists' relationships with Plants : Cases from Indonesia, Thailand, and Singapore

Kurniawan Adi Saputro

The Indonesian Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta

Abstract

Although I am not a botanical artist myself, I had the privilege of participating in the recent exhibition as a curator rather than an artist. My insights into the creative processes are derived primarily through observation of my wife, the artworks, and interviews with her friends.The ongoing research is still in its early stages, and initial findings are subject to change upon publication.

Artists study their objects before realising them into final artworks. Their mode of observation is different from that of the scientists in that their main intent is to portray plants as accurately as possible, as opposed to gaining insight into its biological systems, just like scientists. This raises the question, do botanical artists solely work in service of scientific knowledge, or do they produce their own knowledge? What are the relationships between the artists and the plants that bring about the knowledge? Are there national differences between these artists?

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Curating the KonTra Series as a Heterotopic Platform for Emerging Malaysian Choreographers

Mohd Zhafir Muzani Mohamad

Abstract

KonTra series is a mixed bill dance production that highlights six contemporary works inspired by traditional elements from six Malaysian choreographers in each series. KonTra was presented by The Actors Studio Seni Teater Rakyat at Pentas 2, the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Center (klpac) and curated by the resident choreographer Zhafir Muzani. Started from KonTra: Bianglala (2022) focuses on experimenting with the Malay traditional art form, followed in the same year by KonTra: Asirvatham, experimenting with the 'blessing' concept in the Indian community. Then, KonTra: Borneo in the following year, exploring the Sarawak and Sabah cultures. The recent series, KonTra: Yùeguāng, is the fourth instalment, venturing into the Chinese traditional element in October last year. Curating the KonTra series allowed emerging Malaysian choreographers to create new work and utilise traditional material as inspiration to convey the message and ideology in the space of heterotopia. Foucault defines heterotopia or 'other space' as a real place in society that is different from the typical space that consists of special rules, purpose and meaning. Through a heterotopia lens, the idea of contemporising the traditions in the KonTra series can be seen as a platform that offers emerging choreographers a space of otherness which challenges the conventional boundaries between contemporary and traditional dance, a temporary and evolving space; each series reshapes its identity through the diverse background of its choreographers, and as a space of both inclusion and exclusion, not only for the choreographers but also for the audience experiencing this 'other space' of artistic negotiation. Looking at KonTra as a heterotopic space, courageous emerging choreographers experiment with contrasting elements and invite a new way of thinking about the alternative space for dance-making in Malaysia.

Keywords: Heterotopia, Contemporary, Traditional, Curator, Choreographer

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Exploring Arts Education in Cambodia: A Case Study

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Abstract

This presentation explores how the subject of Arts Education can play a significant role in enabling learners to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for cultivating a foundational understanding of artistic expression and appreciation. It aims to nurture creativity, curiosity, critical thinking, tolerance, and aesthetic sense in children and young people. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport in Cambodia envisions a holistic education policy that integrates STEAM learning, designated Arts Education as a standalone subject, for grades 1 – 9, as outlined in the General Education Curriculum Framework of 2016. Arts Education subject comprises components such as dance, music, singing, drawing, handcrafts, and art appreciation.

However, given the current situation with limited resources, the Arts Education curriculum is not yet fully implemented in the public schooling system. The National Arts Education curriculum is in its final stage of development, with assistance from a Japanese program. Although Cambodia has numerous talented artists, there is a scarcity of arts educators in general schools, despite the recent launch of a teacher training program aimed at educating arts teachers.

In practice, we observe that students engaging in various art forms build confidence, promote self-expression, and develop positive attitudes and behaviours. This engagement ultimately enhances their overall learning experiences and prepares them to interact effectively with society, instilling a deep-rooted understanding of their own cultural context. In conclusion, Arts Education plays a vital role in the holistic development of children and young people, nurturing their creativity, emotional health, and social skills while laying a foundation for lifelong learning and personal growth.

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Analyzing the Opportunities for Ban Laem Homestay to Develop Tourism Activities through a Performative Experience Framework

Khalid Midam

Abstract

Drawing on firsthand observations from eight tourism events, this article explores how Ban Laem Homestay, a coastal Muslim community in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Southern Thailand might enhance its community-based tourism through a performative experience approach. While the community offers culturally rich and engaging activities, many are delivered in a fragmented manner, often lacking narrative coherence and structured facilitation. The study considers how principles from performance theory, storytelling, and creative tourism could be applied to reframe these activities as immersive experiences. It highlights opportunities for the community to craft shared storylines, clarify the roles of local guides, and design each activity as part of a cohesive journey. By doing so, tourism in Ban Laem could evolve into a participatory form of cultural expression that strengthens both visitor engagement and community identity.

Keywords: Performative Experience, Community-Based Tourism, Storytelling, Creative Tourism, Ban Laem Homestay, Cultural Performance

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Integrating Feminist Pedagogy in Vietnamese Graphic Design Education: Reimagine the Design Learning experience

Trần Phương Thảo Ngọc

Master of Research: Arts – Arts University Bournemouth

Abstract

Responding to the challenge of revitalizing and empowering student communities through inclusive learning experiences, this presentation explores the implementation of a feminist pedagogy framework in undergraduate graphic design at British University Vietnam (BUV). Through a critical investigation of non-feminist practices in design higher education and guided by feminist pedagogical theories, the researcher designed, facilitated, and documented a series of feminist-informed workshops. The presentation will share key insights and lessons learned, contributing to the ongoing dialogue on pedagogical innovation while offering practical strategies for enhancing inclusivity. This work demonstrates how empowering both students and educators can foster an equitable learning environment and revitalize the design community.

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Delhi Dancescape: Dancers navigating presence and representation

Urmimala Sarkar

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Abstract

India's capital city, Delhi attracts large number of national and international visitors because of it position as the capital, the fascinating architectural remains, and its role in promoting the performing arts. This has encouraged many art practitioners including dancers to make Delhi their home. This presentation is an attempt to explore the dance ecology, that has developed in this city since Indian independence. The growth of premier institutions, the state patronage, the cultural policies and the overall proximity between the structures of patronage and the dancers, have made this city a hub of dance-related activities. Such activities include dance institutions teaching specific classical and folk dance forms, many dancers migrating to Delhi to make it their home, annual fundings, state recognitions of individuals, forms and institutions, spectacular events such as the Republic Day Celebrations, numerous annual festivals and invitation for foreign tours organized and funded by the Government of India. The active cultural processes in this ecology have been identified by dance scholars as hope/ identity assertions, (re)inventions, claims of authenticity, creative expressions and representation. This presentation analyses the relationship, agency, the sense of rights and expectations that dancers have as inhabitants of Delhi, by using multidisciplinary methodologies of history, performance anthropology, dance studies and cultural studies. It also hopes share some reflections on the research-in-progress that aims to reflect on the dancers' responses and responsibilities in the changing scape of the capital city, the fast-altering audience perceptions and the contemporary trends of aesthetic understanding.

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Sultanate Monuments of Ahmedabad as Community Anchors

Riyaz Latif

Abstract

The historical identity of the city of Ahmedabad in western India is at its core delineated by the surviving corpus of monuments – mosques, mausoleums, water structures and so on – dating to the Gujarat Sultanate period (15th – 16th centuries); their presence as the city's defining emblems of heritage has been central to the city being declared a UNESCO World Heritage City in 2017. These Sultanate monuments, distinctive due to their architectural configurations which seamlessly assimilate the earlier indigenous temple building traditions into their visual and structural expression, stand out for their intricate ornamental idiom, which makes them singular within the overarching sphere of Indo-Islamic architecture. However, the afterlives of these monuments have been quite varied where some representative structures are primed for cultural consumption through heritage walks and so on, while others – of no less historical significance – suffer relative neglect, dilapidation and encroachment. In a singular way, this variance in the afterlives of the Sultanate monuments of Ahmedabad is irrevocably entangled with the nature of transforming community practices in relation to their reception, and this presentation seeks to address in a very prefatory manner the significance of these emblems of heritage in molding the ways in which people – communities – receive and impart meanings to them. The central question which this presentation seeks to address in this regard is: how has the communities' engagement (or the lack of it) with these monuments as active or passive consumers shaped their relationship with the historical identity of the city as a living organism. To that end, the presentation, by foregrounding this distinctive architectural corpus, seeks to reflect on the issue of artistic exploration and its potential to engage, inform and transform creative communities.

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Embodied Resistance, Memory, and Social Imaginary in the "Woman, Life, Freedom" Movement: A Study of Participants' Experiences

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Abstract

In one of my artistic research-based projects, *Kariznew*, performed at the Attakkalari Biennial in Bangalore in 2011, I explored the concept of *Collective Gesture Memory (CGM)*—a repertoire of gestures, body movements, forms, and associated concepts embedded in the cultural memory of a community, serving as a resource for creating dance and physical theatre. According to the hegemonic social imaginary, some of these gestures are regularly used in daily life, while others appear rarely or are reserved for specific events and contexts. In that project, we revisited CGM through a creative process that reinterpreted elements—particularly those from religious rituals—as new artistic materials to reveal fresh dimensions of otherwise rigid religious bodily practices.

A similar process could be seen in the Woman, Life, Freedom protest in Iran in 2022. One major theme of the protest was resistance against the oppression of women's bodies and the hegemonic gender performativity imposed by religious doctrine. Protest participants performed and shared subversive gestures—embodied expressions that had been banned or suppressed by the dominant social imagination.

Social movements are fertile grounds for collective creativity. In this context, creativity connects collective memory to the formation of social imaginaries. Artistic research can analyze these connections and the processes of transformation rooted in collective creativity. My inquiry explores the relationship between the process of collective embodiment and its impact on hegemonic social imaginaries in protest contexts, as well as its potential for artistic research focused on embodiment, memory, and imagination. How do participants extract gestures from collective memory, revise and share them, and generate new symbolic forms that contribute to emerging social imaginaries?

This study presents a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with four women from Bandar Abbas and Tehran, focusing on their embodied experiences, cultural memory, and imagined futures during the 2022 *Woman, Life, Freedom* movement. The findings highlight how the body and performativity served not only as sites of resistance but also as mediums of creative political expression and gender redefinition amid state violence and cultural repression.

Participants described performative acts—such as walking unveiled, burning headscarves, clapping as part of local wedding rituals, collectively stamping the ground, shouting slogans, and standing silently in protest—as symbolic and creative actions. These embodied gestures redefined what it means to be a woman in public space. Emotional transitions—from fear and shame to pride and collective empowerment—were deeply interwoven with these bodily expressions.

These gestures were not only reactions to oppression but also citations of collective and cultural memory. Some referenced legendary figures, past movements, maternal heritage, or familiar images from television and cinema. For example, group clapping was inspired by wedding traditions in southern Iran. Nonviolent acts such as standing silently or unveiling recalled iconic protest images, such as Vida Movahed's.

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Regarding social imagination, women envisioned a future where bodily autonomy and gender expression were no longer controlled. Several observed cultural shifts after the protests: increased courage among young women, changing attitudes among men, and the normalization of personal choice around wearing the hijab.

In sum, this study reveals how women's bodies in southern Iran became living archives of resistance, reclaiming cultural space through gesture, emotion, and memory. These embodied narratives contribute to a feminist social imaginary that challenges hegemonic gender norms and fosters new collective visions of freedom, bodily autonomy, and women's rights.

Keywords: embodiment, collective memory, social imagination, artistic research

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The Process of Presenting an Adapted Play as a Stage Reading Performance: A Case Study of The Country of the Blind

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Abstract

This practice-oriented research titled "The Process of Presenting an Adapted Play as a Stage Reading Performance: A Case Study of The Country of the Blind" aims to study the process of presenting issues of conflict in Thai society. The researcher selected H.G. Wells' 'The Country of the Blind' as source material, adapting two endings of the Thai translation published by SM-Thai Publishing and translated by Manorah into a stage play.

The researcher analyzed both published versions to examine Social Conflict, Concept of Power, Concept of Discourse, and the play adaptation process. Data was collected from general audience members through anonymous questionnaires and discussions with playwriting experts. The story, addressing otherness in society, was adapted to reflect and critique social conflict issues in Thai society while communicating that humans should analyze differences rationally to facilitate change and coexistence. The adapted play was presented through stage reading performances three times at Sripatum University's Multipurpose Building.

The research found that stage reading performance presents plays accurately and completely, reduces rehearsal time, and applies to different contexts between "the sighted" and "the blind" through reading and non-reading scripts. However, limitations include requiring collaborative decision-making between adapter and director regarding storytelling proximity to actual performance, and the format's unfamiliarity to general audiences may cause viewer uncertainty.

Nevertheless, presenting ideological conflicts is universal and can be understood across different social contexts. Stage reading performances help audiences connect with ideological conflicts in Thai society, generating post-viewing discussions and debates, demonstrating the format's effectiveness in engaging audiences with complex social themes.

Keywords: Adapted play / Stage reading performance / Concept of Power / Concept of Discourse / Social conflict issues in Thai society

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Performing Ricelihood Kinesthesia and Animist Theatrics in Northern Thailand

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Abstract

This research is part ethnographic and creative research centering on a performance *Ricelihood* to explore the livingness and agency of northern Thai rice culture that, I argue, has undergone the processes of erasure, dormancy, and reemergence. In addition to denoting continuity, *Ricelihood* is the title of a ritualistic and theatrical performance I produced collaboratively with several rice communities, including students, rice growers, and elders, in Lampang, Lamphun, and Chiangmai between 2019 and 2020. Through the approaches of *Practice as Research* and *Devised Theater*, my inquiries focus on how Thai rice communities engage with ritualistic storytelling and how the synchronization of memories between the performers and audiences is formed, transformed, and sustained through crises of religious coloniality, gender inequality, economic disparity, and political ruptures.

I employ the conceptions of the *act of totality* and the biological concept of the *morphic field* to discover the possible continuity of rice culture in contemporary northern Thailand. I argue that the performance *Ricelihood* generates the rice's *morphic field*, in which memory of rice ritual and plantation is enlivened not only through the accumulated memory in the rice communities but also through the sensorial perception of both performers and audience, created and shared during the ephemeral event. The performance *Ricelihood* is the collective attempt of several rice communities at community building and constructing a rice tale that is about them and genuinely belongs to them.

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Papers of All APARN 2025 Presenters

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Non-anthropocentric dramaturgies as a possibility for engaging with more-than-human communities

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Abstract

The Anthropocene is a term that emerged in the year 2000 being coined by Crutzen and Stoermer who proposed the term to understand the epoch where humans excerpt a centre role in shaping materialities and ecologies that are all dependent on a normative understanding of the human in a hierarchical relationship with other species. In times where the Anthropocene faces humanitarian, environmental and even a performative crisis, questions about art making and its relevance in such a paradigm shifting time has become recurrent and relevant. As an artist scholar that has been nurturing a longstanding interest in ecoperformance, dramaturgy and philosophy, I too began to develop an interest into investigating art making that not simply question the Anthropocene, but transform que questions into the very possibility of performative action. In this paper I propose to share some of the practices that I have been investigating and discuss the ways in which they can foster an inclusive and dialogical performativity, or perhaps community, among humans and more-than-humans. These practices are informed by my studies in dramaturgy, Somatics and theories of attunement. Through a Somatic-Performative Research framework I have been activating inquiries and praxis that ignite a practice-as-research journey into the possibilities of co-creating non-anthropocentric dramaturgies in crossovers with ableism, aesthetics and authorship.

Key-words: Ecoperformance, Non-Anthropocentric, Ecodramaturgy, Somatic-Performative Research, More-than-Human

Introduction and purpose

The Anthropocene is a term that emerged in the year 2000 being coined by Crutzen and Stoermer to describe the epoch where humans excerpt a centre role in shaping materialities and ecologies that are all dependent on a normative understanding of the human in a hierarchical relationship with other species.

The Anthropocene can be regarded not only as a temporal category that considers the scope of human activity on the planet but goes beyond this epoch to rethink the actual understanding of what is considered human and what this means to an overall scrutiny of life and ecology in the planet. The Anthropocene predicts a set of rules and hierarchies that emphasise an ontological superiority of the human category, exploiting other categories that are considered as "not/non-human". The Anthropocene predicts communities of humans as the focus of development and relevant relational activity. It looks at what people are doing and how they are fostering encounter and sociability. Thus, when having the human activity as a main focus, all that is not considered as human is seen as add-ons, as peripherical, as supplementary, as scenery and of possible exploitation to serve the human and their endless needs and desires. Although the human category seems a straight forward differentiation of other non-human beings, the practice that shapes what is and what is not/non human presents greater complexities.

To understand the scope of the non-human I follow Manning (2020, p.36) who explains that societal forces such as systemic racism, ableism and all forms of heteronormativity will "claim the centering of a certain version of humanity over all other

experience". This means that humanity is not such a simple category to identify. With Manning (2020), I agree that the beings that do not fit into the normative standards of the white, heteronormative, able, standard, neurotypical human-animal are left out of the human selection. Thus non-human or what the author calls "more-than-human" encompass all instances of life that have not been tailored to the able and neurotypical human animal that presents form (morphism), abilities, behaviours and normativity that respond to the societal shaping that determines the human animals/beings. Then, I see the Anthropocene as this specific – social-normative – perspective that has evolved to distinguish specific types of people from all Other humans and non-humans.

In recent decades we have been seeing an upsurge of discourses and practices that question the supremacy of the human in detriment of all other forms of existence. As a consequence, humans exploit all that is non-human and who do not belong to any "human rights" protection. In the performing arts this supremacy has been the accepted norm, since the human action, skill and performance is the expected outcome of a work of art created and shared. Of course I am generalising this understanding as I recognise the shifts that performance art, education and technology have offered to the understanding of the performative body and the role of the human in performance. Nonetheless, the excluding factor that establishes a human category while cancelling what is not (always) considered as humans, strongly impacts on the ways of interacting (with), creating (with) and performing (for/with) non-humans, in addition to the aesthetics that emerges from these.

In recent decades we have been observing an upsurge of humanitarian, environmental and even a performative crisis, that questions the Anthropocene and its related art making and its relevance. This introduces a paradigm shift where the non-anthropocentric becomes a terrain that welcomes expanded modes of practice that revises, re-evaluates, re-conceptualises and re-activates established norms, to enable the non- to come forth.

As an artist scholar that has been nurturing a longstanding interest in ecoperformance, dramaturgy and philosophy, I too began to develop an interest into investigating art making that not simply question the Anthropocene, but transform que questions into the very possibility of performative action.

The natural environment (not human-created) is one of these non-. To think about the environment as the same material that we, human animals, are composed of and thus we are an integral part of it, is to think "across bodies" and to mobilise what Alaimo (2010, p.2) describes as a "world of fleshy beings with their own needs, claims and actions".

Dramaturgical practices with more-than-human bring a fresh perspective to the possible collaborations that incite non-anthropocentric performative practice. In this realm, I am deeply inspired by the work of Ciane Fermandes (2019, p.28) who has been developing praxis that merge performance and Somatics in a decolonial setting where the performer merges with the environment in a process of "perceiving, connecting, and exploring body and space as *soma*" in a continuous exchange of matter and energy where all (living) organisms and the space (inside and outside of them) compose a "somatic field".

Following Fernandes, I have been merging the somatic field into my inquiry in dance dramaturgy (Scialom, 2022) with studies in philosophy and anthropology that enable inclusive, processual and otherness to shed light into practice and performance making that is attuned with the environment. This research interests has been stretching through time and space in a continuous exploration of environmental dance that dates back to 2010 when I began to explore the relatedness of the body performing with/in the environment.

Investigative Approach

This investigation configures itself within the Practice as Research (Nelson, 2022) umbrella that sets a continuous investigation amongst theory and practice where practice is a means for enquiry and discovery. Within this epistemological framework I have specifically been working within a Somatic-Performative Research – SPR (Fernandes, 2020, p.61). SPR is associates the somatic and the performativity in "a constant state of change, between pulsing and resting, innovation and balance, in a process of merging, differentiating and growing". This constant state of change is what Shon (1983) has conceived as a knowledge in action.

The knowledge in action that is activated in this practice is that is a somatic one that considers a full attunement (Nagatomo, 1992) with the environment as knowledge. In this sense, Somatics as a field of knowledge guides the practice in a methodological sense. The engagement of the body as an integral living compound activates relationality that creates momentary or transitional ecosystems that materialise in performance.

If knowledge is in action, research data is collected during practice, and registered either in annotation that are done during the activity itself (see Figure 1) or automatic writing notes taken after the practice.

Analysis of data happens through reflective practice associated with the practice, specially using Schon's (1983) "reflection in action" that predicts a process of thinking in real-time as action is happening, alongside the SPR framework.

Somatics, as an epistemic field of praxis has been the support for such explorations. This is because Somatics enables a deepening of the processes of awareness in the body and relationally with what is beyond it (Fernandes, 2019). Somatics enables an expanded perception of self beyond the limits of the body.

My knowledge in Somatics spans over a set of practices that have enabled diverse perspectives of the soma. With deep experience in Rudolf Laban praxis and Bartenieff Fundamentals as well as Feldenkrais and Yoga Asanas, my experiments with moving in or from (stimulus of) the environment evolved to a relational moving -with it. My praxis was deeply influenced by the continuous motion of internal and external forces that are uniquely activated by each of these practices. While some have an internal focus (such as Yoga Asanas and Feldenkrais), others include the external expression that is observed as the body shapes itself into forms and dynamics.

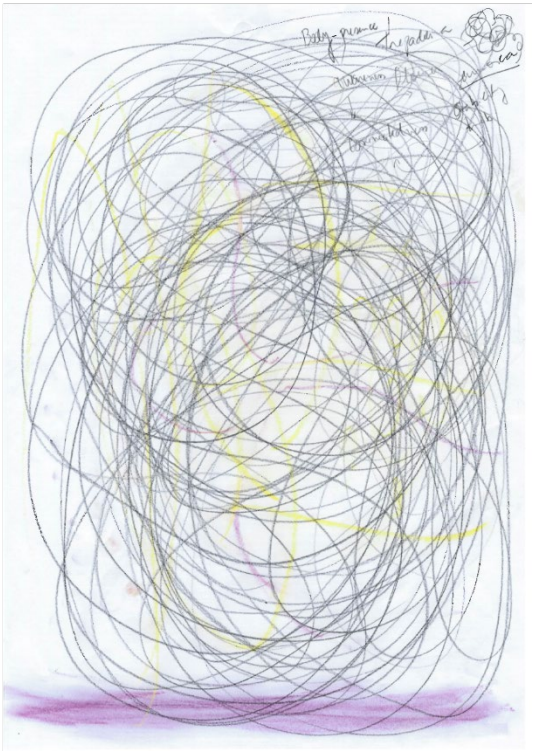


Figure 1 – sketch done during performative activity by Melina Scialom.

Creating Communities with the more-than-human

The aim is to investigate practices that attempt to co-create with the more-than-human and consider how they can fosters a different sense of community – among humans and non-humans. Traditionally, community is directly related to social structures, both empirically descriptive of such structures and normative to them (Minar and Greer, 2017). They make reference to social units and are composed of relations that could be recognised as mainly human-centred, since they involve actions, values, desires, bonds and purposes. Community considers the continuum that is negotiated between individual and collective which is in principle Anthropocentric.

Considering this human-centred characteristics of a community, how could this concept be applied beyond the scope human morality that works within values and desires of individuals and collectives? To assume communities that merge the more-than-(with)-human as part of a collaborative activity, we expand the perspective of the human into the environment, becoming an integral part of the system humans are embedded in.

Non-anthropocentric thinking of a community allows a recognition of the centrality of the human to shift into a decentred agency that includes the Other communities that inhabit the planet and/or beyond. The interaction of the human with the non-human enables the composition of dramaturgies of relation that are shaped from unique interactions. The materialisation of unique dramaturgies that result from the collaboration of human and non-human enables situations of co-creation with the more-than-human.

In my practice research I collaborate with more-than-human ecosystems of natural environments. In the practice that I propose I recognise the non-separability between human and more-than in a constant relationality. As Manning explains the “more-than” is to be connected to the environment not separated from it: “We breathe in oxygen. We're involved in the gravitational field. We're, you know, made up of water and bacteria. So whatever we are is not in any sense separable from the Earth” (Manning, 2023).

To bring practical considerations on how to create communities with the more-than-human – and the procedures to do so – I propose paraxial elements that make up a framework of practice.

Practice



Figure 2: Ecoperformative practice with water, sand and dancers in Hong Kong. Photo by ZHOU Meihan.

1. Moving with.

To move with the environment. Moving with allows you to be part of the environment and not in the environment. The moving in the environment generates performers within an outdoor scenery; moving with reverts the event into a process of collaboration.

Nature moves by itself and does not need human intervention to move it. When we collaborate with nature we attune to this movement and we move with it. We activate a process of deep listening in-to and out-to. We co-create with the elements in a dancing collective.

Movement of human body emerges from and inputs back into the environment (she). She calls out, she pushes and pulls, she invites and she distances, she ebbs and flows, she dances.

2. Process of becoming.

Beyond imagining the relation with the environment (her), we merge with her through processes of becoming. When becoming part of the environment we reorganise our bodies as included in the ecological structure that composes the medium.

To ignite such processes I have been activating Butoh practices, more specifically Min Tanaka's Body Weather training. Butoh has devised techniques for transforming the self into other. This is transformed into a procedure that invites moving with nature, as our bodies transform into the elements of the environment that it moves with/in.

The process happens in a state of complete consciousness, so much so that the body is in full awareness of the relational forces that are sensed and the movement is a voluntary choice. Despite the ritualistic character of the practice, the experience is apprehended and articulated in a real time negotiation of forces and in-tensities.

3. Establishing community.

The process of merging with the environment and performing together creates a community of more-than-human beings that exist in collaboration. When becoming part of an environment we learn to sense and communicate with the elements that co-compose together. We communicate - each in their own language - in attunement with the flow that traverses the bodies.

Community gathers beings without the process on individuation that separates human and/to/from beings, remaining in the state of the collective, creating an ecology of relations that intersect as a rhizomatic network. Here, community is collaborative, ecological and expressive.

Importance and expression function as intensifiers of experience, bringing into activity the singularity of a life that nonetheless continues to carry its anarchic share. In this account, the human is not singled out. There is no externalizing voice, no mediator. Arrows of experience are their own force, importance not a question of what matters to me, but of what actually (but always also in potential) *makes a difference*. (Manning, 2023, p. 33)

4. Co-reographing.

This next stage happens in the studio, embodying the qualities that materialised in the different layers of the soma – muscular, energetic, imagetic, haptic… The qualities of the experience with the more-than-human ecological dance are re-enacted into a present living experience. This experience becomes choreography when organised together. The process can take multiple forms, such as solos, duets, trios, groups. The co-reography becomes a work – co-created by the community – when shared with others.

When considered a work, it should be acknowledged as a shared authorship, not owned by the humans, but as a creation from the community that activated such joint creative encountered.

This means that the more-than-human is not the background that embellishes the performance nor the elements that inspired a human performance but a collaborator. Alaimo (2010, p. 2) explains that:

Potent ethical and political possibilities emerge from the literal contact zone between human corporeality and more-than-human nature. Imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always inter- meshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'.

Non-anthropocentric dramaturgies

What emerges from the co-reographing with more-than-human communities are dramaturgies that do not centre or favour the human, but include the environment as collaborator, valueing the participation and influence of all elements present in the experience.

Dramaturgy is a practice that currently spans through diverse disciplines and activities (Bleeker, 2023). Here it functions as the instrument of assemblage that generates compositions between beings. Non-anthropocentric dramaturgies configure specific qualities of relationality. Manning (2023) introduces the understanding of relational landscapes that do not consider nature as the performance space or the non-human as accessories, but relates both in the act. This highlights the processuality of the encounter of the body with the more-than-human, which, instead of objectifying the human or the non-human, it enables the exploration of movement and affect, as a continuous potential of relation.

Emanuelle Coccia (2021) explains how the body is an integral part of the universe. Not only it emerged from everything that exists and has existed, but also will feed into its ecological cycles. Its own composition is a clustering of materiality that comes from the universe itself and all its elements. Coccia explains that we are an expression of nature itself in a process of

becoming, as any other element/component of nature also is. Through this perspective we can reestablish our connections with the more-than and co-create as community.



Figure 3: Ecoperformative practice with water, sand and dancers in Hong Kong. Photo by Melina Scialom.

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Mapping Networks of Performing Arts Research in Bangkok: A Preliminary Survey of Some Artists' Performance Practices and Community-Building Processes In The Thai Capital

Lowell Skar

Abstract

This paper explores artistic research in Bangkok as a heterogenous assemblage of specific methods and situated practices that contemporary performing artists develop in and through the performance projects and in relation communities of those who care about the nonmainstream performing arts in Bangkok. It will provide a tentative mapping of some parts of this assemblage tied to performance research and their supporting artistic communities of practice. This mapping emerges from direct observation, document research, interviews and surveys with artists, academics, and researchers in the performing arts. The paper first locates how some contemporary performing artists in Bangkok seek new insights and embodied ways of feeling and moving that to share with others. The paper seeks to locate the diverse, intertwined modes of knowledge making through performance practice by using of examples from various performing arts traditions and disciplines in Thailand's capital. It relates them to the communities supporting artistic research and links the work of artists, academics, cultural workers and community actors. Together, they work to organize, design, create, and evaluate performances in Thailand's capital in ways that engage, challenge, and form communities of those who care about the contemporary performing arts. The paper addresses how performance practice research done by artists, academics and cultural organizers engages and shapes communities and how communities affect research done in performance-making processes.

Keywords: Performing Arts, Artistic Research, Bangkok, Community-Building, Performance Practices, Devising Theatre, Object Theatre, Embodied Knowledge, Minor Theatre, Contemporary Thai Performance

Introduction

The ecosystem of Bangkok's contemporary performance culture is fragmented and fragile, but its challenges have also made it more flexible, resilient, and robust (Skar 2021; Esplanade 2024). After economic downturns, coups, and a global pandemic, the mix of old and new performers and groups has changed. The search for spaces, times, and funds to rehearse and to perform remains a persistent set of problems for performance-makers, and these problems have become more acute since the pandemic waned. The Bangkok performance scene consists of varied groups forming a heterogenous assemblage of artists who use specific methods and situated practices in and through performance as part of a social world of those who are interested in and who care about the performing arts.

Bangkok's non-mainstream performing artists regularly explore innovative ways to create new performances that resonate with audiences and push the boundaries of traditional theatre. This paper will consider just a few of the constellations of people and practices involved in this activity, relating them to the repertoires of artistic practice they use to create performances for audiences. While staging scripted plays remain a common mode of performance making, the collective character of performances means that how scripts are made and how they are staged is often quite open-ended. This has led to the use of devising

theatre as a dynamic and collaborative approach to performance-making common among many Bangkok performers. This process often involves various configurations of script development, object theatre, and movement improvisation among performance ensembles or collectives. These diverse practices and the artists who use them allow artists to work together in a fluid and organic manner, fostering creativity and experimentation.

When performing artists in Bangkok do their work, they do research. Their performance-making is a form of research and investigation since it allows them to *find out something* through and in their performance making. It forms a creative way to discover, investigate and *find something out* since it seeks to invent strategies for experimentation, extrapolating and naming potentialities and working with methodologies for further development. By shaping performances through processes of script making, devising, staging and rehearsals, performance makers become active researchers. They explore some unknown areas or issues that interest or concern them in the nascent performance, gather different types of materials and ideas tied to those areas or issues, developing a performance from that material to show or present to others as a new type of embodied, felt knowledge. While most performing artists' creative practices do not aim for scholarly output, they do aim to generate and show others new knowledge through the processes they use to create art, to record or keep their work, and to present or exhibit their work to others. In the performing arts, this artistic research involves exploring methods and practices that artists use to experimentally develop and present their performances.

This paper gives a preliminary and partial mapping of the working practices that some contemporary performing artists in Bangkok use to create their performances as part of what Gilles Deleuze called a "minor theatre." It does not attempt to cover all of Thailand. It aims to contribute to the understanding of their creative processes in relation to how they explore the unknown on the periphery of large performance frameworks. By investigating the working practices of these Bangkok-based artists, we can uncover the range of techniques and principles that inform their artistic creation. This will both extend and enrich the field of artistic research. It views their efforts as part of a *community that is not one* – one that is "unavowable" (*inavouable*) for Michel Blanchot and "inoperative" (*désoeuvrée*) for Jean-Luc Nancy.

By mapping these practices of Bangkok performance-makers with and for others, we also help to identify communities of those concerned with arts-based research in and through the performing arts. This can help to clear the ground for new understandings of how the performing arts relate to forming the creative and critical processes of community-making.

Literature Review

Contemporary performing artists in Bangkok are part of a wider arena of contemporary performance in Southeast Asia. The performances, forms and groups in the region have been studied, but few have focused on the performance practices that performance makers use to create their work and how they are tied to those who support and watch their work. Fewer studies still focus on groups in Bangkok.

Much previous research has examined how traditional forms have been appropriated by governments for nationalist agendas, apart from royalty or religion, as living symbols of national culture and heritage (Cohen and Noszlopy, 2010). Catherine Diamond (2012) has seen changes in traditional forms in Southeast Asia less as responses to the needs of artists and more as responses to foreign or commercial forces, noting that they often appear "not as legitimate innovations but as bastardizations." Her book maps socio-political changes from traditional performance modes and modern hybrid theatres and spoken drama and explores the place of nationalism in performing arts as a "contemporary modernity" to question what it

means to be a part of an open globalized world and continuing to live in new and often repressive nation-states.

Based mainly in cities, much contemporary performance work in Bangkok, like Southeast Asia more generally, has appealed to university educated youth and has sought to be both locally grounded and post-national. Resisting the mainstream, these performance makers invent new frames for social and aesthetic engagement, effectively making a differing artistic response that seeks to undo ordinary modes of artistic production and to address what was of concern the immediate present. This makes their work "contemporary," and often takes the form of critically responding to issues of power and inequality that stress affects emerging from local turmoil but connects to regional and global issues (Tan and Rajendran 2020).
As part of the locally-grounded transnational focus, Matthew Cohen (2014) also notes "a new paradigm is emerging in which Southeast Asian theatre and performance are not being treated as the West's exotic 'Other' or in relation to nation building but as a site drawing interested parties into a conversation regarding both local and global issues." With more inter-Asian cultural exchanges, performance in Southeast Asia today – including Bangkok – is becoming a "site of intersection" for all communities from various cultures, so that its contemporary theatre is a conversation of local particularities and shared global concerns. (Tan and Rajendran 2020).

In Bangkok, theatre-making consists of multiple sequences of practices which often form an organizing frame tied to performance-making. These practices also form research repertoires for performance makers involved in them, offering them both a chance to explore new methods and themes and to experiment with new ways to help the artists and audiences access to experiencing something new or differently. Most performances still rely on three key processes – text-making, acting, and directing – to make the performance come to life. Artistic research in performance uses creative methodologies to explore and understand performance-related phenomena and may present findings as part of artistic works, showing their aesthetic dimension. It is a form of research that aims to create knowledge and potentially change the arts. Paul Rae sees performance research as "best understood in aesthetic terms more familiar to us from performance than from research…." and notes that "performance research activity can be described in terms of aesthetic presentation, conduct, and form" where "the aesthetic overlap of performance research and performance practice" is dominant. (Rae 2024: 319). Kanpong Thaweesuk pointed out how the PKDC "approaches art with serious intention through deep research and a genuine search for answers. They make work that connects the past and present, dares to question the past and imagines the future—all with authenticity." (FB post, June 6, 2025 June 2025 Life Update).

Open-ended script-centered performance creation processes and related practices are still commonplace – and perhaps dominant – in the Bangkok performancescape, but other practices have also become focal points for performance making. A common set of techniques is tied to devising theatre, for which ensemble members, from actors to designers, take part in all or most stages of the creative process, from conception to presentation (Bonczek and Storck, 2012; Robinson, 2017). Devising often uses collective creation, where group members work to develop different parts or phases of the performance. It often features unpredictable and unplanned working methods, including script or movement improvisation, co-authorship, and sharing of creative roles.

Movement processes are often integral to devising theatre. These processes involve the exploration of physicality and movement to convey emotions, themes, and narratives and can make visually engaging performances (Jones, 2020). Artistic research examines these practices to understand how they contribute to the development of a polished and well-coordinated performance.

Object theatre also is tied to performance making and often tied to devising. Objects become key elements in the performance, as everyday items become symbolic or narrative tools. This practice encourages creativity and innovation, allowing performers to explore new ways of storytelling (Miller, 2021). Carrignon (2013) suggests that object theatre is like cinema, although film has the director and editor decide what's important to see by film editing, and the thing-placer or thing-mover has to draw audience's attention. Studies of object theatre argue that it enhances the visual and sensory aspects of performance, making it more engaging and immersive for the audience Ryöppy and Skouby, 2015; Grazioli, 2009; Foley, 2014; Martinez, 2015).

Previous literature also emphasizes the strong links between performance making practices and artistic research. Synne Behrndt and Jon Refsdal Moe (2021) argue that devised theatre are outcomes of complex research-based processes and that these processes show different ways in which contemporary practices and processes are research in and through action. In Thailand, this suggests that artistic research in devising theatre can lead to the enhancement of forms of feeling and living differently, as it allows artists to engage with their own experiences and insights in a meaningful way.

Methodology

To examine contemporary performing artists' practices in devising theatre, I combined qualitative and practice-based research methods. For qualitative research methods, I used interviews and observations to gather insights into the artists' experiences and perspectives on their theatre-making through collective script writing, physical theater and movement improvisation, and object theatre. These methods allow the discovery of nuances and complexities of the performance making process by Bangkok theater makers, and the collaborative dynamics among various artists. Interviews were conducted with several figures involved in the Bangkok theatre scene. (Placeholder1)

Describing the Bangkok Performance Scene

The current Bangkok non-mainstream performance scene consists of an interconnected web of scores people who are involved in making performances and more than 20 current performance groups, most of which are better thought of as artist collectives or performance constellations. The people involved in these constellations come from many different backgrounds, but most have graduated from university (often a university in Bangkok). While in university, many of them became interested in and involved in making and watching live performances. Universities have the benefit of enabling one to train in and perform in a variety of productions, and they also provide spaces for rehearsing and performing. For Bangkok performing arts constellations, outside of university, both space and time is scarce for performance making. Space for performers to gather and develop their productions, as well as perform them are difficult to find, and times for groups of performers to assemble to develop and perform a production are both hard to arrange. This tends to lead to small-scale productions, produced over a relatively short period of time, by complex webs of performance makers, often including rotating cast members. While often dealing with issues and topics outside of Bangkok, the theatre scene in Bangkok is Bangkok-centric, with most performance makers having lived in Bangkok for a long time. They are based on exploring both what to create and show and experiments with how to design and present it to others. Shortages of available spaces and times are connected to the ongoing dearth of sources of funding for many new projects, which typically come from multiple sources. While various government agencies or universities may support some new work, another key source of support is from national governments for international collaborative projects, or for commissioned work done for performance festivals or events.

Because Bangkok lacks spaces for learning or exchange, in a changing world, it is important to have sites where one can pay attention to the newly emerging ideas and neglected

parts of the past. Performances can create space for discussion by connecting performers and performances to different groups of people, even as a form of learning. Performances can also help people understand certain issues and ideas, and this understanding can generate real change in life. Performance making can help to create a performance community in Bangkok, focusing on knds of performances that are rarely seen. In Bangkok, much mainstream theatre is not where you meet others for discussion. Going to a play is like going to a mall; you go there, watch a theatre piece and go home. There are other ways of viewing that can involve people more.

The lack of durable spaces for rehearsing and even for performing is a major limitation for groups in their performance-making activities. It affects the work they do at every stage and every level of their practice since the development of performance projects often require much negotiation, short time spans, and simple unelaborate stagings. Exceptions are projects that receive foreign support and funding They form a repertoire of experimental means of aesthetic communication that works through various projects that work with words, objects and bodies in ephemeral spaces to create their performances.

A Heuristic Overview of Performance Making Practices

Performance-making is collective work that involves a process informed by diverse practices and techniques, aesthetic choices and economic context, as well as practical aspects apart from writers, performers and directors.

When Bangkok performance-makers develop their work, they consider it using a range of terms, such as "this story" (*rueng ni*), "this dance" (*ram ni*), "this piece" (*chin ni*), or "this piece or work" (*ngan ni*), or sometimes the English term "this work." Producers and artistic directors may call their efforts "projects," but this merges onto the most common terms in Thai – "*ngan*" (a project). If the project will likely end up as a theatrical play and is centered on a script, *lakorn* (play) is most common, while those using working mainly with dance movement and soundscapes may call their work *kan sadeang* (stage show). Somewhat originally and perceptively, one theatre-maker (Parnrut) sees her script-centered work as a dialogue or an "ongoing conversation" with her collaborators, one that can develop a conversation with both the wider theatre-making and theatre-going community.

Performance makers in Bangkok use a large repertoire of practices to develop their work. Broadly, these practices focus on working with scripts, bodily movement and objects to create performances. Groups that form and take on names form a constellation of people whose skills and interests usually draw on all practices from this repertoire but often focus more on one type of practice more than the other two types. This is schematically represented by Figure 1 below.

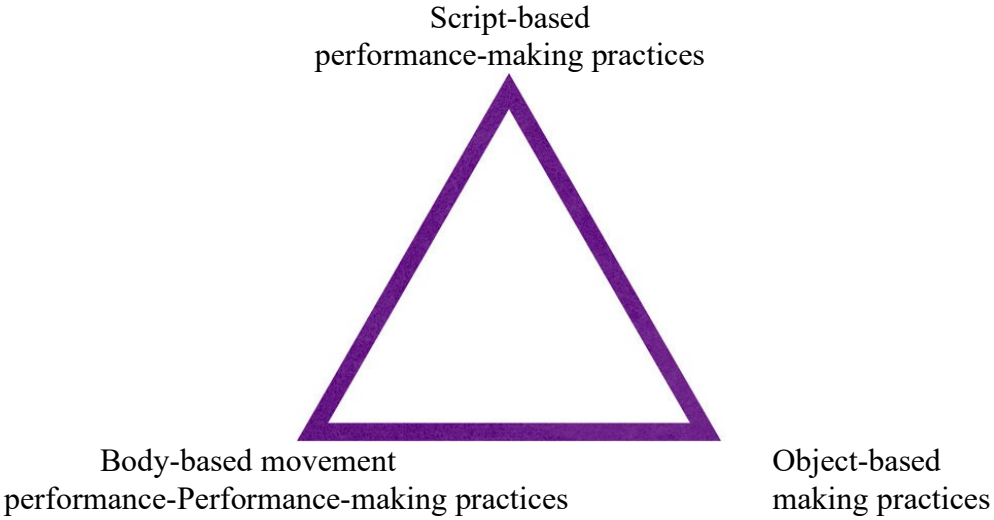


Figure 1: A schematic presentation of the repertoire or toolbox of performance-making practices used by nonmainstream theatre-makers in contemporary Bangkok.

Although theatre-making is often seen to be based on written scripts, something true in Bangkok's theatre scene, too, what counts as a script varies considerably. It may include original old or new Thai plays, faithful translations, loose adaptations or hybrid blends or mixes of plots, characters, and ideas, from many different plays. In developing their scripts, some often develop scripts on their own, like Nikorn Sae-Tang of 8X8 Theatre (founded in 1998), Damkerng Thitapiyasa, who worked with Parnrut Kritchanchai, in the New Theatre Society (founded in 2009?), while other contemporary theatre-makers develop their work through collective practices, such as Jarunun Phantachat (Jaa) and Dujdao Vadhanapakorn (Dao) of B-floor (started in 1999). Wichaya Artamat has also had more than a decade of script-making as part of his performance-making practices, starting with New Theatre Society but, from 2014, as part of ForwhaT Theatre, often working with Pathipon Adsavamahapong (Miss Oat).

Body-focused movement performance-making practices include practices that put the human body at the center of storytelling process, often tied to contemporary dance and physical theatre. Among Bangkok-based performance makers, this includes Pichet Klunchun and the PKDC (Pichet Klunchun Dance Company, founded in 2005), Crescent Moon (Space, in Bangkok 2005-2017) projects led by Sineenadh Keitprapai (Nad), and the mime trio of Ratchai Rujiwipatna (Nging), Nuttapol Kummata (Ta), and Thong-glur Thongta (Glur), who worked together since 2000 and under the name Babymime since 2005, as well as Jitti Chompee's work as choreographer of 18Monkeys Dance Theatre (founded in 2010). Many B-floor projects led by Teerawat Mulvilai (Kage) and others are also movement-based, and one-time member Kwin Bhichitkul has worked in dee ng Theatre (founded in 2014) which makes bodily movement central to its performances. Even the multi-talented performance-maker Nikorn Sae-Tang (8X8 Theatre) depends heavily on movement to tell his stories. While overlapping with techniques and practices used in physical theatre, such as Anne Bogart's Viewpoints, Jacques Lecoq's movement and mime techniques, or Laban Effort Qualities, many Bangkok performers use practices derived from classical Thai dance, other types of traditional dance in Thailand, and butoh.

Beyond script and body movement as sources of their performance-making, several newer theatre-makers in Bangkok have also been using objects, masks, puppets, visuals and technological systems as part of their working process to explore new ways to communicate their ideas and sensibilities. This includes Nikorn Sa-Tang, who works with neutral and character masks and objects in many of his works, the mime artist Nuttapol Kummata (Ta) who left Babymime in 2020 to form TaLent Show, often working with Nattaporn Mayped Thanhahuad (May). B-floor projects also often rely on the use of visuals and objects in their productions. More recently, Wichaya Artamat has made pieces organized around objects, as well as video and voice recordings to communicate, including live recordings that show those objects. Pichet Klunchun has not only long danced with masks in his engagement with *khon* (classical masked dance), done spontaneous painting onstage, moved with large snakes, but has begun working with images and video recordings of classical dance along with AI systems in newer work.

The performance work by these artists using the above repertoire of practices, often done as part of a constellation or ensemble, does not only form *communities of performance practice* for the duration of each project. It also establishes *communities of performance viewers* when they perform before audiences. Since the nonmainstream theatre community in Bangkok is not large but highly committed, and since rehearsal and performance spaces and meeting times are at a premium, many of the projects assemble an ensemble using the same people of the theatre *communities of theatre practice*. Using mostly Bangkok-based

performers and mostly the Thai language and cultural materials tied to Thai society, politics and culture, these working practices and those who create and perform them likewise create a wider *Bangkok theatre community* that constitute the Bangkok performance scenehese performance projects are often built of practices, materials and ideas that resonate with people in Bangkok, many of them are connected groups and stages outside of Bangkok, both in cities like Chiangmai and Hua Hin, but also in cities like Khon Kaen and Chiangrai. These translocal connections to other parts of Thailand include performances outside of Bangkok and also transnational ties to international performance networks. These connections include parts of the Bangkok performance-making scene part of both larger translocal and transnational theatre assemblages.

Mapping Performance Making Practices in Bangkok

This section of the paper will locate what some performing artists in Thailand do to seek new insights and embodied ways of feeling and moving that to share with others. The focus in this paper is on the work of Pichet Klunchun, Nikorn Saetang, Jitti Chompee, Jarunun Phantachat, Wichaya Artamat, Parnrut Kritchanchai, and Peangdao Jariyapun. These performing artists experiment and explore ways to identify and refine and communicate live forms of feeling and living differently. Their work emerges as part of practices that are at work in creating spaces that are dynamic, open, and evolving, and which often lack an institutional or discursive home. Their diverse, intertwined modes of knowledge-making through performance practice are involved with various constellations of nonmainstream contemporary performing arts traditions and disciplines in Bangkok are tied to nascent communities supporting artistic research and links the work of artists, academics, cultural workers and community actors. As part of these performance assemblages, they organize, design, create and evaluate performances in Thailand in ways that engage, challenge, and form communities of those who care about the performing arts.

A key feature of the performance in Bangkok is efforts to reconnect with hidden histories, revitalizing cultural memory and advocacy for agency, even as artists extend beyond the local to incorporate aspects of the global through their digital, technological and environmental concerns. Many of the performance projects that begin among performers or performance groups in Bangkok start with facts or experiences that are difficult to understand enigmas or puzzles in contemporary life or in their artistic practice.

In broad terms, those involved in theatre-making in Bangkok often start with an internal, often inarticulate, experience, feeling, irritation, tension or conflict that relates to an experience of something unsettling or confusing in their lives or in the world around them. They seek to explore and articulate this experience or feeling and to experiment with ways to make a performance. As connected to or part of an ensemble of those involved in performance-making, they turn to other people, spaces, and forms of support for them to develop their ideas.

To do this, they start exploring and experimenting, using a wide variety of forms of early research for discovery and focusing. These range from reading other plays or news or history, to looking on YouTube for related material, to writing out ideas in familiar theatrical forms, in stream of consciousness form, or bullet points, to sketching out images, to taking pictures or filming, or to move according to learned forms or to experiment with new types of movement, or moving in new spaces, to playing with objects and things that they find or that are around them. While these efforts are often individual efforts, they also connect to other people, things, spaces and bodies. Through this preliminary, exploratory searching, the performance makers considered are seeking not only what they want to communicate or tell,

but also how they want to tell it. Importantly, they are also already part of an assemblage of invention that involves them in a web or a network of practices.

Whatever approaches to this preliminary research used, the performance makers considered often end up with one of three major starting points for them to start articulating their project: focus on a script, focus on objects, focus on moving bodies. Since each of these focal points has a material and a shareable component, and is already part of an assemblage, each can be used to involve others, too, in its development. And just as scripts are never separate from objects (costumes, props) or bodies (as characters), so too are objects never apart from scripts or bodies, and bodies connected with scripts and objects. They form an open and flexible repertoire of practices that depend on the project, its space and time for rehearsal and performances, funding, as a collective research project for creating new collectives.

Toward a Minor Theatre: Situating the Bangkok Performance Ecosystem

The interconnected web of Bangkok contemporary performance-makers, together with their creative practices and the innovative performances they make, along with the audiences who view them, form a performance assemblage (Eeg-Tverbakk, 2023). Centered on nonmainstream performance making, this assemblage also has features of what Gilles Deleuze has called a "minor theatre" (Deleuze, 1993)

The Bangkok performancescape forms an "assemblage" or a dynamic composition that gathers together different elements into a perfrmance making process. This web or network of people, spaces, scripts, modes of improvisation, movement techniques, and object practices form a kind of diverse unity that emerges in its specificity by its interconnections. The Bangkok performance assemblage is open and does not form a totality but constitutes a collection of different parts, like the diverse parts of an ecosystem. By exploring and experimenting, many parts of the performance assemblage in Bangkok seek to create *affects* for performers and their audiences. Their aim is less to produce performances as recognizable objects that repeat what is familiar than to push themselves and their audiences to *feel something new or different with their whole (individual and collective) self* through their encounters with live performance. Deleuze sees the performance encounter as offering the corporeal transformations of (human and inhuman) bodies in connection with one another *as* a kind of thinking that is nonrepresentational and unconscious, one that is felt and embodied as *affect* or *sensation*.

The Bangkok contemporary theatre as assemblage takes the form of *minor theatre* (Deleuze 1993) as an effect of the work of Bangkok's contemporary performance-makers. As marginalized minor groups of performers who work outside or beneath mainstream commercial theatre, they are aware of and resistant to the constraints and opportunities of this *major theatre* and the more general *world of mainstream entertainment*. Thanaphol Accawatanyu (2024) characterizes the distinction like this: "The underground and independent scene is really separate from the commercial and mainstream scene. They don't watch our shows, and we don't watch theirs." Minor theatre uses performances to collectivize a new sensibility and subjectivity and to call into being new kinds of community. Minor theatre contains the possibility to express and to communicate another potential community, to forge the means of another awareness, another attunement, and another sensibility (1975: 32). For Deleuze, this minor theatre sets out to invent new values and facilitate the creation of a community who have hitherto been missing, not to mark out the conditions of an oppressed minority. Rather than focusing on representation or interpretation, minor theatre focuses on experimentation as a creative act of becoming.

Minor theatre is thus a type of research that recognizes the contingency and multiplicity - the hybridity - of all cultural performances. Rather than stress 'national identity and cultural authenticity' as opposed to global uniformity, minor theatre highlights the multiplicity or many-layeredness of its own cultural-historical formations. So minor theatre emerges from complex and multiple connections established between local and international forces and conditions and focuses on new ways of becoming, on relations, on what happens between: between actions, between affections, between perceptions. This locates minor theatre in a logic and an aesthetics of "and" and "in-between" that creates new configurations of language, movements and objects to perform a kind of living reality, experienced as a creative combination of forms, people, performance styles, and things.

Conclusion

This paper has explored – in a preliminary way – the heterogenous assemblage of methods and situated practices used by a few performance-makers in Bangkok. The artists developed these methods and practices in and through their distinctive working processes with other performance-makers and in relation communities of those who care about the performing arts. Developing productions involve creating focal points for artists developing performances that center on mainly on scripts, on bodies in motion, or on objects for many performance makers considered here refer to working with some form of scripts, objects and bodies in developing their work, but some focus more on scripts, some more on objects and some more on bodies as starting points and reference points in their theatre-making process. The ensemble of those involved for a given piece varies from project to project. While this work is typically collective in its development, often one or two people are commonly initiators of and deferred to in the development of the performance.

The performance-making repertoire aims to explore and experiment with modes of communicating sense-based and embodied perceptions and experiences through practices that center on scripts, bodies, and objects as the starting point and centerpiece of collective performance devising processes. They include using existing scripts, script adaptations, individual script development, collective script-writing, devising theatre, object theatre, viewpoint methods, movement improvisation, and the performance-making practices of *khon* (classical Thai masked dance), Anne Bogart's viewpoints, *butoh*, and Jacques Lecoq have significantly expanded the possibilities of theatre. By examining the works of specific authors and practitioners, we can gain a deeper understanding of these practices and their impact on contemporary performance.

The performing artists in Bangkok seek new insights and embodied ways of feeling and moving to share with others. Their artistic research emerges as they experiment and explore ways to enhance forms of feeling and living differently. This paper maps their work onto practices and spaces that are dynamic, open, and evolving, but which often lack an institutional or discursive home. The paper seeks to locate the diverse, intertwined modes of knowledge making through performance practice by using of examples from various performing arts traditions and disciplines in Thailand. It relates them to the communities supporting artistic research and links the work of artists, academics, cultural workers and community actors. Together, they are involved in organizing, designing, creating and evaluating performances in Thailand in ways that engage, challenge, and form communities of those who care about the performing arts. The paper addresses how performance practice research done by artists, academics and cultural organizers engages and shapes communities and how communities affect research done in performance-making processes.

These performance assemblages often work on topics and themes that engage how the political, historical, cultural, and social past silently affects present conditions and how people

– and live performances – communicate. The performance assemblages also form a diverse, complex but committed community. The interconnected web of Bangkok contemporary performances form what may be called, per Gilles Deleuze, a "minor theatre." The Bangkok contemporary performance community – both of performers and as audiences – is a community that is not one. It is an example of what Maurice Blanchot terms an "unavowable community," which is marked by difference, alterity, and variety, or perhaps what Jean-Luc Nancy calls a "disavowed community," which for him is a community based on the human passion for sharing in the here and now. In dialogue with those two connected concepts, *the contemporary theatre community in Bangkok is not one*. It forms a diverse ensemble of those engaged as a theatre-making assemblage that is minor.

Performing arts practices in Bangkok evoke and invoke silenced voices of those who are politically oppressed, economically disadvantaged and culturally neglected. But the performing arts also have the potential to both confront the life, culture and politics of today, and to provoke and dislocate audiences from their settled modes of representational "reality." In so doing, their performance practices can rupture the appearance of normality and make spaces for social and political alternatives, modes of political agency, and communities since such a space can offer opportunities for differences to emerge.

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Invisible Connections: Exploring Intergenerational Trauma Through Experimental Filmmaking

Megan Wonowidjoyo

Abstract

This project "Home Sweet Home" (2024) investigates the invisible connections between mother and daughter, exploring how trauma can silently pass through generations. The catalyst for this inquiry was a deeply personal discovery — both my mother and I became single mothers at the age of 39. This uncanny repetition led me to question whether unseen forces, inherited memories, or subconscious patterns bound our lives together. Drawing on memory studies and consciousness theories, the project examines concepts like postmemory, transgenerational trauma, and hauntology. Marianne Hirsch's postmemory theory suggests that the trauma of previous generations can be inherited through stories, emotions, and behaviors. Cathy Caruth and Freud argue that unprocessed trauma may unconsciously repeat itself through the "return of the repressed", while Derrida's hauntology implies that unresolved histories can "haunt" the present, shaping lives in unseen ways. Additionally, scientific studies in epigenetics reveal that environmental factors can alter gene expression, passing emotional responses like fear or anxiety to future generations. Methodologically, I employed experimental filmmaking to trace these invisible connections. I documented my mother's daily life over two years as she moved across Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, searching for a permanent home. This observational process unfolded alongside my own reflections as a single mother. Home videos, personal diaries, and intimate interviews became sites of memory, revealing echoes between our lives. The editing process embraced stream-of-consciousness techniques, weaving past and present through associative memory. Intercutting scenes from our lives highlighted emotional parallels, while nonlinear storytelling blurred temporal boundaries, creating a space where memories linger and repeat. Through this film, I seek to understand how memories — both personal and inherited — shape our identities and life choices. The work offers a poetic exploration of mother-daughter bonds, intergenerational trauma, and the invisible threads that connect us across time.

Keywords: Experimental Filmmaking, Mother–Daughter Relationship, Transgenerational Trauma, Postmemory, Hauntology, Inherited Memories

Introduction

The genesis of artmaking often begins with a question—quiet at first, then it returns. Some questions fade with time, while others linger, unresolved, haunting you, refusing to leave. For me, one such question emerged not in theory, but in crisis. At 39, I reached the lowest point of my life—facing a divorce and becoming a single mother. Though I was never close to my mother, I was surprised by an overwhelming urge to return to her. After I shared everything, she calmly revealed that she, too, became a single mother at 39. Startled by this uncanny coincidence, I began to question the invisible connections between my mother and me. Why do tragedies recur, fates repeat, and destinies mirror each other? Could there be forces beyond science—unconscious patterns or inherited memories—that bind our lives together as mother and daughter? This persistent urge to seek answers became the genesis of my experimental documentary *Home Sweet Home* (2024), a film born not only from personal crisis but from a deeper need to understand what cannot be easily explained.

This research seeks to answer a question unanswerable through simple logic. While some questions can be answered through science, others resist definitive answers. They

demand different methods—ones that engage memory, emotion, intuition and meaning making. This is where artmaking becomes not just expression, but inquiry.

Memory Studies

I feel the approach to answer this question of "invisible connections between the mother and daughter" can be found in memory studies. In "Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis" (1993), Richard Terdiman discusses the important role of memory- Memory is not passive but active and is constantly reconstructed in the present during the act of remembering. The act of remembering is not an activity isolated in the past but is connected to the present and future, as the past made present (Terdiman, 1993. pp. 7-9). Memory is not a fixed object made in the past, frozen in time and unchanging perpetually, but memory is an "act" and a "verb" (Rothberg, 2009. pp. 1-12).

Each time one recalls, he is recalling a memory that emphasizes a narrative to his present condition. In using memory to find the invisible connections between two lives, I am recalling key memories, drawing parallels and making meanings. Since the mother and daughter are not close, I do not focus directly on the mother and daughter relationship, but I juxtapose the memories of each of their own lives side by side as a comparison to construct and investigate their inner world, and uncover the invisible connections between them. While most stories in film are told in chronological order based on events along a linear timeline in a set time and place, memories work multi-directionally, going back and forth. Therefore, I also do not use the conventional structure of chronological order to answer this question but through the flow of memory.

Trauma as psychic wound

Why did our lives—my mother's and mine—each bear the weight of unexpected rupture at the same age? Is it mere coincidence, or are there deeper, unspoken patterns echoing across generations? Beyond the transmission of genes that shape physical traits, personality, or preferences, could there be something deeper—such as inherited memories or traumas—passed on as a mother brings a child into the world? How do I define this trauma- that seems to be invisible but returning to haunt the lives of the mother and daughter, one generation after another?

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, was one of the first to theorize and introduce the concept of trauma as an unassimilated psychological wound that disrupts the unconscious mind. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920/1955), Sigmund Freud introduces the idea of trauma as a wound of the mind, not the body—a psychic rupture that overwhelms the individual's capacity to process the event as it happens, as it happened too suddenly, unexpectedly and violently. Unlike a bodily wound that heals, Freud argues that a psychic wound remains open—unprocessed and unresolved. When trauma overwhelms the mind's capacity to register what is happening, it becomes unassimilated, lingering in the unconscious rather than being integrated into memory. This unprocessed trauma violates the psyche, disrupting one's sense of time, memory, and self.

Traumatic experiences that are too overwhelming for conscious awareness become repressed, but they do not simply disappear. Instead, they resurface indirectly in what Freud calls the "return of the repressed" (1915/1957), manifesting in dreams, slips of the tongue, neurotic symptoms and repetitive behaviors. The repressed desires, memories and traumas lay hidden in the unconscious, yet what the psyche represses inevitably finds expression, often in disguised or fragmented forms. Because the event is experienced too suddenly and unexpectedly, it cannot be fully grasped at the moment. Instead returns later—haunting the

survivor through nightmares, flashbacks, and compulsive repetitions. In his theory of "repetition compulsion" (1920), Freud suggests that unprocessed trauma does not return as a coherent memory, but as involuntary re-enactment—the survivor unconsciously relives aspects of the trauma without knowing why. Freud illustrates this with the biographical case of the Italian poet Torquato Tasso, who repeatedly and compulsively inflicted wounds on himself, as if re-enacting his suffering and anxiety. This pattern of behavior exemplifies how trauma re-emerges not only physically but psychically, manifesting as compulsive repetition and self-destructive acts. Tasso's case demonstrates Freud's idea that the unresolved nature of trauma drives survivors into cycles of unconsciously and compulsively repeating the traumatic experience.

Trauma as double wound

Building on Freud, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as a "double wound" in her influential book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). Caruth argues that trauma is not just the initial injury caused by a shocking event—it is also the second wounding that occurs later, when the traumatic event returns in haunting ways. These delayed responses, often an involuntary re-experiencing of that event, disrupts the survivor's present. Caruth describes trauma as not simply a psychological pathology or illness, but "a wound that cries out"—a reality that cannot be directly accessed, but is instead transmitted belatedly, through actions, language, and silence. Caruth argues that trauma is not just the violent event itself, but also the incomprehensibility of the event—its shocking and untimely arrival, which resists being fully known- an injury that is irreconcilable, unlocatable (Caruth, 1996, p. 19). What returns to haunt the survivor is not only the memory of the event, but the absence of understanding, the unanswered "why." Therefore, trauma is not simply a past event but an unclaimed experience, one that resists integration and continues to haunt the present, often across generations (Caruth, 1996). This recurrence is not tied to the original event alone, but to its unassimilated nature, leaving the survivor caught in a cycle of unresolved psychic injury.

Caruth further questions whether trauma is the moment of death, or the ongoing experience of surviving it? Just like the example of Tasso repeatedly injuring himself, Caruth interprets the compulsive repetition as a metaphor for trauma's paradoxical structure. In trauma, the victim does not consciously choose to relive the event, yet they repeatedly enact it, as if compelled by an unseen force. Lacan, reinterpreting Freud's dream of the burning child, explores this oscillation between loss and survival (Caruth, 1996). In the dream, a father—sleeping in the next room—hears the voice of his dead child whisper, "Father, don't you see I'm burning?" The child's body, left unattended, catches fire, and the father is awakened not by the flames, but by the voice of the child in his dream. This moment captures the essence of trauma: the delayed call to awaken to a loss that was not fully grasped in the moment it occurred. It is a plea to be seen, to be heard—a call that demands a new way of listening, even through silence and repetition.

This same delay—of knowledge, of understanding—is what Cathy Caruth identifies as the core of trauma in Freud's theory of neurosis. As Caruth (1996) explains, drawing on Freud, the dream becomes a space where the return of the repressed emerges in a haunting voice—"bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright" (Freud, 1920/1955, p. 13; Caruth, 1996, p. 72). For Caruth, what is significant is not only the repeated act of injury, but the "sorrowful voice" that emerges from it—a haunting call that reveals the unresolved.

Hauntology

Derrida's (1994) concept of hauntology, introduced in his book *Specters of Marx*, is a philosophical idea that explores how the past—especially unresolved or suppressed histories—continues to affect and shape the present, often in invisible or ghostly ways. There are three core ideas of hauntology: this first is the ghost as a metaphor. Playing on the word "ontology" or the study of being, hauntology suggests that our sense of being is always haunted by what is absent, lost, or forgotten. Derrida argues that just as ghosts linger, certain ideas, traumas, or historical injustices do not die—they return and persist, often subconsciously, shaping actions, thoughts, and identities.

The second idea of hauntology examines unresolved histories and repetition. Derrida argues that unfinished or repressed historical events, such as colonialism, war, trauma, or loss, are not really past. Instead, they "haunt" the present, creating repetitions, echoes, and disruptions. These "specters" or ghosts, might appear in cultural memory, personal trauma, or societal structures. Lastly, Derrida challenges the notion of linear time—past, present, future—as separate and ordered. In hauntology, the past intrudes upon the present, and the future is shaped by the ghosts of what has been left unresolved. The ghost is not just a remnant of the past, but also a call from the future—what still needs to be addressed.

Similarly, Marianne Hirsch's (2008) theory of postmemory suggests that the trauma of previous generations can be inherited not through direct experience, but through the stories, emotions, images and behaviors passed down within families. This inherited memory can feel as vivid, real and formative as direct, firsthand experience, shaping the identities and emotional mindsets of subsequent generations. In this way, postmemory echoes Derrida's concept of hauntology—the past returns not as history, but as a living ghostly presence, subtly directing lives through inherited pain, unresolved narratives, and unconscious repetition.

Emerging research in epigenetics supports the idea that trauma and memory can be passed across generations—not just culturally or emotionally, but biologically. This intergenerational transmission of behaviors is a result of genetic inheritance and epigenetic mechanisms, defined as environmental factors that can change gene expression within the DNA sequence. In one notable but controversial study (McDougall, 1927), parent mice were trained to navigate a maze, and their offspring—despite never having seen the maze—performed better than control mice. Similarly, other epigenetic studies have shown that fear and anxiety responses can be inherited, with changes in gene expression caused by environmental stressors passed down to future generations. In a study on inherited fear (Dias & Ressler, 2014), mice were conditioned to fear a cherry blossom-like scent by being mildly electric-shocked, and this fear response was passed on to their offspring. The researchers found changes in the structure of the mice offspring's brain, suggesting that the fear response was biologically passed down from the children to grandchildren, likely through epigenetic changes in the DNA. These findings reinforce the idea that trauma may not only be remembered through stories or behaviors—as postmemory suggests, but may also be biologically encoded—haunting descendants in both body and mind.

Methodology

In my documentary *Home Sweet Home* (2024), I explored whether the unresolved trauma of my mother's past had silently shaped the contours of my own life. The uncanny repetition of becoming a single mother at 39—the same age she became a single mother—raised unsettling questions about inherited pain, subconscious repetition, and the invisible threads that bind our lives.

Drawing on Freud's and Caruth's theories of trauma, I sought to find the places of trauma and wounds of the mind through sites of memory. Sites of memory (Nora, 1989) are

locations—whether physical, symbolic, or cultural—where collective memory is deposited, preserved, and reactivated. They serve as containers for remembering, often triggered by acts of remembrance or personal reflection. By filming my mother through a series of interviews and conversations, I traced her trauma while simultaneously confronting my own through narrated excerpts from my diary. Over two years, I documented her life as she moved across Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia in search of a permanent home. This observational process paralleled my journey as a single mother, weaving together our experiences. Home videos, personal diaries, and intimate interviews became sites of memory (Nora, 1989), revealing deep, often uncanny echoes between our lives.

Further informed by Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, I considered how my mother's trauma might have been transmitted not through direct experience but through stories, emotions, and pain passed down over time. While making the film, I observed my mother constantly repeating the same life stories in a compulsive manner. Her storytelling was not merely recollection, but survival—an echo of what Dori Laub wrote about Holocaust survivors: "They did not only need to survive to tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive" (Laub, 1992, p. 78). In the stories, her trauma emerged as a wound that speaks.

This intergenerational transmission echoes Derrida's notion of hauntology, where the past does not remain buried but returns in spectral form—haunting the present, passing from mother to daughter through patterns we may not fully understand. My film thus becomes both an act of mourning and inquiry, tracing how inherited memory might shape or even determine the repetition of personal tragedy. It does not seek to resolve the trauma, but to trace its echoes—to ask: What is its origin? Why does it persist? Where does it end? Why am I still alive? Each scene becomes a repetition, circling back to the "return of the repressed"—a haunting that insists on being remembered.

Streams of Consciousness

In my film experiment, I explored the invisible trauma between my mother and me. I adopted a theoretical framework of stream of consciousness, which aligns with Freud's trauma theory that repressed memories reside in the unconscious. Stream of consciousness (James, 1890) refers to a narrative technique that represents the continuous flow of subjective thoughts, feelings, and memories in an individual's mind. William James, who coined the term, described consciousness as "a river or a stream… a succession of states of consciousness, each emerging out of the last and melting into the next" (James, 1890, p. 239).

This technique is most famously employed in the works of Virginia Woolf in her explorations of memory, trauma, and the fluidity of subjective experience. Woolf used the stream of consciousness in her writing, particularly in her novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Woolf, who wrote the book in her forties, admitted she found it difficult to describe her feelings for her mother, stating that "the presence of her mother obsessed" her (Woolf, 1985, p. 80). Her mother's invisible and recurring presence compelled her to write the story, where she described her mother as the "subject of this memoir." Reflecting on the process of writing, Woolf likened it to a fragmented inner experience: "I see myself as a fish in a stream; deflected; held in place; but cannot describe the stream" (Woolf, 1985, p. 80).

In a similar way, I spent many months editing this documentary with multiple versions and reworkings. The early version had a linear approach in its timeline and narrative, but in the later versions I shifted to a stream of consciousness editing technique, tracing memories and connections between my life and my mother's—weaving our subjective lives as interconnected streams of memories.

In *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), we see Woolf's masterful use of stream of consciousness. "She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that

he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air" (Woolf, 2000, p. 194). This passage shows how Clarissa Dalloway's inner thoughts drift seamlessly between her emotions, Septimus's tragic fate, and sensory experiences, like the clock's chimes, demonstrating how stream of consciousness merges internal monologue, memory, and immediate perception. In another scene (Woolf, 2000, p. 110), where Lady Bruton considers attending Clarissa's party, she soon drifts into sleep on her living room sofa. Her thoughts leap from place to place, person to person, from familiar scenes of her childhood home to her grandfather's memories of war and trauma. In a half-dream state—half-asleep on the sofa, half-aware of reality—she imagines herself holding a baton as her grandfather had, "commanding battalions marching to Canada" (Woolf, 2000, p. 111). The narrative flows with a surreal, poetic rhythm, led by the character's thoughts.

The stream of consciousness technique is not limited to literature; filmmakers like Chris Marker and Terrence Malick have adapted it to cinema. Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1983) weaves a fragmented, poetic narrative through voiceovers, personal letters, and disjointed images, mimicking the associative flow of memory and subjective thought. Similarly, Malick's films, such as *The Tree of Life* (2011), use impressionistic visuals, whispered voiceovers, and fluid editing to evoke a stream of consciousness, blurring the boundaries between past and present, reality and memory.

This resonates deeply with me: how the stream of consciousness connects one life with another. I feel a deep connection to Woolf's method of stream of consciousness, where truth emerges through the intimate layers of one's private thoughts. The narrative jumps fluidly from one person to another, with each stream of consciousness drawing us into the very shoes of its thinker, immersing us in their inner world. Inspired by this, I used my mother's voice narrating her stories and my own voice-over narration of my diary entries to seek the hidden truth and connections in our lives. The stream of consciousness technique allowed me to blur the lines between the conscious thoughts in the characters' external reality and the inner world of their unconscious mind.

Editing as Sites of Memory

Using the stream of consciousness as a conceptual framework, it served as a guiding idea and creative approach that shaped my film's aesthetic and narrative structure. Film editing played a vital role, as the footage served only as raw material to explore transformations of memory. By treating raw footage as sites of memory (Nora, 1989), I cast aside the need to follow a linear storytelling structure and instead edited according to the logic of memory, juxtaposing past, present, and future. Editing was not merely a replication of a predetermined script, but a material thinking process (Carter, 2004)—thinking in, through, and with the film—where each cut became an act of inquiry.

By editing through the stream of consciousness, images, sounds, characters, people, places, objects, and actions all served as sites of memory to construct many possible memory transformations and narrative developments. In that sense, the framework of memory did not restrict the film to the logic of real time and space in the external world; instead, the film followed a new space-time of memory. Through intuition, I explored multiple paths, as in a dream, crossing the boundaries of space and time, jumping from the life of the mother to the daughter's, where the past sits beside the present and future, as the connection of shots is led by the flow of streams of consciousness. This non-linear, intuitive approach opened up a dynamic space where the connection of shots flowed like thought itself, reflecting the fragmented and associative nature of memory. It created a freedom in creative thought formulation, where every image, word, sound, or action could potentially trigger a memory and

lead to the next narrative progression. In this way, the possibility of memory association is endless.

For example, the film's opening shot—a darkened room with an open window—suggests the daughter's post-traumatic contemplation of suicide. Amidst night sounds of crickets and passing cars, a past memory emerges of a conversation with her son, asking what her relationship was like with her mother. Here we see that through streams of consciousness, the edit abandons the logic of a linear timeline. Through a new logic of memory association, the past meets the present in a fragmented but deeply personal and intimate inner world. Through this process, editing becomes not just a technical assembly but a form of creative thinking—where each image, word, or sound holds the potential to spark new memory connections, allowing trauma and recollection to emerge and transform.

Memory association

Editing through memory is a deeply personal process, revealing inner thoughts and unspoken connections. In *Home Sweet Home*, the association of memories between mother and daughter unfolds like a delicate, intuitive game—each thread of connection offering new meaning. Memory associations emerge through sound, color, movement, or image, linking one thought to the next and creating a dynamic web of resonances.

Memory association is one of the techniques in stream of consciousness, weaving past and present through layered connections. It refers to the mental connection between different ideas, images, or sensations based on similarity, contrast, or other relationships. Memory association creates a memory trigger by linking elements such as images, sounds, colors, or movements through sensorial experience or felt connections rather than logical sequence. This technique mirrors the way human memory and thought processes work—in a fluid, non-linear, and often unpredictable manner.

For example, in the film, a cut from a childhood scene of the daughter to a contemporary one where she becomes a mother in adult life is based on an emotional connection of longing rather than a chronological or spatial link. Another example occurs when the mother recounts her experience as an Indonesian Chinese diaspora bringing her four young daughters to Singapore, and the film cuts to a parallel scene of her now-adult daughter raising her young son, teaching him household chores. This associative cut connects their lives through the shared thread of motherhood, blurring temporal boundaries and highlighting emotional parallels. Here, the edit becomes not merely a technical process but a poetic space where memories linger, repeat, and transform—capturing the complex interplay of personal history and generational echoes.

The return of the repressed

The return of the repressed is defined as the re-emergence of trauma, or a haunting voice of the wound that cries out. The re-emergence of this haunting voice appears in the film at several moments as ruptures in women's lives. One example is a close-up shot of the daughter's eyes, as she turns and watches her husband walk out of her life. This scene repeats at different junctures in both the mother's and daughter's lives when they experience the blow of trauma, as the sudden violent psychic wound returns. In its first appearance, the close-up of the eyes is juxtaposed with a scene of shouting and domestic violence, followed by the daughter's voice asking her mother, "Have you ever truly loved a man?" In its second appearance, the husband abandons her, chasing the children and her out of the family house. This image is juxtaposed with the mother's narration that the love between man and woman can suddenly change, describing how, despite her submissiveness, she too was betrayed by her

husband when he had a mistress. The close-up of the eyes becomes a metaphor for the return of the repressed, where the eyes witness again and again the recurrence of trauma, moving from one woman's life to the next.

In this stream of thought, we see that beside moments of death and trauma, a parallel question emerges: Why did you fall in love with a man who eventually led to your death? Why are you still alive, or why did the death happen? These images of the woman's eyes watching moments of trauma—in both the mother's and daughter's lives—become the only witness to this death, seeing but unable to save either from tragedy, and not understanding why they are alive after death.

In Unclaimed Experience, Cathy Caruth describes trauma as "a wound that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound" (1996, p. 4). The voice in the film therefore seeks not just to find the connection between mother and daughter—which lies in the trauma—but also to ask why it returns. Through the stream of consciousness, memory narrates this story of the return of the repressed through disjointed, non-linear recollections between mother and daughter that mirror trauma's belatedness and incomprehensibility.

Dream interpretation

Sigmund Freud describes trauma as an unassimilated psychological wound that disrupts the unconscious mind. This unprocessed trauma does not simply disappear, but resurfaces and manifests in disguised forms, such as in dreams. Beyond the verbal interviews and diary entries, which record the women's memories in their conscious state of mind, the film delves into their dreams to explore the unconscious.

Their dreams become a window into the unconscious, a way to peer into the inner world of the characters. Key dreams of the mother appear in the film—one is a dream she has right after a night contemplating suicide, where a spiritual being gives her hope of a turn of fortune. For the daughter, she has a recurring dream of her son being rejected in school. Both dreams capture a sense of anxiety in both women, represented by a spinning room or building, creating a vertigo effect. This overwhelming feeling of fear and anxiety cripples both women, as the environment around them moves or spins out of control.

This spinning building becomes a metaphor for an unconscious wound that lingers throughout the film—it is interwoven into scenes where both mothers worry about their child, peppered throughout daily activities of giving the child tuition, preparing meals, playing with the children, and reading bedtime stories. It creates a blurring between the real and the surreal, as the unconscious, unprocessed trauma becomes embedded in the heart of both mother and daughter. This unconscious state of hauntology reveals a form of inherited traumatic memory being passed down from mother to daughter.

Discussion

In making this experimental film about trauma, I realized that using memory as a narrative framework offers both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it creates spontaneity, as surprising juxtapositions reveal new meanings. The non-linear process and the free association of memory allowed for creative expression, where the past, present, and future coexist without the limitations of real-world time and space.

On the other hand, using memory as a method of filmmaking also exposes personal and often deeply private aspects of the characters. This places them in positions of vulnerability. I was fortunate and grateful that my mother was very open to being filmed, but I had to be careful that none of the other characters' names or present faces were revealed in the film. As the other main character, whose life was placed under magnified scrutiny, I felt exposed and nervous

about allowing audiences to witness such intimate moments, particularly those involving trauma.

Is memory reliable?

More critically, I questioned whether memory—revealing the private and intimate thoughts of a person—was an effective method for exploring truth in this documentary. I wanted to be honest with myself. I pushed myself hard to tell the truth, to seek the truth, and to confront the difficult and dark places that people would normally avoid, in the hope of finding the roots of trauma and perhaps some resolution. However, debates persist over whether memory—which, by nature, is subjective, imaginative, and fallible (Walker, 2005)—can serve as a reliable path to truth. Shouldn't truth be grounded purely in objective facts? How can memory's subjective nature form a basis for truth?

This problem of subjectivity is embedded in the very nature of memory, where the act of remembering involves a transformation of the remembered event or experience (Saunders, 2008). "The return of a memory" (Ricoeur, 2004) takes the form of an image—what Bergson calls the memory-image—in which the production of an image involves both actual memory and imagination, containing inherent subjectivity. Furthermore, the changeable nature of memory, as being "continuously modified in the present" (Hirsch, 1981), adds to this subjectivity. Yet, this very subjectivity constitutes the essence of how memory functions, as an integral part of how the human mind develops cognitive understanding and constructs meaning in the world.

Although the process of memory is invisible, there is an integrity and consistency in its logic and its search for truth (Casey, 1972). Freud (1960) describes this search as the unconscious dream wish, where the dream turns this way and that until it finds the most opportune path. I used the same method of stream of consciousness in editing the film, where the cuts follow the path of memory or dream. The unconscious search of memory struggles to discover an unknown thought without fully knowing what it is (Bollas, 1987). By recalling and processing past memories of what was seen, heard, and experienced, the act of remembering becomes a cognitive process. This search continues until it reaches a feeling of déjà vu—a moment of recognition where truth declares itself and the act of remembering is completed (Ricoeur, 2004). Aristotle describes this search for truth as orthos logos—right reason—where the faithfulness of memory affirms its epistemic, or knowledge-validating, dimension (Ricoeur, 2004).

In the context of documentary filmmaking, Aufderheide (2007) describes the process as a vehicle and catalyst, enabling the discovery of both a fictional part of ourselves and the most real part.

Is there a cure to trauma?

In the course of editing the film, I was led to this question: is there any cure for trauma? Turning to memory studies, both Freud and Caruth suggest that trauma resists complete resolution, though each offers a different perspective.

Freud, particularly in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), describes trauma as an unassimilated psychic wound that returns through compulsive repetition. He did not propose a "cure" for trauma in the conventional sense but believed that psychoanalysis—through working-through, interpretation, and making the unconscious conscious—could help individuals integrate the traumatic experience into their psychic life. However, he acknowledged that some traumas, such as war neuroses, are so extreme that full resolution may not be possible.

Caruth, particularly in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), builds on Freud's work and argues that trauma is inherently unclaimable and irreconcilable, as it is not fully knowable. Its return manifests as a "haunting" that cannot be completely cured. Caruth emphasizes that trauma's core is the missed encounter with the event itself—it wasn't fully experienced in real time, so it haunts later as flashbacks, nightmares, or silence. For Caruth, listening and witnessing are crucial, but full closure may not be achievable.

Many contemporary trauma theorists and clinicians suggest that while trauma may not be "cured" in the sense of erasure, healing and integration are possible through therapy. Approaches such as narrative therapy help survivors process and re-integrate traumatic memories. Community support and witnessing (Laub, 1992) are also essential. Artistic practices, such as this experimental documentary *Home Sweet Home* (2024), offer alternative pathways to articulate, externalize, and engage with trauma's unspeakable core.

Another filmmaker who uses memory to explore life's questions is Krzysztof Kieślowski. His films offer insights into "curing" trauma through memory as an editing technique (Wonowidjojo, 2023). In examining why certain tragedies happen in someone's life, Kieślowski employs a technique called "variants of fate" to question whether a different path was possible. This is evident in his films, where he gives the main character a second chance through a second life. In *The Double Life of Véronique* (1991), two women—Weronika from Poland and Véronique from France, born on the same day and with the same appearance—share a mysterious connection, as if they are living the same life. By juxtaposing these parallel lives, Kieślowski questions whether living in different countries might lead to a different fate, potentially preventing the tragedy of death. One life ending in death serves as a warning to the other to live differently.

Expanding on this technique, Kieślowski uses a double life again in *Three Colors: Red* (1994), breaking the boundary of time and space. He introduces Auguste, who serves as a younger version of the retired judge Kern—a hypothetical "double life" through contemporary flashback. This structure heals Kern's trauma by altering his destiny.

Similarly, in *Home Sweet Home* (2024), I employed the variants of fate technique. Despite an open conversation with her mother, the daughter fails to find resolution to her childhood trauma. In a contemporary flashback, the adult daughter breaks the barrier of time and returns to the past to address her younger self directly. She speaks to the psychic wound of trauma in an attempt to heal the unresolved pain and bring peace to the child. The reconciliation occurs through this flashback at the film's end, confronting the irreconcilable trauma.

Another variant of fate appears in the film, attempting to "cure" the trauma running through both women's lives. The film's structure—juxtaposing the two lives of mother and daughter—can be read as either the same life haunted by the same trauma, or as a double life running in parallel as variants of fate. While the mother's life ends in regret, rejecting a second chance at love, the ending serves as advice to the daughter: you still have a chance to live happily. The connection between these double lives functions as both a warning and a guide—the mother's failed life compels the daughter to seek happiness and fulfillment.

Conclusion

Through this film, I sought to find answers to a question in life that cannot be easily resolved through logic. It also raised urgent questions: Am I making this film to understand trauma? To make sense of its repetition? To interrupt its intergenerational transmission?

Using stream of consciousness as a conceptual framework, I translated trauma theories into an approach to editing that mirrors the human mind's unconscious processing of memory. This experiment demonstrates how film can become a space where irreconcilable trauma may be approached—not necessarily resolved, but where the voice of the psychic wound can be seen, heard, acknowledged, and accepted, serving as a witness.

My experiment in *Home Sweet Home* offers an original contribution by extending trauma theory into the realm of hybrid documentary practice. By interweaving personal memory, family history, and experimental editing, the film reveals how creative methods can give form to experiences that resist representation. This process not only challenges linear storytelling but also opens new possibilities for understanding how trauma is transmitted across generations.

The memory approach I employed—layering the conscious and unconscious, personal and collective—provides a creative avenue for processing unlocatable trauma, understanding intergenerational bonds, and articulating the invisible. Especially in the digital age, where digital memory becomes increasingly pervasive and fragmented, this experiment suggests a pressing need for further research into how hybrid documentaries can explore the multifaceted dimensions of memory. Using memory as a search for truth, films become not just a medium of storytelling, but an active space of inquiry, witness, and potential healing.

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VISUAL STORYTELLING AS A CATALYST FOR HEALTH EQUITY AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Medical animations are valuable tools for patient education, helping to bridge knowledge gaps in health literacy. However, unlike didactic animations, narrative-based patient education allows audiences to learn from patients' lived experiences. These stories go beyond medical facts, exploring the emotional, social, and mental aspects of illness, fostering empathy and influencing attitudinal and behavioural changes. Despite their potential, research on narrative animations in patient education remains limited, particularly in the fields of cancer and genetics. This study investigates how animated patient narratives can improve genetic literacy and engagement among racially diverse communities. Two animated narratives were developed through an interdisciplinary, iterative production process involving animators, clinicians, and patients. Each film featured characters from different racial backgrounds navigating hereditary cancer predisposition syndromes. Simplified diagrams were used to explain genetic inheritance and disease symptoms, to overcome health literacy barriers. Cultural motifs were incorporated to enhance relatability, and shared local elements, such as public transport (MRT), military service, and public housing (HDB), ensured that narratives transcended racial boundaries. Crucially, the narratives concluded positively to reinforce self-efficacy and encourage proactive health behaviours. The study, which involved 260 participants, assessed engagement, knowledge retention, and perceptions of racial representation. Findings showed increased understanding and interest in genetics, with audiences responding positively to racial representation and expressing openness to learning from characters outside their backgrounds. The results presented in this paper highlight how artistic storytelling can foster cultural specificity and shared understanding, positioning narrative animation as a powerful tool for inclusive health communication. This research contributes to the broader discourse on artistic research in public health, demonstrating its potential to shape more informed, resilient, and empathetic communities.

Keywords: Animated patient narratives, culturally sensitive patient education, Health equity, Visual storytelling

INTRODUCTION

Health literacy and education

Health status is a multifactorial outcome influenced by biological predispositions and socioeconomic determinants such as income, access to care, and education(Chelak & Chakole, 2023). Health literacy—the ability to obtain, understand, and use information to make informed health decisions and behaviour (Nutbeam & Lloyd, 2021)—has been found to mediate the relationship between socioeconomic status and health disparity(Stormacq et al., 2019). Thus, improving health literacy through accessible health education is a viable intervention for promoting health equity, especially among marginalised communities.

Traditional health education often adopts a didactic approach, where arguments are substantiated with empirical evidence to persuade behavioural change (Dudley et al., 2023). However, such methods typically lack emotional resonance and may be inaccessible to individuals with lower health or general literacy levels. To bridge this gap, there is a growing research field on narrative-based communication, where health information is embedded within stories that draw on lived experiences to foster empathy, increase engagement, and improve understanding (Adebayo et al., 2020; Dudley et al., 2023; Ma et al., 2025).

Narratives in health education are compelling because they help audiences move beyond the clinical aspects of the disease to engage with the illness's lived, emotional, and social dimensions. Indeed, this is the foundation of narrative medicine, which encourages clinicians and educators to acknowledge, interpret, and respond to patient stories to build trust, support shared decision-making, and humanise the clinical encounter (Murphy et al., 2017). Frank (1995) and Greenhalgh & Hurwitz (1999) have argued that stories shape not only what is known about illness but also how it is experienced, acted upon, and remembered.

Narrative communication has demonstrated greater persuasive power than purely expository forms, particularly in contexts that require emotional processing and attitudinal change. For instance, rural elders in South Korea reported greater understanding of diabetes and were more confident in performing health behaviours after undergoing narrative-based diabetes education (Lee & Lee, 2022). Additionally, a meta-analysis of 25 empirical studies exploring the effects of health narrative on persuasion showed a small but significant persuasive effect, especially concerning disease prevention and detection, such as cancer screenings (Shen et al., 2015).

The Power of Visual Storytelling in Health Education

While written narrative medicine is powerful, it may still pose accessibility barriers for those with lower literacy or narrative competence. A growing body of research has emerged to explore visual storytelling in health education to address this. Fields such as graphic medicine, which present healthcare discourse through comics and graphic novels, demonstrate how visual narratives can demystify complex concepts, foster reflection, and empower patient voices (Czerwiec et al., 2015). For instance, a scoping review of narrative-based health communication tools found that multimedia formats were more persuasive and accessible than purely written narratives, particularly among audiences with lower literacy levels (Dudley et al., 2023). Although comics can enhance health education clarity, their interpretation is not universal (Cohn, 2020). For example, individuals who belong to ethnic groups that do not have a strong tradition of reading comics, such as Aboriginal communities in Australia, have been shown to struggle with understanding sequential panel narratives (Roque & Rumsey, 2012).

In contrast, a systematic review of 15 studies found that animations, both didactic and narrative, improved short-term recall of health information among patients from middle- to high-income countries across various health settings, such as obtaining informed consent

before treatment (Hansen et al., 2024). Indeed, animated health narratives offer distinct advantages, as supported by multiple cognitive psychology theories. Its temporal nature allows for chunking of information into smaller, more digestible units, thus reducing the burden required for mental processing (Sweller, 1988, 2011). Furthermore, integrating narration, audio, visual and textual elements activated multiple information-processing pathways in the brain. This multimedia approach encourages connections between new information and existing knowledge, thus improving understanding and recall (Mayer, 2005; Mayer & Moreno, 2003). This is demonstrated by Onuora et al.'s (2021) a study which showed that frequent exposure to dramatised animated COVID-19 narratives was associated with better recall of health information among social media users in Nigeria.

Cultural Representation and Sensitivity

Cultural representation in healthcare refers to acknowledging and including diverse cultural backgrounds, beliefs, values and practices within the healthcare system (Kreuter & McClure, 2004). It involves understanding and respecting the cultural contexts of individuals and communities and ensuring that healthcare services are sensitive to their needs and preferences. This is especially important for promoting health equity by ensuring that all individuals, regardless of background, have fair access to information and services that support their well-being.

In the case of education, culturally sensitive health education, defined as the intentional and evidence-based adaptation of content to align with recipients' cultural backgrounds to improve the persuasiveness of messages, promotes health equity by increasing health literacy. While culturally sensitive health interventions have been associated with higher patient satisfaction, improved health outcomes, and increased adherence to treatment (Thomas et al., 2004), care is required when embedding culture into health education to avoid stereotyping or stigmatisation. As Griffith et al. (2024) warned, portraying racially minoritised populations as "other" or pathologically different can reinforce stigma rather than empowerment. Comparative messaging highlighting disparities, especially when framed around failure or deficiency, can induce shame or helplessness rather than motivate change. This is demonstrated by Nicholson et al.'s (2008) study which showed that education tools emphasising Black-White disparities in colon cancer outcomes resulted in more negative emotional reactions and decreased willingness to undergo screening, compared to tools that addressed colon cancer outcomes only within the African-American community.

Cultural sensitivity could be achieved by incorporating the experience, norms, behavioural patterns and values into health communication tools. Resnicow et al. (1999) proposed that cultural sensitivity could be adopted through surface structure and deep structure tailoring. Surface structure tailoring refers to incorporating observable characteristics of the community such as food, appearance and language. On the other hand, deep structure tailoring embeds culturally specific forces that influence health behaviours and outcomes, such as core values, norms, and stressors. While surface structure may appear superficial, increasing the interest and relevance of health education materials to the intended community is essential (Resnicow et al., 1999). A study conducted in Malaysia explored the acceptability of a culturally tailored video narrative intervention among stroke survivors(Appalasamy et al., 2020). Their qualitative results revealed that patients found the narratives engaging, comprehensive and informative.

As a multicultural society like Singapore, composed primarily of Chinese, Malay, and Indian ethnic groups, presents both a challenge and an opportunity for culturally attuned health communication. The Health Promotion Board (HPB) and the Ministry of Health have made deliberate efforts to reach diverse communities through translated materials and culturally

tailored campaigns. For example, *Our Community Spirit Dikir Barat* uses *dikir barat*—a Malay musical performance that combines rhythmic chanting, singing, and hand gestures—to promote reduced sugar and salt intake during the festive season (hpbsg, 2025). Another notable example is the use of mini-drama series aired around major holidays such as Chinese New Year, Hari Raya and Deepavali, where health messages are embedded within culturally resonant family narratives. The mini-series *Let's Break the Cycle* shares the story of an Indian family navigating a healthier lifestyle through reduced sugar, salt intake and an active lifestyle (hpbsg, 2024). The series adopted both surface structures, such as ethnic dishes, outfits and music, as well as deep structures, such as emphasis on family relationships.

The Health Issue: Hereditary Cancer and Genetic Testing

Cancer is a significant health concern worldwide, with 5-10% of all cancers linked to inherited genetic mutations (Hart et al., 2020). Identifying individuals at risk of developing a hereditary condition is crucial for early detection and prevention. Cascade genetic testing allows family members of a person diagnosed with a genetic condition to determine if they carry the same mutation, empowering at-risk individuals to make informed health decisions (Daly et al., 2023). However, in Singapore, the uptake of genetic testing remains lower than the global average (Courtney et al., 2019), thus limiting the potential for proactive healthcare. A qualitative study of 24 in-depth interviews revealed that high testing costs, perceived inability to cope with test results, and insufficient knowledge about genetic testing were some factors discouraging genetic testing among women in Singapore (Sun et al., 2020). Compared to the Chinese and Indian women, Malay women were more likely to present to the hospital at more advanced stages of cancer progression (Bhoo-Pathy et al., 2012). Focused group discussions among 27 Malay women in Singapore revealed that cultural values, reliance on traditional medicine, religious beliefs and family input strongly influenced decisions to undergo breast cancer screenings and genetic tests (Shaw et al., 2018). This underscores the critical need for patient education that is not only culturally sensitive but also emotionally resonant and accessible to diverse audiences.

Research Gap and Study Aims

There is a notable gap in research on the acceptability and effectiveness of animated patient narratives in improving genetic literacy in the Southeast Asian context. Few have explored how transdisciplinary, practice-based artistic research can create credible and immersive health education tools by combining visual storytelling, animated narratives and clinical insight, and inspired by patient experiences.

Shaffer et al. (2018) Identify three key components that determine narrative impact: audience interest (including realism and source credibility), involvement (through identification and empathy), and immersion (engagement and self-projection into the story). Building on this framework, this study investigates how narrative animation can address these dimensions while maintaining cultural specificity and cross-cultural resonance.

The study presented in this paper aims to 1) examine how transdisciplinary collaboration between animators and healthcare professionals can inform the creation of narrative-based animated patient education tools; 2) explore how cultural motifs—both surface and deep—can enhance the acceptability and relatability of culturally sensitive animated patient stories among a culturally diverse population, 3) compare the effects of different narrative styles (linear vs non-linear) on its effectiveness to engage and improve understanding Of genetics.

METHODS

Animation Design

The animation team collaborated with clinicians from the National Cancer Centre, Singapore, which included oncologists and genetic counsellors. Patient stories, gathered through past research and clinician observations, were used to inspire the narrative content of the animated short films. Through an iterative process, the team developed a framework to guide the design of the animated patient stories, leading to the creation of two short films with the following common elements:

1. The story features a specific racial group, but could resonate with a broad audience.
2. The story embeds a Singaporean localised narrative
3. The story had to promote a positive and empowering message, encouraging proactive health behaviours.

Following the development of the framework, the medical and animation teams collaborated to script and storyboard the animations. The animation's progression was subjected to rigorous review and discussion with healthcare professionals to guarantee the clinical accuracy and suitability of the animated content. The animation team integrated insights gained from these consultations, resulting in modifications that aligned the animations with identified preferences to enhance the overall efficacy of the visual narrative.

A consensus was made to feature two different cancer predisposition syndromes, Familial Adenomatous Polyposis (FAP) and Neurofibromatosis Type 1 (NF1) as they vary in clinical presentations, symptoms and age of onset. FAP is a genetic condition characterised by formations of thousands of polyps in the gastrointestinal tract (Lauricella et al., 2024). Patients with this condition have an increased risk of developing colorectal cancer. Thus, standard clinical practice involves regular screenings and surgery in adulthood to minimise cancer risk(Lauricella et al., 2024). Additionally, at-risk family members are advised to undergo genetic tests to determine their genetic predisposition to the condition. Like FAP, NF1 is a cancer predisposition syndrome that is detected through genetic testing. Symptoms typically manifest as bumps on the skin, called neurofibromas, which may be painful to the touch (Legius et al., 2021). While no cure is available, detecting this condition could help patients manage its symptoms.

The two films were designed with different narrative styles to investigate the role of narrative style on cognitive and emotional engagement. The NF1 film follows a linear narrative structure. In contrast, the FAP film adopts a non-linear structure, featuring a short whimsical animated sequence. Nonetheless, both films integrated a segment explaining the disease symptoms, the affected demographic, and the genetic mechanism. The filmmaking process and how culturally sensitive elements are inserted in the films have been extensively discussed in (Benvenuti & Spark, 2024).

Evaluation

Following the films' production, a mixed-methods survey was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness and acceptability of the animations in facilitating genetic health education among a culturally diverse Singapore population. Ethical approval was obtained from the SingHealth Centralised Institutional Review Board (Reference: 2024/2001).

Participants

The study recruited 260 participants, consisting of patients and the public, aged 21 or older, from the National Cancer Centre, Singapore (NCCS). Participants were recruited through convenience sampling and in the clinic waiting rooms within NCCS. Inclusion criteria include ethnicity, where participants had to be Chinese, Malay or Indian. Exclusion criteria

include the inability to read and understand English and give informed consent. Adhering to the ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects, all participants had to provide informed consent before they could be involved in the study.

Procedure

Potential participants in the clinic waiting rooms were first approached by the researcher and invited to participate. Details of the study would be extensively described to the participant, and any queries were clarified to ensure informed consent. Once informed consent was obtained, participants scanned a QR code to access the online survey on their phones or tablets. The survey consisted of three parts: a pre-test questionnaire, animation viewing, and a post-test questionnaire. Participants had to answer all questions before submitting the survey to prevent data missingness. Each participant watched both animations, but the viewing order was randomly assigned to control for order effects. To ensure participants watched the entire film, playback controls such as fast forward and pause were disabled. To compensate for their participation, participants were reimbursed with SGD10.

Survey measures

The medical research team developed a genetic literacy and perception of animation questionnaire. To evaluate the effectiveness of the animations, pre- and post-understanding and interest in genetics were measured using 5-point Likert scales.

Additionally, the two films were compared regarding informativeness, engagement, pace, appeal, and simplicity using a 7-point Likert scale in the post-test questionnaire. Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to determine statistical significance of the result, which was set at $p<.05$. This test was chosen as the data was ordinal and collected within individuals. To understand participants' reception of the portrayal of ethnicity and culture in the animations, the post-test questionnaires include 5-point Likert scales assessing the acceptability of portraying different ethnicities and learning from animations featuring characters of other ethnicities.

The post-test survey also included two open-response questions to understand why participants preferred animation.

RESULTS

Animation A: NF-1

The film uses a straightforward narrative structure to share the story of a fictional Chinese boy, Alan, navigating life with NF1. The narrative begins with Alan's carefree childhood, where his playful spirit is symbolised by his habit of drawing on his skin (Figure 1A). His close bond with his Ah-ma (grandmother) is comforting, grounding him in familial warmth. However, as Alan grows older, his awareness of the visible bumps on his skin caused by NF1 intensifies, gradually eroding his self-esteem (Figure 1B). He is shown admiring the tattoos featured outside a tattoo parlour but quickly retreats with his hood pulled up in shame.

The scene transitions to a medical check-up in National Service—a significant rite of passage for all Singaporean males. During the consultation, a doctor suggests that Alan undergo genetic testing, explaining that he may have NF1. This moment introduces a brief explanatory sequence, where the doctor provides a simple overview of NF1's symptoms and genetic basis. Back home, Alan's quiet struggle is met with silent understanding. Sensing his discomfort, Ah-ma offers steady comfort and draws on his skin, echoing his childhood habit. The film culminates in a moment of transformation as Alan chooses to get a tattoo. Rather than serving as a mask, the tattoo symbolises his journey towards self-acceptance. This is strengthened by the acceptance shown by his Ah-ma and peers, despite the negative connotations of tattoos in the Asian culture.

This animation incorporates local and cultural visual motifs to enhance emotional resonance. Alan's military uniform, crew-cut hairstyle (Figure 1C), and HDB flat setting are distinctly Singaporean, while his interactions with Ah-ma are conducted in Mandarin, emphasising his Chinese cultural background (Figure 1D). Familial warmth is further highlighted through scenes of shared meals—a symbol of care. Even the Chinese calendar in the background reinforces cultural authenticity. Medical information is conveyed, with symptoms visualised through figures of small characters that look like hands, making the concepts accessible (Figure 2). An extract of the NF1 animation can be viewed here (https://vimeo.com/1024632499/0192158ebf?share=copy).



Figure 1

Representing lived experiences and cultural context in animation A (A) Young Alan playing with doodles scribbled on his skin. (B) Alan, in a hoodie to hide his symptoms, retreating from Ah-Ma's offering of food. (C) Alan confidently interacting with his peers during National Service, showing psychosocial resilience despite his condition. (D) Alan shares a meal with his Ah-ma (grandmother) in their flat. Both characters visibly display manifestations Neurofibromatosis Type 1 (NF1), emphasising the inherited nature of the condition and grounding the scene in a culturally specific, intergenerational context.

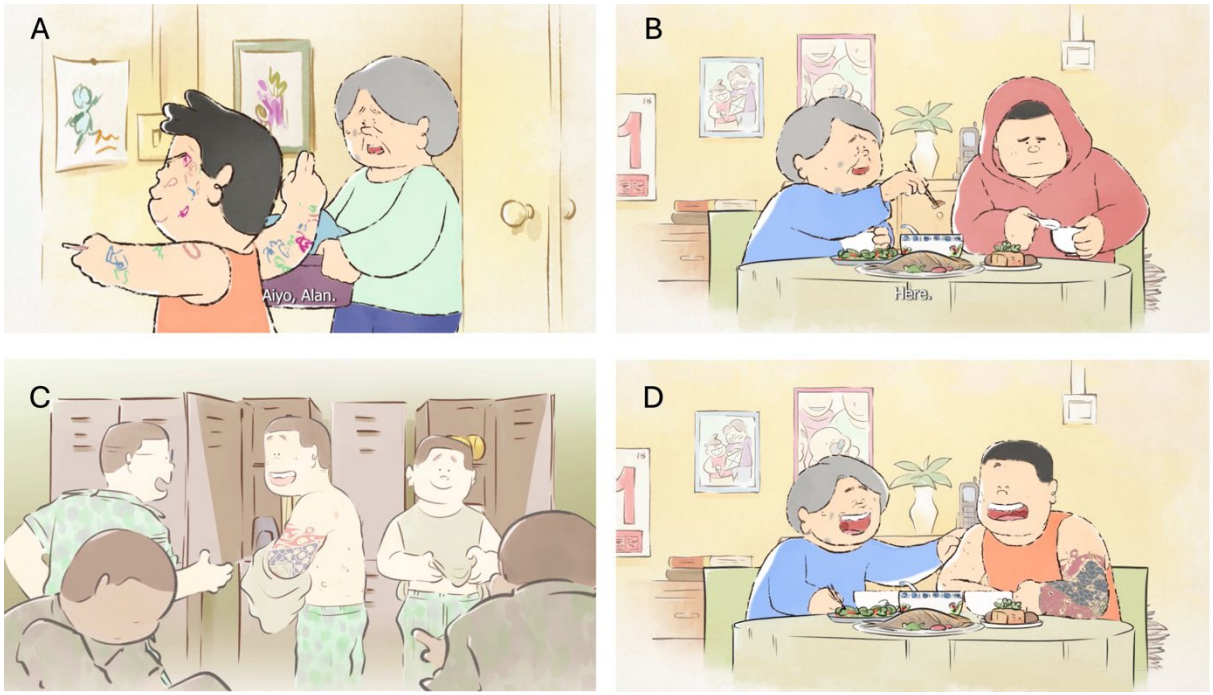
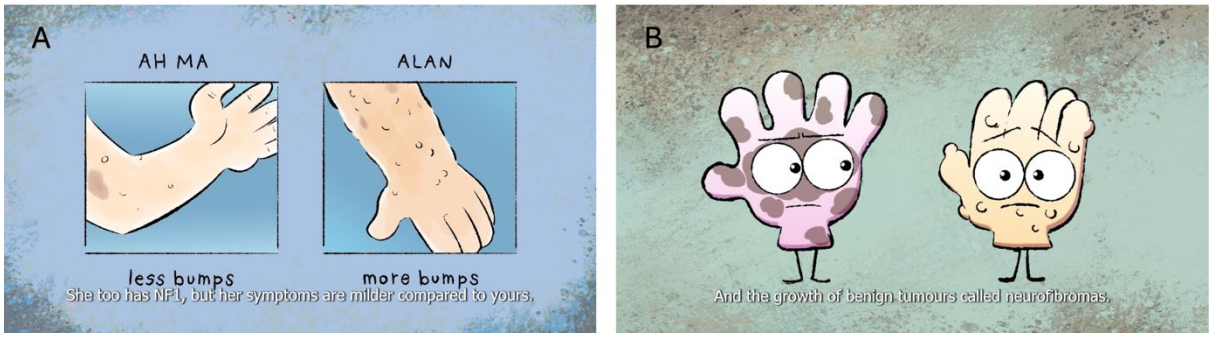


Figure 2

Representing medical concepts through simplified imagery (A) The genetic concept of Variable Penetrance was explained using simplified explanations and diagrams. (B) Different symptoms of NF1 through hand-shaped characters.



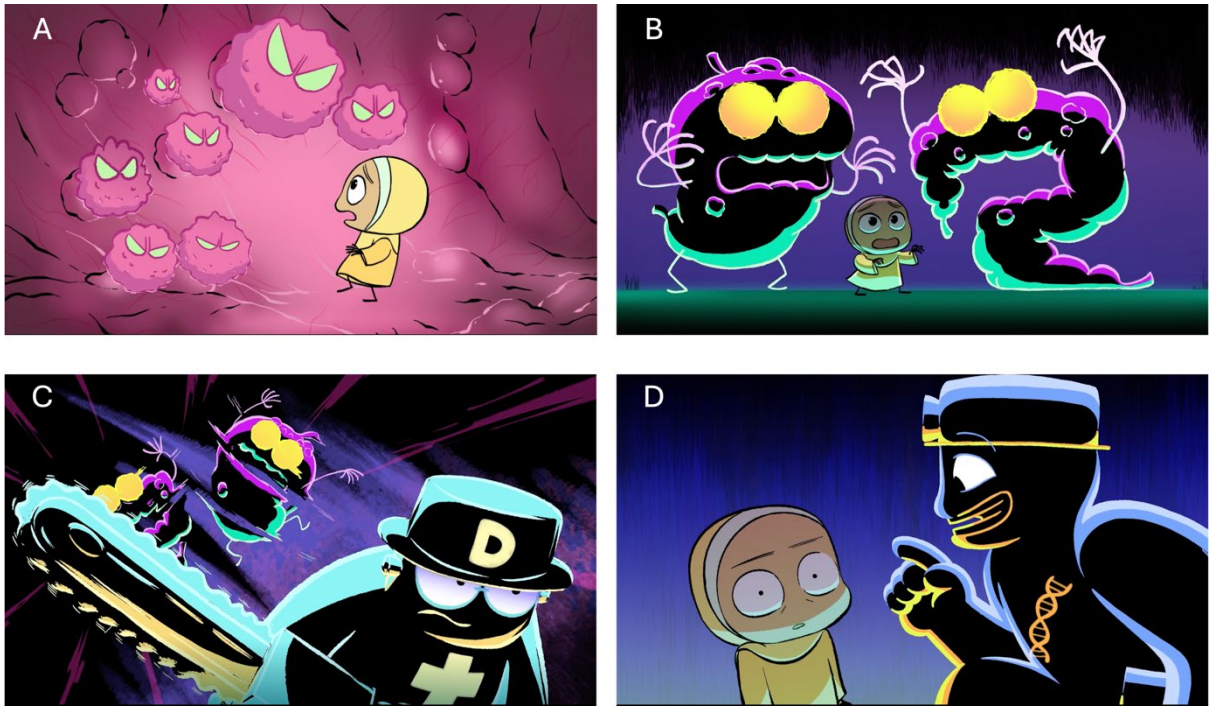
Animation B: FAP

The film opens at Tanah Merah MRT station, a recognisable Singaporean landmark. A Malay family, recognised by their attire and language, reveal their destination: a hospital. During the consultation, the doctor explains her medical condition to the protagonist, Fatirah. As the doctor explains the symptoms and treatment of FAP, Fatirah's growing anxiety transforms this experience into a surreal nightmare.

Her fear distorts reality into a chaotic dreamscape—grotesque representations of the colon and stomach become monstrous entities that chase her (Figure 3). Amid this turmoil, Fatirah encounters two guiding figures: Doc, marked by a cross, and Gen, symbolised by a DNA strand. They initiate a dramatic exorcism, using humour and exaggerated action to dispel the monsters.

Figure 3

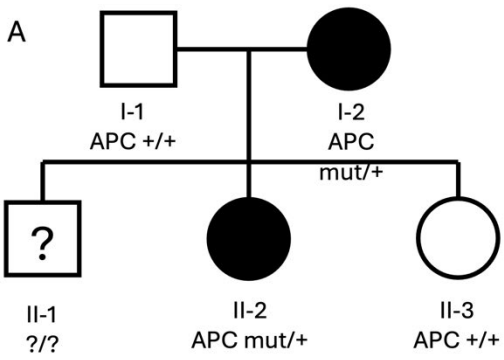
Dramatised nightmare sequence (A) Fatirah encountering colon polyps with angry facial expressions. (B) Fatirah being chased by anthropomorphized grotesque stomach and colon. (C) Doc killing the anthropomorphized grotesque stomach and colon with a chainsaw. (D) Fatirah being afraid by Gen's dramatic exorcism and chanting.

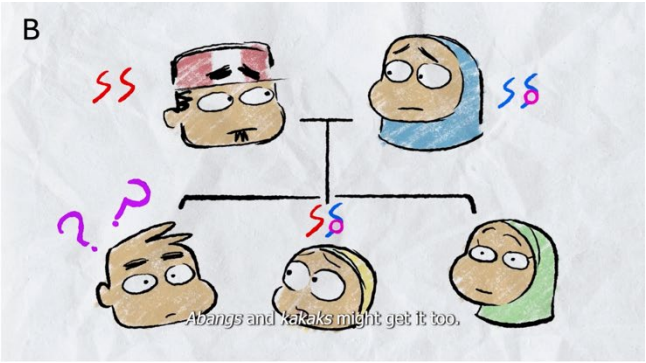


The film returns to reality, with Fatirah in tears—her imagination overwhelming her. The film transitions as Fatirah introduces herself directly to the audience, sharing her FAP condition. The animation clearly explains the hereditary nature of genetic conditions through a genogram. Unlike standard genograms, which use squares and circles, this version replaces them with character portraits, making the concept more accessible to audiences with different literacy levels (Figure 4). Complex genetics ideas are simplified further as the film refers to the inherited mutated genes as "boo boo genes." The film also illustrates common symptoms of FAP through short, relatable scenes set in a typical Singaporean HDB flat, grounding the information in a familiar local context.

Figure 4

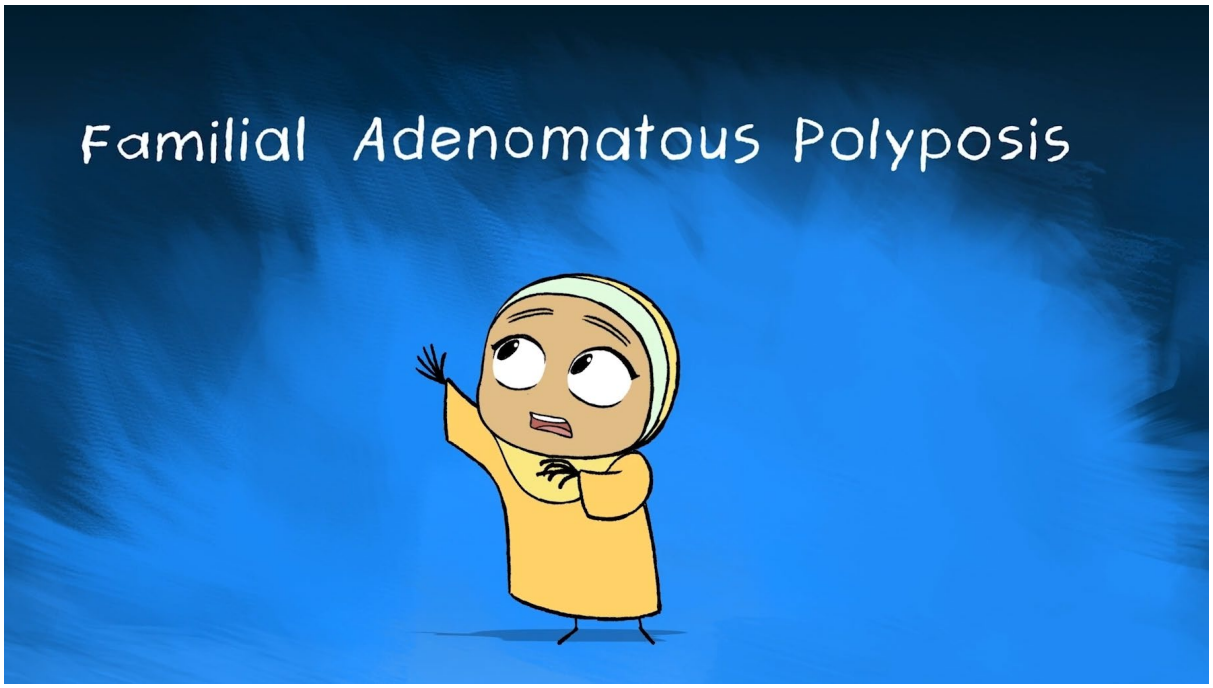
Comparison of genogram formats used in patient education (A) A traditional medical genogram using standardised symbols and clinical annotations to represent family relationships and genetic mutations. (B) A still from Animation B, which uses stylised character headshots and illustrated representations of gene mutations to depict hereditary cancer risk in a more accessible format for patients.





The final segment follows Fatirah as she takes charge of her health. Understanding her genetic risk for colon cancer, she adopts proactive health measures, including regular screenings and eventually preventative surgery.

Unlike Animation A, this animation adopts a more imaginative and symbolic narrative. This approach was designed to evaluate in the survey how the test subjects would respond to either the narrative or visual storytelling approach. An extract of the film is available here (https://vimeo.com/1071657530/1582bb9d94?share=copy).



Participant demographics

A total of 301 participants were recruited into the evaluation study. Of these, only 260 participants completed the survey and were included in the final analysis, giving a response rate of 86.4%. The most common reason participants did not complete the survey was that they were called to their medical appointments before finishing it. Participants ranged in age from 21 to 79 years, with an average age of 44. Most participants were female (63.9%) and of Chinese ethnicity (66.2%). Most participants had no history of genetic testing (79.6%). In terms

of education, more than half of all participants had a bachelor's degree or higher (59.6%). The sample characteristics are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics summary.

Characteristic		N	(%)
Gender			
	Male	94	(36.15%)
	Female	166	(63.85%)
Age		44	(14)
Race			
	Chinese	172	(66.15%)
	Malay	35	(13.46%)
	Indian	33	(12.69%)
	Others	20	(7.69%)
Education			
	Primary	4	(1.54%)
	Secondary	26	(10.00%)
	A Level/ Diploma/ ITE	72	(27.69%)
	Graduate	111	(42.69%)
	Post-graduate	44	(16.92%)
	Others	3	(1.15%)
History of genetic testing			
	No	207	(79.62%)
	Yes	53	(20.38%)
Income			
	Less than $2500	36	(13.85%)
	Between $2500 to $4999	66	(25.38%)
	Between $5000 to $7499	54	(20.77%)

More than $7500	37	(14.23%)
Unemployed/ Retired	67	(25.77%)

Effectiveness of animated patient stories in patient education

The results demonstrated a significant enhancement in participants' perceived understanding of genetics following their exposure to the animated narratives (V=545, p <.001). Participants also reported a substantial increase in their interest in genetics after viewing the animations (V=2125, p <.001).

Acceptability of cultural representation

The cultural representation within the animations was generally well-received. A substantial majority of participants (97.31%) found the portrayal of characters from different racial backgrounds to be somewhat to highly acceptable. Furthermore, 98.85% of participants reported being somewhat to highly receptive to learning genetic information from an animated narrative featuring a character of a different race.

Animation preference

Most participants (n = 159, 61.2%) expressed a preference for the dramatised Animation B animation over the straightforward Animation B. Quantitative comparisons between the two animations revealed that Animation B was rated significantly more informative than Animation A (V = 1095.5, p =.001) and was also perceived as more engaging (V = 2103, p = .025). However, no statistically significant differences were observed in participants' assessments of the animations' pacing, simplicity, or overall appeal.
Qualitative data showed that participants' preference was primarily due to its perceived effectiveness and emotional engagement. Both animations were found to be informative, precise, and engaging.

Among participants who preferred Animation A, they appreciated the linear structure, citing that it was "more straightforward and easier to grasp" (Participant 22, 33, Female, Chinese), compared to the dramatised Animation B, which "took longer to get to the point than the [Animation A] vid" (Participant 79, 24, Male, Malay). Participants also appreciated Animation A's heartwarming and hopeful tone, with some finding Animation B too dramatic and scary. As one participant described it, Animation A was "[h]eartwarming and not scaring the patient with the illness that she might get" (Participant 83, 44, Female, Chinese). Similarly, Participant 93 (35, Female, Chinese) stated that Animation B "felt more scary and taunting with the dark images than the first animation, which is softer in tone."

Among those who preferred Animation B, they appreciated that it was more informative and offered "[m]ore detailed explanations, more relevant to genetics testing" (Participant 96, 23, Female, Chinese). As one participant described it, "and details what she should do to maintain her health, eg with regular check-ups. So it was a bit more informative on the action steps after receiving a positive diagnosis of having that faulty gene" (Participant 3, 27, Female, Chinese). Additionally, participants appreciated Animation B because it has more dialogue and explanation than Animation A. One participant expressed it this way:

Animation B had "more explanation and better soundtrack matching. NF1 video less talking, honestly, I feel like u need to WANT to understand the deeper meaning behind the video to learn what it is trying to say. compared to FAP, there's alot of explanation and

simplifying terms which would make it easier to understand what it's trying to say." (Participant 71, 21, Female, Chinese)

Participants also found Animation B more engaging, with the protagonist often described as cute, and endearing. Participants also appreciated the story told through the lens of a child, with many empathising with the character's fears. One participant found that Animation B "more engaging and was more appealing when told from a kid's perspective - her fears and acceptance as she ages was more relatable" (Participant 53, 47, Female, Indian).

The qualitative data also revealed a more nuanced response regarding the portrayal of tattoos within Animation A. While a few "like[d] the part where grandma accept the tattoo" (Participant 232, 47, Female, Chinese) and found it "[m]ore realistic, especially the tattoos which happens in real life even though it's not approved by many parents and society itself" (Participant 220, 75, Female, Sri Lankan). However, some participants disapproved of the use of tattoos, citing that "using tattoos as a solution isn't a good choice" (Participant 85, 30, Male, Chinese).

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates the potential of culturally tailored animated patient education as an accessible and engaging medium for improving genetic literacy, particularly in contexts where cultural values shape attitudes towards illness, testing, and health decision-making. In Southeast Asia, where conversations around genetics and cancer may be sensitive or stigmatised, animation offers a uniquely expressive and accessible mode of communication. Despite the importance of cultural framing in patient education, research is scarce exploring the use of culturally nuanced animated storytelling for genetic education in this region. Our study addresses this gap by showcasing how interdisciplinary collaboration between clinicians and art practitioners can produce emotionally resonant and informative patient educational tools.

Quantitative and qualitative findings affirm that both animations effectively enhanced perceived understanding and interest in genetics, even among participants without a university education. This indicates the medium's accessibility across literacy levels and highlights its potential for broad community outreach. Participants described the films as informative, engaging, and easy to understand, which echoes earlier work done in the UK Kirk et al. (2016).

Between the two narrative structures tested, the dramatised Animation B emerged as more emotionally compelling, including the nightmare sequence, depicting the anxiety commonly experienced during medical consultations, enhanced audience empathy and engagement. This speaks to animation's capacity not merely to inform, but to foster affective understanding. It illustrates how art can be mobilised to communicate the emotional dimensions of healthcare, amplifying the patients' lived experiences and creating deeper resonance within diverse audiences.

The study also explored the cultural reception of character representation within a muti-ethnic Southeast Asian context. With an ethnically representative sample from Singapore, results indicated broad acceptance of the animations, including portrayals of ethnically diverse characters. Importantly, participants expressed openness to receiving genetic information through animations involving people of different ethnicities, underscoring the animations' potential to transcend identity markers and foster inclusivity in a pluralistic society. However, one creative choice—depicting a character with tattoos based on a real patient's coping strategy—elicited mixed responses. In Singapore, tattoos carry complex social connotations, often associated with deviance or religious disapproval(Nasir, 2016). The team's decision to include this element involved deep deliberation, reflecting the challenges of crafting authentic and culturally sensitive narratives.

Ultimately, this study shows how co-designing patient education materials with sensitivity to narrative, cultural context, and emotional resonance aligns with broader ambitions of artistic research: to contribute to building more empathetic, resilient, and health-literate communities. While this project involved a rich collaboration between clinicians and creative practitioners, future work could expand participatory practices to include patients more directly in the creative process. Doing so would enhance authenticity and democratise the research process, positioning patients as active co-creators of patient education tools that inform and shape community understanding. Additionally, future research could explore how interdisciplinary collaboration between artists and healthcare professionals can extend the reach of culturally sensitive animated patient stories—not only across racial boundaries, but also to address the needs of vulnerable populations, such as individuals with cognitive impairments. This would further strengthen the inclusive and transformative potential of such creative interventions in patient education.

A limitation of the study was potential bias in the sample population due to convenience sampling. While efforts were made to recruit a diverse sample pool, there was a risk of self-selection bias, with individuals who are more interested in health communication and digital media being more likely to participate.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the value of animated patient narratives as accessible and culturally resonant tools for improving genetic literacy. Combining clinical insights with local storytelling elements, the animations engaged diverse audiences and promoted understanding across cultural lines. This project contributes to more inclusive approaches to patient education. It highlights the potential of visual storytelling to foster empathy, promote health equity, and empower communities to engage with complex medical information in emotionally and culturally meaningful ways.

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

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Abstract

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

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

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

Methodology and Sources

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

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

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

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

Contextualizing the Paradox: Local Rebellion, Institutional Nesting

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

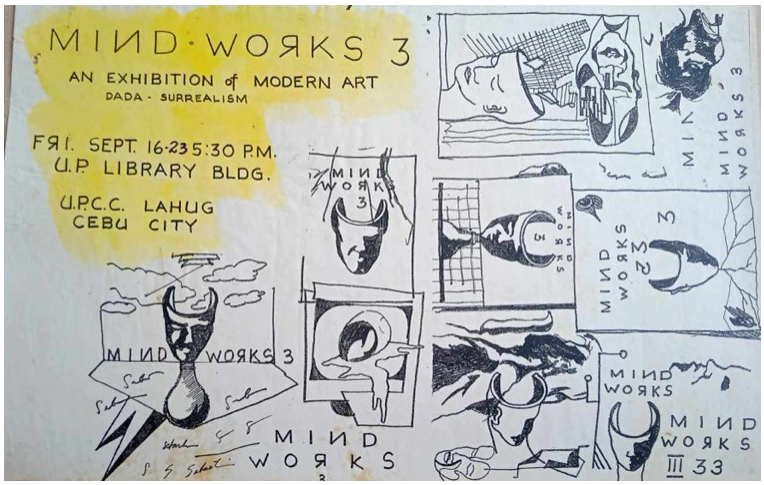


Figure 1. MindWorks archival poster 1988, photo courtesy of Jojo Sagayno

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

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

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

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



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

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

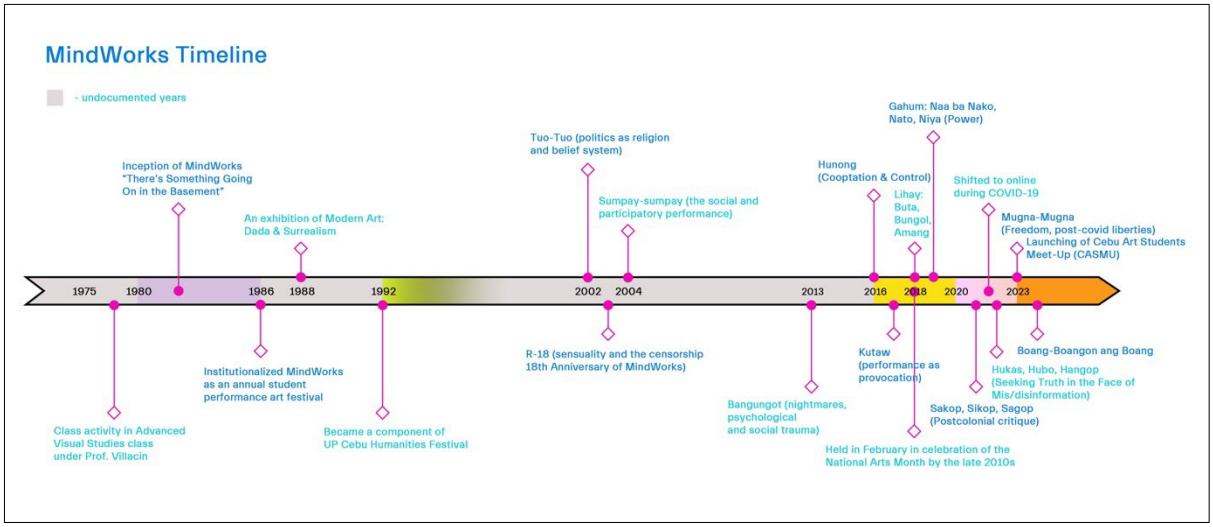


Figure 3: MindWorks Timeline

Pedagogy as Performance: Learning Through Rebellion

MindWorks as Freirean Pedagogy

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

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

Form, Format, and Space as Pedagogical Acts

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

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

Performance Case Studies and Critical Theories

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

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



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

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

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

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

Learning as Process

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

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

Performing the State: Critique from Within

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Navigating Paradox, Enacting Democracy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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Being A Nora Teacher In An Educational Institution : A Case Study Teacher Duangkamol Boonchu

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the identity and role of Duangkamon Boonchu as a Nora teacher who has inherited and revitalized the traditional Southern Thai dance drama within a formal educational context. The study focuses on her pedagogical methods in teaching Nora at Kangpla Witthayakhom School in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. Duangkamon Boonchu was selected as the case study due to her outstanding role in preserving Nora while adapting it to the constraints and opportunities of modern education. Her ability to integrate cultural heritage into the lives of young learners makes her a significant example of a local teacher who sustains living traditions in contemporary society.

The research employs a qualitative methodology, incorporating in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and descriptive content analysis. Key informants include the teacher, students who participated in Nora learning, and community members who hired student performances. The findings reveal that Duangkamon Boonchu effectively designs flexible and context-sensitive teaching approaches—such as repetitive practice, small group instruction, video-assisted learning, and off-class rehearsals at sacred sites like Wat Kang Pla.

Moreover, the teacher successfully motivates students to develop a deep sense of appreciation, understanding, and pride in Nora. Many students are able to perform confidently within a short period—such as one school term, or even one week in some cases. The study highlights the importance of "being a Nora teacher" as a culturally rooted educator who plays a crucial role in preserving intangible cultural heritage through formal education. Her pedagogical practice presents a sustainable model for transmitting traditional knowledge to future generations.

Keywords: Being a Nora teacher, Nora transmission, local teacher

Introduction

"Nora", the Southern Thai dance drama, is a rich form of intangible cultural heritage that embodies the spiritual, social, and historical identity of Southern Thai communities. Deeply rooted in ritual practices, belief systems, and family lineages, Nora has been passed down across generations through master-apprentice relationships (Department of Cultural Promotion, 2022; UNESCO, 2021). However, in today's rapidly changing society and formal education system, traditional methods of transmission face growing challenges—such as limited learning time, declining interest among youth, and a shortage of expert teachers.

In recent decades, efforts have been made to integrate Nora into formal education, particularly in secondary schools across Southern Thailand. This approach has become an important strategy for preserving and revitalizing the tradition among younger generations. Yet, one key challenge lies in designing effective pedagogical models that balance time constraints with the need for cultural immersion and student engagement.

In this context, the role of the Nora teacher becomes critical. Teachers are not merely transmitters of dance movements or verses—they serve as cultural mediators who bridge traditional wisdom with contemporary learning. Their ability to adapt teaching strategies,

motivate students, and employ diverse instructional tools plays a vital role in the success of Nora education in schools.

Kangpla Witthayakhom School in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province is a notable example of a school that actively promotes Nora through elective courses and cultural club activities. At the heart of this initiative is Teacher Duangkamon Boonchu, a local Nora master whose pedagogical approach distinguishes her from other Nora instructors. She combines artistic training with spiritual elements—such as rituals, oral narratives, and reverence for teachers—while implementing intensive, time-sensitive training that enables students to perform Nora effectively within a short period.

Moreover, Teacher Duangkamon emphasizes out-of-classroom learning, including rehearsals at sacred community sites like Wat Kang Pla, real performance opportunities, and peer-to-peer learning models. Her methods foster not only skill development but also a strong cultural identity and emotional connection among students. Her work reflects the essence of "being a Nora teacher"—an integration of artistry, faith, and community.

This study therefore aims to explore the concept of being a Nora teacher through the case of Duangkamon Boonchu, focusing on how she preserves and transmits Nora within the framework of formal education. The research seeks to propose effective strategies for sustaining living traditions in contemporary Thai society through localized, school-based cultural education.

Research Objectives

This research aims to explore the concept of "being a Nora teacher" within the context of formal education, focusing on the identity, philosophy, and role of Teacher Duangkamon Boonchu—a cultural bearer of the Southern Thai dance drama, Nora. She has played a key role in transmitting this traditional art form to students at Kangpla Witthayakhom School in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. The study seeks to analyze how she designs and implements pedagogical strategies that are suitable for the educational context and responsive to time constraints and student diversity.

In addition, the research intends to investigate the unique characteristics of "being a Nora teacher" as reflected in the teacher's methods of instruction, cultural storytelling, and motivational strategies. These elements provide insight into her role as a cultural mediator who bridges traditional knowledge with modern schooling. Ultimately, this study aims to highlight the significant role of local teachers in preserving and transmitting Nora as a living heritage within Thailand's formal education system.

Research Instrument and Research Methodology

This research is a qualitative study that aims to explore the context, concepts, and processes involved in the transmission of Nora performance by a Nora teacher within a formal educational setting. The research instruments and data collection methods were carefully designed to align with the nature of in-depth qualitative inquiry, encompassing behavioral observations, perceptions, and emotional responses of key informants.

Target Population and Key Informant

- Teacher Duangkamon Boonchu is the key informant, as a Nora teacher who plays a vital role in designing Nora's teaching methods in school
- Four high school student representatives who participated in the Nora training, which includes Master Phukawin Sukcha, Master Phumsiri Thongpan, Miss Kunpriya Pangprae, and Miss Issara Chanasuk, to reflect the views of students about teaching methods and learning results

- Two hirers of the performance are experienced external individuals for hiring teachers and students for Nora's performance, to reflect on the views of the public and the community

Research Instrument

1. In-depth interviews

The interviews explored the interviewees' stories, experiences, and feelings independently through open-ended questions, which covered 6 main aspects, such as:

- History and Inspiration as a Nora Teacher
- Teaching Strategies and Learning Methods
- Fostering Motivation and Understanding of Performance
- Learning Assessment
- The Role of Nora Teachers in an Education System

2. The Perspectives on Cultural Conservation in the Modern Era Participatory observation

It was deployed to record behaviors, teaching strategies, learning methods, and the teacher-student relationships throughout the practices and performances.

3. Field record

It was utilized to record events, circumstances, atmospheres, and learning environments at schools and Wat Kang Pla related to Nora's teaching.

4. Supplementary documents

It included a class schedule timetable, club activities, photos of Nora's activity, and a video demonstration of Nora's practice, which supports the data from the interviews.

Research Methodology

1. Study the background of Teacher Duangkamon Boonchu and Kang Pla Witthayakom School in Thung Song District in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province
2. Familiarize yourself with the research context by attending the teaching observation class
3. Perform the interviews and observe the field record for 3 consecutive weeks
4. Transcribe the interviews and analyze the data by applying descriptive content analysis
5. Check the data and the key informants to verify the analysis results

Data Analysis

In this study, the researchers used a qualitative methodology to analyze the data, which fitted with the Abstract data, specific context, varieties of beliefs and emotions, and the informants' experiences, particularly in the context of local performing arts, Nora, which was deeply cultural, social, and spiritual.

The process of data analysis began with transcribing the interview recordings meticulously to maintain the completeness of words and contexts. Then, the researchers read repeatedly so that they could absorb information comprehensively and perceive the essence of the information deeply.

After that, they categorized the data into groups such as Nora's teacher's techniques, motivation strategies, learning assessments, students' attitude, and Nora's role in the community. Next, establishing a main theme by bringing all categories together to synthesize, to get an overview of Nora's transmission process in the education system; for example, local performing arts adaptation in the institutes or local teachers as a cultural transmitter.

For the credible data analysis, the researchers presented the data to some interviewees to validate the data and apply for cross-reference comparison, such as teacher-student-hirer data comparison for different perspectives of data confirmation.

The researchers put all the data together for an in-depth interpretation to reflect the role of the Nora teacher in schools, the survival of cultural heritages in an education system, and the bonds between artistic knowledge and pride of local identities, completely corresponding with the purposes of this research.

This is what Nora's Teacher said:

Teacher Duangkamol Boonchu once said in the interview, **"Nora Teacher not only teaches the choreography but also embodies the spirit of the performing art."** Her speech was filled with words that resonated with the heart of a true local art teacher. In her childhood, she grew up with Nora and respected a male Nora teacher as her father. He was a great model who inspired her to pursue a passion for the performing arts. She said that she felt connected to the ritual, the songs, and the Nora costume as a child, and now it is a part of her life.



Figure 1: Kru Duangkamon Boonchu with Nora masters and students
Source: Supphasin Ainphet

When becoming a teacher at Kang Pla Witthayakom School, Thung Song District, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, she realized the necessity of applying local performing arts to the modern education system with the limitation of time and learners' competence. This led to flexible and effective teaching methods such as repetition, constant refinement, model learning, and out-of-class practice, for example, Wat Kang Pla, by motivating students to have faith in the arts with the storytelling of the lineages of the Nora masters, the rituals, and the links between Nora and local beliefs.



Figure 2:Performing a mixed-style Nora dance during a votive offering ceremony at Wat Kang Pla
Source: Supphasin Ainphet



Figure 3: Performing a slow-paced Nora dance during a votive offering ceremony at Wat Kang Pla
Source: Supphasin Ainphet

She said what made her blissful was seeing the students who had never known anything about Nora before were the talented ones in Nora's performance. Someone applied their knowledge and skills to make a living and pass on knowledge to others. She believed that Nora was still alive due to the willingness to learn from the young generations and the teacher with a heart full of spirituality.



Figure 4: Kru Duangkamon Boonchu with students and the researcher
Source: Supphasin Ainphet



Figure 5: Kru Duangkamon Boonchu teaching students to sing Nora verses
Source: Supphasin Ainphet

Students' experiences in learning about Nora with a local teacher

Students who learned with Teacher Duangkamol stated, "learning about Nora at Kang Pla Witthayakom was a valuable experience that developed their artistic skills, cultural understanding, and self-development." Most students were new to this field, but they could learn and develop quickly under Teacher Duangkamol Boonchu's strict training.



Figure 6: 150 students taking a basic Nora dance examination, performing the 12 master poses
Source: Duangkamon Boonchu



Figure 7:150 students taking a basic Nora dance examination, performing the 12 master poses
Source: Duangkamon Boonchu

Students stated that the teacher had an easy-to-understand teaching style, like the detailed explanation of the choreography's meaning, the repeated technique, and the self-practice with a mirror. Moreover, she had many ways of motivating students, such as local field performance, encouraging, and instilling a sense of cultural pride and identity. They were proud of themselves for playing an essential role on the stage.Many people stated that learning about Nora helped them perceive local culture.



Figure 8: Students visiting the Nora Exhibition at the Hall of Master Artists in Pathum Thani
Source: Duangkamon Boonchu

Some of them are inspired to learn at a professional level and have started to perform on a small stage for additional income. However, most of them agreed that learning about Nora with her was not just art; it touched the authentic roots and spirituality of the community.

Faith that continues to echo from those who hire Nora's performance

Performance Hirers, who were in collaboration with Teacher Duangkamol, stated that Teacher Duangkamol's pupils performed well and were skillful and had a strong understanding of their role on stage. Within the limited time, students were confident, assertive, and maintained Nora's lineage choreography properly. Many hirers underscored that Teacher's pupils had "readiness" in costume, rituals, and emotional expression in Nora's style.



Figure 9: Students of Kru Duangkamon Boonchu performing in unison on stage
Source: Supphasin Ainphet

In addition, the hirers admired Teacher Duangkamol's teaching methods, which not only emphasized dance skills but also cultivated respect for the Nora masters and the local ritual perception, for instance, the Master Appreciation Ceremony for Nora, the Thai Blessing Ceremony (Bai Si), and valuing the sacred community sites (Wat Kang Pla). These things impressed the audience and the community.



Figure 10: Before the performance, Kru Duangkamon leads the hosts in paying respects to sacred objects at Wat Kang Pla
Source: Supphasin Ainphet

In the view of hirers, Teacher Duangkamol was an important model who created opportunities for the young generations in the local community to have a space to express themselves and develop further for their additional profession in the future. Also, her approach provided a viable model for sustaining living traditions in contemporary Thai society.

Summary and Discussion

The findings revealed that Duangkamol Boonchu played a vital role in transmitting Southern Thai folk performance art, known as Nora, in school by her exceptional pedagogical adaptability. Her approaches emphasized repetition, group-based learning, media-assisted instruction (e.g., video demonstrations), and out-of-class practice, such as Wat Kang Pla—the center of local culture. Nora was not just about dance moves or chants—it was to enhance cultural immersion and understanding.



Figure 11: Kru Duangkamon Boonchu rehearsing dance movements with students for a Nora performance
Source: Supphasin Ainphet

Students were able to perform Nora effectively within one school term, and in some cases, within just one week. Furthermore, many of them developed their skills for making additional revenues, such as performance hire, stringing beads, and crafting Nora-wise souvenirs, which resonated with the bonds between arts and living concretely.



Figure 12: Kru Duangkamon Boonchu teaching students how to string Nora beads
Source: Supphasin Ainphet

Duangkamol Boonchu also supported “the older teaches the younger” and “the peer tutoring” learning style, which corresponded with participatory learning in the 21st Century Learning in the Arts. Additionally, it was found that students had a sense of cultural pride and identity in preserving their own culture. This reflected that Nora's learning in school not only ensured the survival of intangible heritage but also developed learners’ potential to grow in both cultural and social dimensions equally.



Figure 13: Classmates assisting each other in adjusting dance poses during class
Source: Supphasin Ainphet

Suggestions

From the research findings, we can suggest that at various levels, as follows:

Institutional level

The institutes should support the learning in Nora's learning continuously, particularly in the "local curriculum," which resonates with the community's identity. Schools should allocate time, resources, and spaces for training and expression. This includes encouraging school educators to learn their local arts from local teachers for cultural value and artistic righteousness.

Educator level

Educators should develop contemporary learning, such as technology-based learning and out-of-class practice assessments. Also, they should provide opportunities for students to engage in designing learning methods, such as choosing their compelling part, bead designing, or even linking the arts with other subjects to strengthen the integrated learning management.

Policy level

The government sectors should practically promote and support the local performing arts, especially in budgeting, educator training, and inclusive learning networking, such as schools, communities, and cultural conservation agencies. Furthermore, organizing the competition or arts festival at the local and national levels will enhance the value of Nora's performance and motivate the young generations to carry on their own culture.

Sustainability

We should promote establishing "the community hub of cultural learning" that incorporates educators, artists, students, and villagers to transmit out-of-class Nora—a part of their lives in the community. Integrating the arts with the way of life will be a viable solution to preserve a livable Nora and sustain it in contemporary Thai society.

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The Process of Developing Drama Students Holistically with The Enneagrams

Sakchai Iamkrasin

Abstract

Many new acting students today focus mostly on technical skills, like voice or movement, but often overlook emotional and social skills. These "soft skills" are just as important for becoming a strong performer. This study looked at how Enneagram theory, a personality system, can help acting students grow in a more complete way. Using a method called Practice as Research, the study had two goals: (1) to see how the Enneagram can improve acting training, and (2) to understand how it supports personal and artistic development.

The research involved 45 third-year students in a directing class. They took part in a 60-hour program that combined Enneagram learning with acting exercises and hands-on experience. Researchers gathered information before and after the training using surveys, classroom observations, and informal interviews. The results showed that the Enneagram helped students better understand the characters they play like the character's goals, emotions, and behavior. It also helped students grow in four key areas: (1) being physically ready to perform, (2) working well with others in different situations, (3) building emotional, mental, and personal strength, and (4) developing key professional skills for an acting career.

This study also offers a new way to design acting lessons that support both artistic skills and personal growth, helping students succeed both on stage and in life.

Keywords: Acting Skill, Enneagram, Holistic Development, Character Analysis, Drama Student

Purpose

To create believable and powerful performances, actors need to understand more than just a character's actions; they must also connect deeply with the character's background, thoughts, and emotions. True acting isn't just about how a character looks or sounds; it's about showing what they feel and believe on the inside. When actors can tap into a character's inner world, their performances become more emotional and real for the audience. However, many acting programs focus mostly on technical skills—like voice, movement, and stage presence—while not giving enough attention to self-awareness or emotional depth. Because of this, the deeper layers of character work are often missed.

This research introduces the Enneagram, an ancient system of personality types, as a fresh and valuable tool in acting education. The Enneagram helps actors explore important parts of a character, like their core motivations, fears, and thought patterns. By using it in character analysis, actors can understand why a character behaves in a certain way, making their performance more honest and natural.

The study used a Practice as Research (PaR) approach, focusing on learning through real experience. It took place in two parts: the first involved 45 acting students, and the second focused in-depth on 11 students. The research included surveys, interviews, journals, and observations during a creative theatre project that was part of the students' final thesis in the Performing Arts and Creative Entrepreneurship program at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University.

The results showed that the Enneagram greatly improved students' self-awareness, helping them understand how they think and feel. This deeper self-understanding led to more

thoughtful and expressive acting. Developed as part of a PhD in Performing Arts, the study presents a new model for actor training that balances technical skills with personal growth, with the Enneagram at its core.

Approach

This qualitative study adds to the field of performing arts by using a hands-on, practice-based method to explore actor training. The main goal is to see how the Enneagram—a tool that helps map out personality types and motivations—can support the full development of acting students. The research looks at how using the Enneagram can improve students' self-awareness, help them build better relationships with others, and use these personal insights in their acting work. It focuses on character development through key areas like body language, behavior patterns, inner motivation, and overall goals that shape how a character comes to life on stage.

The study began with 45 third year acting students and later focused more closely on a core group of 11 participants. Data was gathered during and after the learning sessions using surveys, casual interviews, field notes, and live observations. These observations came from both the researcher and other team members involved in the students' creative projects, especially their 2024 thesis production, which was part of the program run by the Department of Performing Arts and Creative Entrepreneurship at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University.

Results

In this study, the researcher created a series of learning activities built around the Enneagram, using it as the main teaching tool throughout the training. These activities were divided into three main modules, made up of eleven smaller sessions, and delivered over 60 hours in both online and onsite formats. Each module was designed to help students better understand themselves and create deeper, more emotionally rich characters, blending self-reflection with creative exploration.

The first module introduced the basics of the Enneagram theory. Students learned about its history, key concepts, and how it can be used in real life—like observing one's own behavior, finding what motivates actions, and recognizing emotional patterns. All nine personality types were studied, with a focus on the internal drives, motivation and habits behind each one. The aim was not just to label personalities, but to use the Enneagram as a mirror for self-discovery, which is an essential step before applying these ideas to acting.

The second module was more interactive. The researcher worked closely with the 45 students, using group discussions and one-on-one interviews to see how they were engaging with the Enneagram. These conversations revealed each student's artistic approach and personal outlook, which helped the researcher choose a smaller group for more focused training.

From this group, 11 students and 1 director were purposive selected to join the third module. They were part of the cast for the play *The Orient Express by Agatha Christie*, performed as part of their final thesis project at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. These students were chosen because they showed strong commitment, openness to self-exploration, and a readiness to use the Enneagram in deeper character work.

The third module focused on putting Enneagram learning into the Acting field. Students used their knowledge to better understand their characters' goals, fears, behaviors, and emotional patterns. This helped them create performances that felt more natural and psychologically real. The Enneagram wasn't used to make decisions, but rather to give actors a flexible structure to guide their choices.

To design a training process that was both practical and meaningful, the researcher interviewed eight experts from academic and professional backgrounds in the performing arts.

These interviews helped gather valuable ideas, expert's opinions, and real-world advice to shape an actor training model based on the Enneagram. After analyzing the interviews, three main themes stood out:

1) The Enneagram can guide actors in analyzing characters through a process-focused approach.
2) It helps actors understand the complex inner world of a character in a clear and organized way.
3) It connects character interpretation with self-awareness, leading to more emotionally rich and authentic performances.

The experts agreed that using the Enneagram in acting education is not only useful but also much-needed—especially to connect a character's outer behavior with the actor's inner experience. This balance between internal and external work is at the heart of theatre, which relies on live, emotional, and physical storytelling.

Using the insights from these experts, the researcher designed a detailed table 2 to show the structure of all 11 learning activities from the study. The table explains each activity's goals, how it was taught, and what learning outcomes were observed. It does more than just describe the method—it also tracks the students' full learning journey, showing how they moved through personal reflection, character exploration, and the use of theory in performance. This step-by-step, experience-based process helped create a well-rounded and embodied model for training actors, which is discussed further in the next sections of the study.

Table 1: 11 Activities, Objective and observed outcomes from the researcher's perspective.

Module	Activity Name	Objective	Observed Outcomes (Researcher's Perspective)
Module 1: Foundational Enneagram Knowledge: Introduce basic concepts of the Enneagram, including origins, principles, and self-observation practices. Emphasize introspection and self-knowledge.	1. Personal Aptitudes and Skills: The First Step to Self-Understanding	To lay the foundation for initial self-understanding in terms of personal aptitudes related to career paths.	Participants were able to perceive patterns and basic methods of self-exploration in a simple manner, which can serve as a guideline for further learning activities under the research project.
	2. Fundamentals and Understanding of the Enneagram	To help participants understand themselves through the Enneagram framework.	Lecture-based activities may not fully meet participants' needs due to the high concentration required.
	3. Enneagram Type Verification through Panel Interview	To help participants understand their Enneagram type	Learning activities based on the Enneagram process may need adaptation to better suit participants' needs.

Module	Activity Name	Objective	Observed Outcomes (Researcher's Perspective)
		through interview reflection.	
Module 2: Collaborative Assessment & Selection: Explore students' readiness, interest, and perceived applicability of the Enneagram to character work. Gather qualitative data for participant selection.	4. Online Self-Exploration Sessions 1–2	To review understanding of the Enneagram concepts.	Assessing participants' learning potential and interests is crucial for designing effective activities.
	5. Linking Enneagram to Acting Techniques: Role and Script Analysis	To enable participants to understand their type clearly and apply it directly to acting practice.	This linkage offers insight into the possibilities of integrating the Enneagram as a tool for understanding characters.
Module 3: Applied Character Development: Apply Enneagram principles in character building for theatre production (*The Orient Express*). Focus on psychological realism and internal logic of characters.	6. Focus Group Discussion: Reflections on Activities 1–5	To collect data for further participant analysis.	1) The Enneagram helps acting students understand their own and their characters' actions, thoughts, and motivations. 2) It may be challenging to understand the Enneagram in a short period. 3) Deep psychological analysis through the Enneagram may not suit all theatrical works.
	7. Participant Selection (Phase 2) for Activity Participation	To select appropriate participants for the next phase.	Participants showed differing levels of understanding. Many struggled to grasp all nine types despite prior training. Only the play 'Murder on the Orient Express' met the required criteria.

Module	Activity Name	Objective	Observed Outcomes (Researcher's Perspective)
	8. First Read: Identifying Character through Group Reading	To allow participants to explore and understand characters using the Enneagram in theatrical practice.	The first read revealed participants' level of understanding of the Enneagram.
	9. Character Analysis and Presentation Using Theatre and Enneagram: 3 Sessions	To present character insights by integrating theatre techniques and the Enneagram.	This required more time due to the depth of analysis expected from each actor.
	10. The Actor Interview	To enhance participants' understanding of the character's Enneagram type.	1) Knowledge gained is easily applicable to acting. 2) This format improved understanding more than theoretical study.
	11. Application and Review of Knowledge in Both Fields	To systematically apply the Enneagram in character analysis.	Documented analysis offers actors a structured guideline for Enneagram-based character study.

After all the learning activities were completed, the results showed that the module 1 (Activities 1–5) helped students build a strong base of self-awareness. Many participants learned to notice their own emotions and understand how those feelings affected their usual behaviors. In fact, more than 80% of students were able to reflect on their personalities using what they learned.

However, the researcher also noticed that over half of the students were not very engaged with the Enneagram's theory. This was mostly because they felt overwhelmed by their academic workload, found the system too complex, or struggled with memorization and deep self-reflection. These challenges led the researcher to believe that many students weren't yet fully ready to use the Enneagram as a tool in their acting work.

On the other hand, the module 3 (Activities 8–11), which was reviewed by five expert advisors and offered to a smaller group of selected acting students, was found to be more effective. The students in this group took part actively in both in-person and online sessions,

submitted their assignments regularly (except for about 20% who had schedule conflicts), and even reached out to the researcher outside class to ask more questions about the Enneagram.

Despite the positive outcomes, the researcher still found some important key challenges in both module 1 and module 3 that made it harder for students to get the most out of the training. These challenges included:

1) **Activity Format**: Some of the activities included too much content and relied heavily on long lectures, which didn't match the learning style of the student group. Since most participants were younger, they responded better to interactive, movement-based activities rather than passive listening. This mismatch led to visible signs of disinterest—such as bored facial expressions, disengaged body language, and distractions like checking their phones or even falling asleep during sessions.
2) **Assignment Submission Requirement**: The timing of this research project overlapped with the students' pre-thesis creative work, which made time management a major challenge. Many students said they couldn't submit their assignments on time because they were already juggling a heavy course load, especially with their responsibilities in theater productions. This extra pressure from the research project became a significant burden, and for some students, it even caused them to lose interest and drop out of the activities.
3) **Imbalance in Enneagram and Acting Content**: The researcher noticed that students reacted differently to the Enneagram lectures, especially when the topics didn't relate directly to their own experiences. When the content focused on theory—like the history or general potential of the Enneagram—without tying it clearly to acting, many students lost interest. Since all participants were acting students, the researcher believed they were mainly looking for practical tools they could use right away in their work, rather than deep theory. This suggests that lectures without a clear connection to performance practice didn't fully meet the students' learning needs.

The researcher brought together insights from three different areas—Stanislavski's nine acting techniques, psychological learning processes, and character analysis in performing arts—to build a unified training model. By comparing these fields, the researcher found strong connections that support and reinforce one another. These links show that it's possible to combine these approaches to improve how acting students learn and grow. This integrated model helps make the learning process more meaningful and effective, as illustrated in the image below.

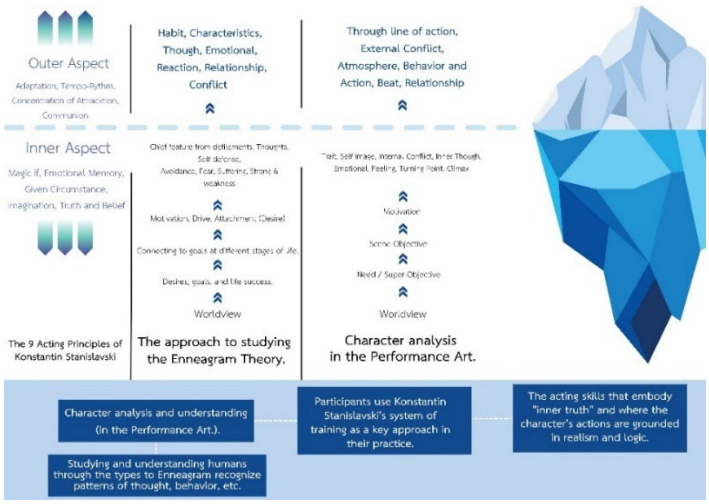


Figure 1: A Comparative Analysis of Konstantin Stanislavski's Acting System,

Character Analysis in Performance Studies, and the Principles of Enneagram-based LearningSource: Author

Stanislavski's Nine Acting Techniques focus on building a performance from the inside outstarting with a deep understanding of the character to create honest, emotional expression. Similarly, the Enneagram is a tool from psychology that describes nine personality types, each with its own mindset, fears, desires, and behavior patterns.

When you combine Stanislavski's methods with the Enneagram, they work well together. The Enneagram helps actors see what truly drives a character's behavior, which makes it easier to understand their choices and emotions. This not only helps actors build richer characters but also leads to more natural, believable performances. Both approaches involve deep thinking and self-reflection, making them a strong match for actors who want to dig beneath the surface of their roles.

Stanislavski's system teaches actors to explore a character's worldview by asking deep, thoughtful questions.

For instance:

– What does the character believe about life?

– What are they most afraid of?

– What is their main goal or purpose?

These questions help actors understand the character from the inside. The Enneagram works in a *similar way*. Each of its nine personality types has its own way of the world view, which shapes how a person—or character—thinks and behaves.

- Type 1 (The Perfectionist): Sees the world in terms of right and wrong, with everything needing to be perfect and correct.
- Type 2 (The Helper): Believes they must be loved and must help others.
- Type 3 (The Achiever): Believes their worth comes from success and recognition.

In acting, a character's worldview shapes how the actor brings that role to life—it becomes the guiding lens for the performance. When actors understand how and what their character sees the world, they can better connect with the character's inner thoughts and emotions, leading to a more realistic and believable performance.

For example:

- Type 1 character (like Hercule Poirot character) shows a strong sense of principle and discipline, always focused on doing what is morally right and upholding justice.
- Type 2 characters (like Gerhard Sophia character) radiate warmth and helpfulness, always trying to support others and earn love and acceptance through kindness.

To create a truly realistic performance, it's not enough for an actor to know what a character does—they also need to understand why the character behaves that way. Stanislavski's method uses the idea of the "magic if", which encourages actors to step into the character's shoes by asking, "What if I were this person in this situation?"

The Enneagram adds depth to this process by helping actors discover the inner motivations behind a character's actions. These motivations—shaped by the character's worldview—become the super-objective, or the character's main goal that drives their behavior throughout the story.

For example:

- Poirot (Type 1 in Enneagram) is guided by a super-objective of "seeking the truth and bringing justice."
- Sophia (Type 2 in Enneagram) is driven by a super-objective of "making others love and accept her."

Understanding this inner drive gives actors a stronger emotional anchor, making the performance feel more natural and deeply connected.

When an actor truly understands what drives a character, they can show emotions and reactions that match the character's personality and goals. To do this well, actors also need to look at the overall of the character, including the character's environment, social background, and early life experiences. The Enneagram's idea of worldview is a helpful guide for this deeper exploration. It encourages actors to ask questions like:

– What kind of society shaped this character?

– How did their childhood affect how they see the world?

– How do they relate to others and their surroundings?

Thinking about these questions helps actors build a character that feels real, layered, and emotionally true.

For example, Hercule Poirot (Type 1 in the Enneagram) can be seen as someone who values justice over strict rules. He doesn't just follow the law for his own sake, looking at the emotions and intentions behind people's actions. To him, real justice means protecting the innocent and standing up to wrongdoing, even if it goes beyond what the rules say.

The Enneagram also helps explain why people behave the way they do. At the heart of each personality type are fears and desires that drive motivation:

- Type 1 fears making mistakes, so they try to be perfect in everything they do.
- Type 2 fears rejection, so they work hard to make others love and need them.
- Type 3 fears failure, so they are constantly driven to succeed and be admired.

In acting, these motivations also reveal the inner obstacles a character must face and overcome during the story.

For example:

- Poirot (Type 1 in Enneagram) faces moral challenges, especially in complex cases were doing what's "right" isn't always clear.
- Sophia (Type 2 Enneagram) struggles with self-acceptance, often feeling not good enough unless others love her.

By understanding these internal struggles, actors can create characters with more depth, emotion, and authenticity.

When actors understand a character's core motivation, they can show the character's inner struggles with more emotional depth. This connects directly to the idea of the super-objective—the main goal that drives the character throughout the story. To deliver a convincing performance, actors need to know why the character makes certain choices and behaves in specific ways.

For example, people who match the Enneagram Type 1 are usually motivated by a strong desire to make the world fair, just, and morally right. They set high standards for themselves, stick to their values, and often feel pressure to be perfect. The character Hercule Poirot is a great example of this. He is deeply committed to finding the truth and serving justice, even when the situation is complicated or emotionally challenging. And Stanislavski's method encourages actors to tap into real emotions during a performance. One powerful way to do this is by understanding a character's defense mechanisms, the automatic ways people protect themselves when they feel stressed, hurt, or uncomfortable. These are often unconscious reactions, like avoiding certain topics, acting overly confident, or withdrawing from others.

When actors understand how a character hides or protects their true emotions, they can bring more emotional depth and honesty to the performance. This makes the character's reactions feel more realistic and psychologically accurate, which draws the audience in and makes the performance more powerful and engaging.

Conclusion

The learning process in this research strongly focused on experiential learning, especially in the early stages. The main goal was to help students grasp basic psychological ideas and learn how to use them as tools for understanding and building characters.

After finishing the 60-hour program, students showed they could connect and apply psychological concepts in their acting work. Their ability to use psychology in character analysis could be grouped into three clear levels:

Level 1: Initial Level of Behavioral: **Understanding Behavior and Motivation:** At this first level, students focused on learning how to understand a character's worldview—how they see life—and their super-objective, or main goal. They used basic psychology tools, like interviews and research methods, to explore these ideas.

Together, students read and analyzed the script to look at how the character thinks, how they relate to others, how they see themselves, and what kind of background they come from. This included looking into the historical setting, environment, and social beliefs that shaped the character. From there, the analysis moved toward identifying the character's main goal, which helped uncover their core personality traits. By recognizing these key traits, students were able to form a clear and organized picture of who the character is. This gave them a step-by-step way to dig deeper into the role.

This approach helped students make logical connections between the character's actions and the deeper motivations behind them throughout the story. Overall, it showed that students had a strong understanding of character analysis—combining both psychological insight and theatrical technique.

Level 2: Level of Cognitive to Behavioral: **Understanding Deeper Character Patterns:** At this stage, students began identifying how a character's inner thoughts influence their behavior, especially in relation to their goals. These inner thoughts are linked to specific personality traits, which help explain both the strengths and weaknesses of the character.

For example, a character with Type 2 traits (The Helper) may be great at caring for others, giving attention, and learning personal details about someone they love. However, their weakness is that they often avoid expressing their own needs, especially to the people they care about most. If an actor understands these subtle differences, they can better identify the character's true line of action—the driving behavior that should guide the performance from start to finish.

This psychological approach also helps actors understand personality traits that might not be fully explained in the script. It gives a clear method for interpreting complex or unclear character behavior. In addition, psychology helps actors explore relationships between characters, both positive and negative. It explains how certain character types might share similar actions but have different reasons behind them.

For instance:

A Type 2 and a Type 9 in Enneagram might both seem caring, but for different reasons. Type 2 focuses on one special person, while Type 9 wants harmony with everyone. This difference can lead to conflict.

Psychology can help actors explore:

Relationship conflicts – like a Type 3 (driven to succeed) clashing with a Type 9 (who avoids pressure by stepping back).

Internal conflict – emotions that aren't visible to others but are very real for the character. For example, a Type 8 might act strong and forceful but is secretly vulnerable and craving love. Actors must learn to show this inner struggle in a subtle, believable way.

Level 3: Behavioral Level: **Reading Actions to Reveal Motivation:** At this level, students learned to analyze characters by closely observing their behaviors and actions throughout the script. They used psychology to identify patterns in what the character says

and does. One helpful technique was highlighting key phrases or moments in the script that showed behaviors linked to specific personality traits.

After reviewing the script, students would consider how often these behaviors appeared and how important they were to the character's role. From this, they could not only understand the behavior but also work backwards tracing the behavior back to the character's thoughts and then to the core worldview that shaped those thoughts.

For example, a character with Type 6 traits might act cautiously and keep emotional distance from others. This behavior is driven by a need for safety and trust, which comes from a belief that the world is unsafe or unreliable. Understanding this helps actors portray those behaviors with real emotional meaning behind them.

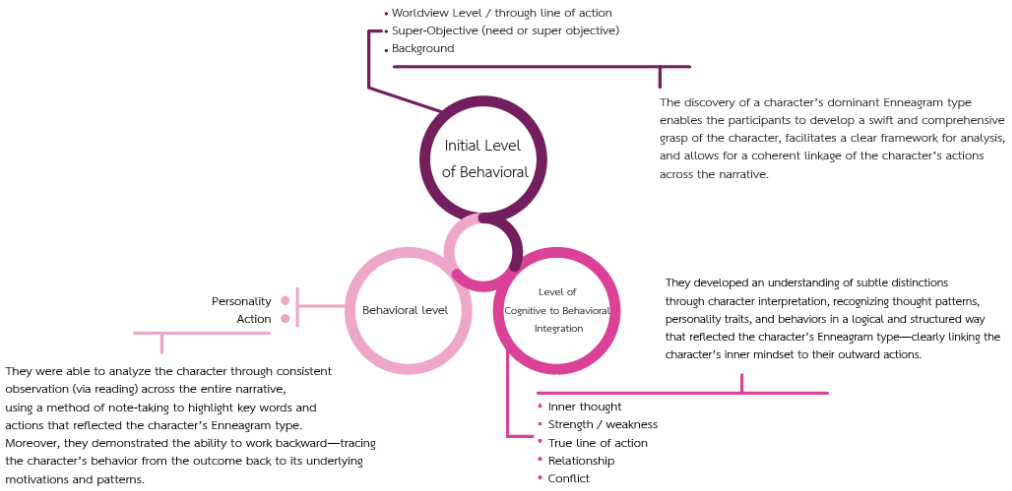


Figure 2: Observed Impacts on the Target Group Following Participation in Research-Based Activities

Throughout the 60-hour program, the researcher noticed several important insights that came from creating an open, supportive learning environment. Instead of acting like a traditional teacher, the researcher took on the role of a senior peer or learning companion. This change in approach helped build trust and made the learning process more engaging and effective.

This shift was especially important in supporting the success of the three learning modules (made up of 11 activities) and led to the development of five key learning components that emerged from the experience:

1. **Safe space for learning:** The researcher and guest experts agreed that a safe, supportive environment is essential for effective learning. When participants feel safe, they're more willing to share their emotions and thoughts openly and without fear of judgment. To build this kind of space, each session began with open conversations where facilitators asked how students were feeling. This helped promote emotional honesty and trust. Strategies like using informal language, sitting at the same level as students, and removing any sense of hierarchy between teacher and learner were also used. Everyone in the group agreed to respect one another's feelings and to keep discussions confidential. These steps helped turn the learning environment into a relaxed, respectful space where students could participate freely and meaningfully.
2. **Trust:** from the start, the research team and guest experts agreed that joining the project would not affect students' grades or academic standing. This was clearly explained before the sessions began to help students feel comfortable. For example,

the researcher, though normally in a teaching role—did not take attendance or penalize students for missing sessions. Facilitators made a strong effort to listen without judgment, both during and outside of class. They were always available to answer questions or offer support. As a result, trust began to grow in three important ways:

- **Between the students themselves**: they felt more connected and supported by each other.
- **Between students and facilitators**: they felt safe asking questions and sharing personal reflections.
- **Toward the Enneagram**: students started to view it as a useful and trustworthy tool for both self-discovery and character development.

3. **The perfect time:** The researcher found that timing was just as important as other parts of the learning design. It mattered in two keys:
   - **3.1 Readiness for Inner Learning:** Many students already had an interest in self-reflection and personal growth, especially using tools like the Enneagram. This made them more open and willing to explore deeper emotional and psychological ideas. Without this kind of inner motivation, the Enneagram wouldn't have been as effective. Personal insight can't be forced—it only happens when a person is truly ready to learn from within.
   - **3.2 Scheduling Challenges:** It was also a challenge to create a schedule that worked for everyone. Students were busy with classes, theater productions, and part-time jobs, while guest experts had their own teaching duties at other schools. The researcher had to carefully plan time slots that worked for both groups, making sure the learning experience could run smoothly for all involved.
4. **Connection:** The researcher built strong, meaningful connections with students by starting with real questions and issues from their everyday experiences. These ideas were gathered through casual, friendly conversations outside of formal sessions. This helped shape the activities, so they were more relevant and useful to what the students needed. The researcher also offered individual guidance and support, especially related to the Enneagram and acting techniques, while always listening with empathy and without judgment. This supportive approach created a deeper sense of connection and eventually led to mutual trust. As a result, students felt safe and motivated to explore and experiment with the tools more openly and actively.
5. **Engagement in Knowledge:** Of all the components, the most important was helping students take *ownership of their own learning*. When students discovered knowledge on their own, they gained a deeper understanding and started to trust the Enneagram as a meaningful tool for acting and character work. Instead of simply teaching information, facilitators focused on creating the right environment for students to explore, ask questions, and find insights for themselves. Each student experienced this learning process in their own way and at their own pace.

   For example, during an activity named The Actor Interview, students created their own interview questions and interviewed each other while in character. One student, playing Sophie Gerhardt (Type 2), gained powerful insights into how that type thinks and relates to others, just by going through the process of asking questions and embodying the role.



Figure 3: The development of five key learning components that emerged from experience

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research:

While this study highlights the potential of the Enneagram as a valuable tool for supporting holistic actor training, there are several limitations to consider.

First, the research was conducted with third-year undergraduate students from a only one university, which may limit how well the results apply to other schools, cultures, or acting experience levels. Also, the 60-hour program overlapped with students' other academic responsibilities and final projects, making it difficult for some to stay fully engaged.

Another important factor was the varying levels of interest and readiness among participants. Some students were more open to self-reflection than others, which likely influenced how deeply they could apply the Enneagram to their character work.

Recommendations for Future Research:

Include a wider range of participants, such as professional actors or graduate students, to compare how the training works at different levels of skill and experience. Conduct long-term studies to see how Enneagram-based training affects actors' growth over time—both personally and artistically.

Develop a structured training manual that applies the Enneagram to acting step-by-step way. This would be a useful tool for educators and practitioners who want to integrate psychological techniques into acting classes in a more practical and accessible format.

Implications for International Performing Arts Education

Bringing the Enneagram into actor training offers important benefits for performing global arts education. As more programs focus on both inner development and technical skills, the Enneagram stands out as a valuable tool for helping actors understand human behavior on a deeper level.

By exploring motivations, fears, desires, and thought patterns, the Enneagram allows actors to truly connect with their characters—not just through observation, but through empathy and emotional experience. In diverse, international classrooms, the Enneagram provides a universal language for understanding characters beyond specific cultural backgrounds. Because it's based on core human traits, it helps students relate to one another and build performances that are authentic, complex, and emotionally real.

It also strengthens key qualities that modern performers need—like self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and empathy—which are especially important in collaborative and multicultural performance settings.

From a curriculum and policy standpoint, the Enneagram can be used as both a practical acting tool and a personal development method. It helps students grow not only as performers but also as individuals. When actors ground their work in self-reflection and human understanding, they're more prepared to connect with audiences across cultures in meaningful and honest ways.

This research shows that Enneagram theory isn't helpful for actor training—it's also a powerful tool for nurturing empathy, insight, and cross-cultural understanding in the performing arts.

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Sustaining From Within: Community Art As Decentralized Social Infrastructure In The Absence Of Cultural Policy

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Abstract

This article explores the E-Lerng Artists Collective, a community-based art group in Bangkok, Thailand, as a model of sustainable community art practice. In a country where no national art council exists, where public art policy is absent, and where governmental support for community-based arts remains minimal, E-Lerng has sustained its work for over seventeen years through grassroots collaboration, cultural resilience, and adaptive practice. Drawing from both scholarly research and the author's firsthand involvement as a founding member, this article offers a rare insider's perspective grounded in long-term experimental engagement. The paper analyzes the collective's organizational structure, community-driven methodology, and adaptive strategies across social, cultural, economic, and digital domains. It argues that the E-Lerng model provides not only a case study of local resilience but also a foundation for a new theory of sustainable community art—one that is autonomous, co-creative, and context-responsive. This theory, distilled from E-Lerng's work, can be adapted by art initiatives in other parts of the world, especially in regions facing similar structural limitations.

Keywords: E-Lerng Artists Collective, Community Art, Sustainable Practice, Participatory Art, Cultural Policy, Thailand

Absence

Community art has long been recognized as a transformative practice that empowers local voices, fosters social cohesion, and activates cultural memory. Yet, in countries where institutional support is scarce, sustaining such initiatives poses a formidable challenge. Thailand, notably, remains one of the few countries without a national arts council or a clearly articulated policy for community-based cultural development. In this vacuum of governmental infrastructure, the E-Lerng Artists Collective has not only survived—but thrived. Founded in 2008 in the historic Nang Loeng neighborhood of Bangkok, E-Lerng has evolved into one of the most enduring and impactful community art initiatives in Southeast Asia. Without access to regular funding, policy frameworks, or formal recognition, the collective has managed to sustain its work for over 17 years. Its longevity and relevance are rooted in a deeply embedded practice of collaboration, local engagement, and cultural stewardship. This article is both an academic inquiry and a long-term personal experiment. As a founding member and active participant in all E-Lerng's projects, I offer a unique insider's perspective grounded in participatory observation, project documentation, and critical reflection. Rather than positioning E-Lerng as a case study of community art, I argue that its methodology—emergent, iterative, and community-driven—constitutes a model that can inform theoretical understandings and practical strategies for sustainable community art globally.In this article, I

seek to articulate the lessons learned from E-Lerng's sustained presence and translate them into a theoretical framework for community art practice in contexts lacking institutional support. The goal is not merely to document success, but to understand and share how a grassroots collective can generate cultural resilience, social infrastructure, and policy imagination from the ground up.

Key Achievements, Context, Crisis, and Collective Beginnings

Since its founding in 2008, the E-Lerng Artists Collective has emerged as one of Southeast Asia's most enduring community art initiatives. Operating without a national arts council or formal cultural policy, E-Lerng has sustained its work for over seventeen years through grassroots collaboration, cultural resilience, and adaptive practice.

Initiated by Nammon–Nawarat Welploryngam, a local artist from Nang Loeng, the collective began with the Community Art Project (2008), aiming to build participatory engagement and pride in local heritage. This led to E-Lerng: Art–Community–Cinema (2009–2011), which successfully prevented the demolition of Sala Chalerm Thani, Thailand's oldest wooden cinema.

In 2014, E-Lerng launched the Nang Loeng Chatree Theatre Project, reviving Thai folk theatre by connecting youth with the last traditional performer. Projects like the Buffalo Field Festival (2015–2018) expanded its impact through interdisciplinary collaboration with artists and scholars.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, E-Lerng pivoted to digital platforms, launching Community x COVID-19 (2020–2022) to deliver aid while fostering creative engagement. The Community Exchange Ecosystem and COMMUNITY LAB projects deepened this resilience, using art to support local economies and preserve intangible heritage.

Through international collaborations such as WWFES and arTech – Imagining Our Future, E-Lerng explored hybrid models of co-creation and integrated technology with community-based practices. The COMMUNITY VIBES project at Bangkok Design Week (2024) exemplified this evolution, bringing together students and residents in a shared creative process that bridged education, policy, and art.

Across its journey, E-Lerng has shown how community art can grow from within—becoming not only a cultural force but a living infrastructure of care, memory, and shared agency.

Table 1: A Summary of the E-Lerng Group's Community Impact Across Different Phases of Its Timeline

Period	Work Approach	Notable Projects	Networks and Support	Impact on the Community and the Art Scene
2008-2011	Initiating community-based art projects that integrate Nang Loeng's traditional	Community Art Project (2008), E-Lerng: Art–Community–	Independent artists, local community members, and civil society organizations.	Raised awareness among younger generations and residents about the community's cultural heritage. Sparked discussions on

Period	Work Approach	Notable Projects	Networks and Support	Impact on the Community and the Art Scene
	way of life and cultural heritage.	Cinema (2009–2011)		preservation and community participation in protecting local history.
2012-2014	Expanding the scope of artistic practices to include live performances, documentary filmmaking, and exhibitions within the community.	Dance House Revitalization, Nang Loeng Chatree Theatre Project (2014)	Domestic art organizations, universities, and scholars in community arts.	Encouraged youth engagement in community activities through art, reinforcing Nang Loeng's identity. Established Nang Loeng as a significant case study in Thailand's community arts movement.
2015-2018	Collaborating with national and international institutions, such as co-hosting exhibitions with university students and taking part in cultural exchange programs with international artists.	Buffalo Field Festival, Establishment of Baan Nang Loeng	Thai and international universities, global art organizations such as UNESCO and the British Council.	Contributed to the development of knowledge in community arts, leading to the formal documentation of Nang Loeng in research on arts and cultural heritage. This initiative eventually resulted in the establishment of COMMUNITY LAB as a cultural knowledge hub for the district.
2019-2023	Adapting to the COVID-19 crisis by using digital platforms to foster artistic collaboration and preserve community knowledge. Partnered with human rights organizations to support and protect community rights.	Community x COVID-19, Community Exchange Ecosystem, Whenever Wherever Festival (WWFES)	Amnesty International Thailand, Contemporary Art Institutions, EUNIC, and international arts networks.	Innovated new community art practices that could be accessed through digital technology, positioning E-Lerng as one of Thailand's pioneering groups in digital-era social arts. Recognized as Thailand's representative in global art forums.
2024-Present	Driving work through data and technology, such as	COMMUNITY LAB expansion,	Government agencies, international	Developed sustainable cultural preservation strategies by integrating

Period	Work Approach	Notable Projects	Networks and Support	Impact on the Community and the Art Scene
	developing a digital cultural archive and employing AI/Photogrammetry to document traditional arts and culture.	COMMUNITY VIBES (Bangkok Design Week 2024), arTech – Imagining Our Future	cultural organizations such as UNESCO, the British Council, EUNIC, and international universities.	technology. Established Nang Loeng as a model community for cultural conservation and technology-infused artistic production while advocating for national policies supporting community arts.

Measurable Outcomes

Social Impact

The E-Lerng Artists Collective has not merely created art—it has transformed Nang Loeng's social fabric. Amid rapid urban change in Bangkok, E-Lerng fostered deep trust, shared responsibility, and solidarity through over 120 community art projects since 2008, involving more than 3,500 participants across generations.

During the COVID-19 crisis, this social infrastructure proved vital. Through *the Community x COVID-19* initiative, E-Lerng mobilized 150 local volunteers to aid 54 low-income communities—reaching over 10,000 households with food, medical kits, and emotional support. This swift response, achieved without government funding, was made possible by the community bonds that art had helped cultivate over time.

Survey data collected after key events revealed the depth of social cohesion engendered by these projects. According to post-project evaluations:

- 85% of residents reported stronger relationships with their neighbors after taking part in E-Lerng activities.
- 76% expressed increased pride in their community identity, particularly among youth and elderly participants.
- Over 65% of respondents stated they were more likely to engage in community-led problem-solving after their involvement in E-Lerng projects.

Compared to communities without art-based infrastructure, Nang Loeng—through E-Lerng's long-term work—demonstrated significantly higher resilience during times of crisis without formal government support.

This level of rapid response was only possible because of years of embedded cultural work. As Putnam emphasizes, reciprocal civic engagement nurtures the trust and networks necessary for democratic resilience, while Matarasso shows that participation in the arts contributes directly to social cohesion and local capacity-building. E-Lerng's trajectory affirms both insights: through decentralized, artist-led engagement, the collective fostered enduring systems of trust, reciprocity, and mutual care. In the absence of formal cultural

policy, E-Lerng cultivated a living social infrastructure—one that proved essential not only for cultural sustainability, but for collective survival.



Figure 1. Collaboration of Nang Loeng Community Members in the *Community x COVID-19* Source: COMMUNITY LAB (2025)

Cultural Dimension

In Nang Loeng, culture is not a relic but a living practice. E-Lerng has played a vital role in preserving and revitalizing the community's heritage through projects such as *E-Lerng: Art–Community–Cinema* (2009–2011), which successfully prevented the demolition of Sala Chalerm Thani—the oldest wooden cinema in Bangkok—by engaging residents as storytellers and co-creators.

In 2014, the *Nang Loeng Chatri Theatre* Project connected the last traditional Chatri performer, Kru Kanya Thipayosot, with local youth and Japanese artists. Their collaborative performance, blending traditional and contemporary forms, drew over 600 attendees and marked a key moment of cultural transmission.

To ensure long-term preservation, E-Lerng established *COMMUNITY LAB*, a digital archive accessible via mobile devices. To date, over 300 items—including photographs, sketches, and oral histories—have been digitized with community participation, creating a living cultural database for future generations.

The collective's model has earned international recognition. In 2022, UNESCO selected E-Lerng as a case study in its report on Culture and Digital Technologies. The group has also hosted artist residencies with participants from over 15 countries, all of whom engaged in co-creation with the Nang Loeng community.

These efforts affirm that cultural sustainability is not about preserving tradition in stasis but about opening spaces for evolution and shared authorship. What was once a heritage at risk is now a dynamic source of identity, pride, and global engagement.



Figure 2. The use of Chatree dance postures to create tools for learning Chatree dance via hand-tracking devices and virtual reality (VR).
Source: COMMUNITY LAB (2025)



Figure 3. Nammon, representing the E-Lerng Artists Collective, speaking as a panelist at *UNESCO's 2023 World Forum for Intangible Cultural Heritage* in South Korea.
Source: COMMUNITY LAB (2025)

Economic Impact: Creating Opportunity and Stimulating the Local Economy through Art and Culture

E-Lerng's work demonstrates how community art can stimulate local economies. Through a range of initiatives—including annual events like the *Buffalo Field Festival*—their programs have consistently drawn over 1,000 visitors per year, contributing to a 25–30% increase in revenue for neighborhood businesses during project periods.

Beyond festivals, projects like *Studio UpCircle* and the *Nang Loeng Plastic Bank* generate 450,000–500,000 THB (USD 13,000–14,000) in annual income by turning waste into creative goods—providing over 50 residents with supplementary income and reducing 40% of local plastic waste.

In 2023, the collective piloted *Community Coin*, a neighborhood exchange system where participation in art and sustainability projects is rewarded with credits, reinforcing local circular economies. These efforts, while non-profit, prioritize resilience and self-reliance over commodification—offering a sustainable model of creative economics rooted in community values.



Figure 4. Community upcycled products developed by *Studio UpCircle.* Source: Studio UpCircle (2025)

Quality of Life

E-Lerng's long-term engagement has meaningfully enhanced the wellbeing of Nang Loeng residents—physically, emotionally, and socially. Through grassroots-driven art practices, the collective has demonstrated how creativity can uplift daily life in tangible ways.

In *Out of the Blue!,* over 200 residents co-created mirrored installations that transformed narrow alleyways into reflective spaces of light and calm. Post-project surveys showed that 78% of participants experienced reduced stress and anxiety.

During the pandemic, the *Community x COVID-19* initiative provided vital support to over 10,000 households across 54 communities, including seven relief kitchens, online art therapy, and educational kits—proving art's role in both material and emotional survival.

Over the past decade, E-Lerng has mentored more than 3,000 youth through programs that foster critical thinking, intergenerational exchange, and civic responsibility. Collaborative performances between elders and children have strengthened emotional bonds and reduced social isolation.

A 2024 survey revealed that 85% of Nang Loeng residents felt more "at home" because of these activities, while 76% reported newfound pride in their community—evidence that art, when embedded in everyday life, can transform not just space, but the very sense of belonging.



Figure 5. Sky reflection drawing activity from the *Out of the Blue!* project held in the garden Source: COMMUNITY LAB (2025)

Social Empowerment and Community Agency

At the core of E-Lerng's philosophy is a commitment to redistributing power—through local ownership, artistic confidence, and civic imagination. The collective has shifted Nang Loeng's narrative from cultural loss to community-driven empowerment.

More than 500 residents have taken part not as passive recipients but as co-creators, curators, and decision-makers. In post-project evaluations, 90% said they felt they had a "voice" in shaping their community's cultural identity.

Projects like *COMMUNITY VIBES* (2024) and *Community {art} LAB* (2025) exemplified this shift, inviting residents—young and old—to lead in artistic production, curation, and storytelling. The boundaries between artist and audience were deliberately blurred, turning art into a shared civic language.

Over the past three years, more than 20 community-led initiatives have emerged from *COMMUNITY LAB*, ranging from waste-to-art businesses to heritage mapping—many now run independently with minimal outside support.

This model of decentralized authorship offers a new paradigm for grassroots cultural governance—proving that even in the absence of formal policy or funding, community agency can thrive through art when trust, creativity, and continuity are nurtured from within.



Figure 6. Community members take part in every stage of the *Buffalo Field Festival.* Source: Openspace (2025)



Figure 7. A performance at the *Buffalo Field Festival* featuring community members as both performers and the primary audience.
Source: Openspace (2025)

Sustainability Indicators

In a country lacking a national arts council, coherent cultural policy, or long-term public funding, the E-Lerng Artists Collective has not only endured—but evolved. Its 17-year continuity is the result of intentional strategies rooted in relational leadership, mutual care, and cultural embeddedness, rather than financial backing.

Central to E-Lerng's sustainability is its horizontal, rotating leadership model. Instead of a fixed hierarchy, the group functions as a decentralized network of artists, elders, youth, and residents. Roles shift, decisions are shared, and creative authorship is distributed. This

structure ensures that no single departure destabilizes the whole—responsibility, memory, and momentum collectively held.

E-Lerng also operates as a cultural common. Tools, space, skills, and even meals are shared and redistributed when needed. These informal systems—born from scarcity—have made the collective resilient in the absence of state support. Rather than wait for funding or permission, E-Lerng cultivates a self-sustaining ecology that values reciprocity over resource extraction.

This model proved crucial during times of disruption. While many global initiatives paused during COVID-19, E-Lerng adapted quickly shifting to digital platforms, launching virtual workshops, and coordinating grassroots aid across 54 communities. Over 10,000 households were reached, not because of institutional intervention, but because the group had already spent years building trust and interdependence.

E-Lerng's sustainability also lies in its hyperlocal grounding. By anchoring its work in Nang Loeng's stories, rituals, and daily life, it asserts cultural presence amid threats of gentrification. Initiatives like COMMUNITY LAB document neighborhood memory while empowering residents to claim space, authorship, and identity in the face of erasure.

What makes E-Lerng's model remarkable is not just its survival—but its integration. Art is not a seasonal event or project output. It is embedded in everyday life: in rooftop rehearsals, kitchen conversations, and intergenerational collaboration. In Nang Loeng, art is not separate from the community, it is the architecture of its resilience.

Community Art Beyond Aesthetics: Decentralization Social Infrastructure

Drawing from over seventeen years of embedded practice with the E-Lerng Artists Collective, I propose a new theoretical lens for understanding sustainable community art: Community Art as Decentralized Social Infrastructure. This theory leaves from institutional frameworks that treat art as an isolated cultural product and instead finds art within the everyday systems of community resilience, local governance, and grassroots knowledge production.

Unlike existing models that emphasize external funding, policy mandates, or state-sanctioned art councils, the E-Lerng experience offers a reverse paradigm. We did not wait for infrastructure to be built to create art—we became the infrastructure. Our collective operated not just as artists, but as community mediators, caretakers of memory, designers of informal education, and facilitators of mutual aid. Over time, this model proved that art initiatives can survive and thrive not because they are supported by a centralized system, but because they are the system.

This model challenges traditional notions of sustainability. Rather than asking how a project can continue after funding ends, we asked: How can this practice be self-generating, adaptable, and integrated into daily life? We relied on shared leadership, rotating responsibilities, and a commitment to relational over transactional engagement. Our practices—whether revitalizing a neighborhood cinema, mapping oral histories, or organizing community art festivals—were not "outputs," but components of a living system that reinforced the community's ability to care for itself.

At its core, this theory argues that instead of building systems to support art, we must support the social systems that generate art. By understanding art as embedded within the lived infrastructure of community life—its rituals, relationships, spaces, and informal economies—we can more accurately sustain it. E-Lerng did not survive because it received continuous funding or endorsement. It endured because it became woven into the very fabric of Nang Loeng's identity. It is this quality—embeddedness—that lies at the heart of the theory.
The theoretical patterns that emerged from this long-term engagement as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Core Theoretical Dimensions: Community Art as Decentralized Social Infrastructure

Theoretical Element	Explanation
1. Art as Infrastructure, not Output	Community art is redefined as a *social system* rather than an art product — functioning as infrastructure for care, learning, and co-existence.
2. Embeddedness as Survival	Sustainability arises from being woven into everyday life, local memory, and informal networks — not from external funding or institutional legitimacy.
3. Bottom-Up Cultural Governance	Leadership is distributed, decisions are made collectively, and trust is prioritized over efficiency — contrasting hierarchical policy structures.
4. Decentralization as Political Position	The model rejects reliance on top-down policy. Instead, it affirms local agency as a form of cultural self-determination and resilience.
5. Art as Process, not Product	Artistic practice is understood as ongoing negotiation, relationship-building, and mutual care — not limited to exhibitions, events, or final outcomes.
6. Practice as Policy	In the absence of state policy, practice itself becomes a form of living cultural governance — responsive, relational, and embedded in local realities.
7. Community as Generator of Value	Artistic content, relevance, and impact emerge from within — through local knowledge, intergenerational learning, and everyday rituals — rather than being imposed externally.

These insights form the backbone of a theory that not only explains E-Lerng's durability but also offers a generative lens for rethinking how we define, support, and evaluate community art globally. Rather than viewing art as the "output" of a system, we are invited to see it as a symptom of a healthy social infrastructure—one that is inclusive, flexible, rooted, and alive.

Policy Implications and Global Relevance

Rethinking Sustainability: From Funding to Foundations

Traditional cultural policy often frames sustainability through the lens of funding continuity, measurable impact, or institutional affiliation. But E-Lerng's case shifts the conversation from supporting the arts to supporting the social systems that produce art. These systems include local knowledge networks, intergenerational trust, informal mentorships, place-based cultural memory, and micro-ecologies of care. By maintaining porous boundaries

between artists and community members, E-Lerng functions less like a project and more like a social organism—adaptive, resilient, and deeply rooted.

Rather than replicating the institutional models of the Global North, where sustainability is often tied to grants and metrics, E-Lerng offers a different vision: a sustainability born of relationships, responsiveness, and shared ownership. This calls for a redefinition of sustainability that recognizes informal, relational infrastructures as valid and vital cultural assets. It is precisely because E-Lerng was not beholden to rigid bureaucracies or external KPIs that it was able to remain flexible, experimental, and deeply attuned to the shifting needs of the Nang Loeng community.

From Cultural Product to Cultural Process

In most state-led or institutionally supported community art programs, success is often measured by the product—an exhibition, a mural, a performance, a report. However, E-Lerng flips this logic. For the collective, art is not a means to produce a singular, commodifiable object. Instead, it is an unfolding process of relationship-building, negotiation, memory-sharing, and mutual care.

This approach positions community art not as a linear project with fixed goals, but as an ongoing cultural process that shifts according to the lived experiences and needs of its participants. In this way, the value lies in the doing, not just in the documentation. A workshop where elders teach children a disappearing dance form, or a neighborhood clean-up that evolves into a creative mapping project, may never be officially recognized as "art," yet these acts form the cultural lifeblood of Nang Loeng.

Such process-oriented work resists the extractive logic often seen in externally driven art initiatives, where communities are asked to take part for a temporary moment only to be left behind once the project ends. E-Lerng's commitment to iterative co-creation allows culture to emerge organically, slowly, and meaningfully. It is a shift from art as spectacle to art as sustenance.

This paradigm has profound implications for policy. It suggests that funding cycles and evaluative criteria must be reimagined—not to reward outcomes, but to nurture processes. Supporting the cultural process means supporting the rhythm of the community, even when the outcomes are intangible or unmeasurable. For E-Lerng, the process is the product.

Lessons for Global Community Art Policy in the Absence of National Art Councils

The E-Lerng Artists Collective was born in Thailand—a country where no national art council exists, where cultural policy is fragmented at best, and where community art remains unsupported in structural terms. In this context, the group's 17-year survival is not merely a story of artistic persistence but a living critique of centralized, top-down policy models.

E-Lerng's continued relevance was not guaranteed by institutional scaffolding. There was no government funding pipeline, no grants earmarked for community art, and no formal policy environment that encouraged long-term cultural initiatives. In fact, the group operated in a vacuum space where formal structures failed to recognize the social and civic value of participatory art. That vacuum, however, became fertile ground for an alternative model to emerge model of decentralized, autonomous, and community-led cultural infrastructure.

Instead of looking upward for validation or resources, E-Lerng turned inward and outward: inward, toward the people of Nang Loeng—its elders, youth, artisans, and everyday citizens—and outward, toward intersectoral collaborations with NGOs, academic institutions, and international partners. This constellation of relational support substituted for missing formal policy and proved more adaptive than any rigid bureaucratic mechanism could have been.

Through shared leadership, co-creation, and data-informed adaptation, the collective cultivated a living policy by practice, where decisions were made by those most affected by them. Community art, in this case, did not wait for permission; it evolved on its own terms. The resulting ecosystem is not only artistically rich but politically instructive. It teaches us that the absence of a national cultural policy does not equate to the absence of cultural agency—if that agency is claimed from below.

For countries in the Global South—or anywhere cultural infrastructure is lacking—this lesson is invaluable. Policy does not always have to precede practice. Sometimes, practice can prefigure policy. And sometimes, the most durable models are those not imposed, but grown.

Implications for Global Community Art Policy

Though E-Lerng emerged from the specific cultural and political terrain of Thailand—where national art councils are absent and public funding for the arts is sparse—its lessons resonate far beyond local borders. In an era increasingly attuned to the role of culture in sustainability, urban resilience, and democratic renewal, the collective's story challenges conventional wisdom about how community art should be supported and sustained globally.

Most cultural policies still follow a vertical model: funding flows from centralized authorities to artists, who are tasked with delivering predefined, measurable outcomes. In such frameworks, "community" is often reduced to an audience or beneficiary—rarely a collaborator. E-Lerng reverses this logic. It operates from the bottom up, strengthening the social systems that generate art, rather than funding art in isolation. It values the slow cultivation of relationships over the quick production of outcomes, and shifts the emphasis from spectacle to sustainability, from consumption to co-creation.

This inversion offers far-reaching implications. It suggests a model of horizontal governance, where artists, communities, and civic actors co-design not only the content of cultural work, but also the structures of support behind it. It urges institutions to treat cultural work not as a series of deliverables, but as a long-term investment in social ecosystems. And it insists that cultural labor—especially when rooted in place—be recognized not as a service, but as a form of care, reciprocity, and lived engagement.

For nations with robust arts funding mechanisms, E-Lerng does not replace existing models—but rather offers a critical lens through which to reassess them. It reminds policymakers that distributing resources is not enough; cultivating ecosystems of trust, learning, and continuity is equally vital. For countries where no formal arts policy exists, E-Lerng offers a roadmap: community art can grow in the cracks of state absence, but when it does, it reveals the very architecture that policy itself ought to support.

E-Lerng teaches us that cultural policy does not always begin with legislation. Sometimes, it begins with action. With a group of people who dare to believe that art can be a form of governance, a platform for care, and a space for imagining otherwise. They have not waited for systems to change. They have become the system. And in doing so, they offer the world not just a theory—but a future.

Tracing from Within: Methodology and Approach

Knowledge in this work arises from embedded experience—years of living, creating, and negotiating alongside the E-Lerng since its founding. As a co-founder and active member, I have taken part in every phase of the group's evolution: from shaping its earliest projects to co-devising strategies for survival in moments of crisis. What follows is not a detached account, but a perspective formed through long-term engagement, where analytic insight grows from within the everyday practices of collaboration, care, and collective authorship.

Multiple forms of documentation support this inquiry. Internal archives offer a record of intentions, decisions, and adaptations. Public materials from exhibitions and programs reveal how the collective positioned itself within broader cultural conversations. Posters, media articles, and digital artifacts contribute to a parallel narrative: one of public perception, reception, and dialogue.

Ethical considerations remain central. Information derived from personal encounters or community memory has been overseen with care. Identities are anonymized where necessary, and materials were used only with consent or when already publicly available. No formal interviews or interventions were conducted, as the aim was not to extract data but to reflect with integrity on lived participation.

Rather than seeking distance, this approach centers proximity. It values intimacy with context as a source of depth. In environments where formal research often arrives late and leaves early, working from within offers not only access, but accountability. The community is not a subject of study, it is the condition of knowing. Artistic labor, informal systems of support, and everyday acts of cultural stewardship form both the method and the matter of this work.

Charting a New Paradigm for Community Art Policy

The story of the E-Lerng Artists Collective is not merely one of survival, but of quiet revolution. In a nation lacking a national arts council, coherent cultural policy, or long-term governmental support, E-Lerng has charted an independent course—growing not through formal structures, but through trust, embedded relationships, and a radical commitment to local knowledge. Over seventeen years, the collective has not only created artworks, but built a living ecosystem of care, mutual aid, and creative agency.

By proposing the theory of Community Art as Decentralized Social Infrastructure, this article reframes how we understand sustainability in community art. Art is no longer the output of policy but the infrastructure itself—a web of relationships, memory, participation, and resilience that supports daily life. E-Lerng did not wait for permission to begin; they became the system that others might now learn from.

This framework has global implications. It invites cultural policymakers, artists, and community organizers to shift their gaze: from products to processes, from outcomes to ecosystems, from top-down grants to bottom-up governance. In regions where formal support

is absent, the E-Lerng model shows that culture can still flourish—if it is grounded in people, place, and purpose.

E-Lerng offers us more than a theory. It offers a roadmap, a challenge, and a promise. It reminds us that when art lives in the hearts of communities, it needs no council to validate it. It becomes the ground we stand on, the stories we inherit, and the future we dare to build together.

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Using Art-Based Practice With Youth For Building The Community Of Environmental Justice Storytelling

Manapee Khongrakchang

Abstract

This paper examines how diverse art-based practices facilitate youth in Mae Ngao village, northern Thailand, in engaging with environmental justice (EJ) storytelling through participatory research. In the context of the Bhumibol Reservoir Inflow Augmentation Project and its contested Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), the village has experienced systemic silencing of its traditional knowledge, livelihood loss, and ecological concerns.
We document three forms of art-based practice: (1) community-based art exhibitions opposing the dam, (2) youth drawing competitions, and (3) personal art journaling during intergenerational field explorations. These activities differ in style, structure, and impact, yet collectively contribute to a resilient storytelling ecosystem. Rather than prioritizing artistic output, this study centers on the processes of learning, transforming, and building solidarity.
The findings highlight how art bridges relationships between youth and elders, as well as between individuals and communities, silence and voice, while offering varied emotional entry points for youth with different capacities. By tracing how young people transform marginalization into action, this paper argues that art-based storytelling is not only a mode of resistance but also a practice of cultural care and environmental stewardship grounded in place-based knowledge and intergenerational ties. This research contributes to broader discussions on youth agency, participatory art, and plural forms of environmental justice.

Keywords: art-based practice, storytelling, environmental justice, youth

Introduction and Purpose

One evening in Mae Ngao village, a Karen community nestled along the Mae Ngao and Yuam Rivers in northern Thailand, I sat with a group of teenagers quietly sketching for an upcoming exhibition on Action on Rivers Day. Earlier that day, we had joined village elders on a boat journey, listening to stories of sacred river spirits, traditional fishing techniques, and signs of ecological imbalance. The youth's drawings, depicting animals, dam walls, and forested mountains, transformed their reflections into acts of resistance. This intergenerational moment was not an isolated event; it reflected a broader movement already underway: a community-led struggle for environmental justice grounded in culture, memory, and place.
Mae Ngao, located near the Salween River and approximately 30 kilometers from the Myanmar border, is home to both Karen and Northern Muang peoples. Like many Indigenous highland communities in Thailand, Mae Ngao faces disproportionate impacts from state-led development initiatives. Chief among these is the Bhumibol Reservoir Inflow Augmentation Project, a large-scale water diversion plan aiming to reroute the Yuam River to the Bhumibol Dam. Despite vocal community opposition, a deeply flawed Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and ongoing legal petitions, the project has continued, threatening to displace entire ecosystems, disrupt local livelihoods, and dishonor spiritual and cultural relationships to the land and river.

The villagers have not remained passive. They have organized public hearings, filed lawsuits, and produced grassroots research using the Thai Baan methodology. Alongside these

formal strategies, youth have taken up art-based storytelling as an equally powerful form of resistance. Through drawings, murals, and personal journals, they not only document threats but also critique, reinterpret, and reimagine their relationship to place and power. While mainstream environmental justice discourse often emphasizes legal and policy interventions, Mae Ngao youth remind us that cultural practice, especially art, can be a political act rooted in the everyday.

This paper asks: How can art-based practices support youth in Mae Ngao to engage in environmental justice storytelling that resists erasure and builds collective power? It is guided by two research questions: (1) What are the effects of art-based storytelling in interpreting environmental justice in the Bhumibol Project? (2) How do Karen Mae Ngao villagers use art to reflect their values and ecological knowledge? These questions also inform the paper's broader concern: how creative practices can amplify marginalized voices and generate place-based counter-narratives that challenge state-imposed development.

As a researcher trained in art education and psychology, and someone who has lived and worked closely with Karen communities, I approach this work as a collaborator and listener rather than an external expert. My methodology combines participatory action research (PAR), ethnography, and arts-based inquiry, all grounded in relational ethics and community accountability. Theoretical framing draws from bell hooks' (1995) vision of art as engaged pedagogy, Freire's (1970) notion of dialogue as collective learning, and Boal's (1979) idea of artistic practice as rehearsal for transformation. In conversation with Santos's (2014) call for an ecology of knowledges and Tuck and Yang's (2014) framing of youth resistance as desire-based, this paper explores how art functions not as an accessory to activism but as a method of world-making. In Mae Ngao, youth resistance is quiet but no less powerful, anchored not in spectacle but in place, kinship, and care. This study focuses on three interrelated practices: community exhibitions, drawing competitions, and art journaling, each offering a distinct mode of environmental justice storytelling through which youth reclaim voice, memory, and future.

Context: The Environmental Justice Landscape in Mae Ngao

Mae Ngao village is situated in the mountainous forests of Mae Hong Son Province, near the Thai-Myanmar border. Although geographically remote, the area is rich in biodiversity, ecological significance, and cultural heritage. The village is home to a multi-ethnic population, primarily Karen, whose livelihoods, spiritual practices, and community rhythms are deeply entwined with the Mae Ngao and Yuam Rivers. These rivers are not merely physical resources. They are sacred and social beings, holding ancestral knowledge, spiritual beliefs, and seasonal understandings that guide daily life. In Mae Ngao, land is not something to own; it is something to share. It is something to care for.

This intimate relationship with land and water is now under serious threat. The Bhumibol Reservoir Inflow Augmentation Project, a component of Thailand's national water management plan, proposes diverting water from upstream tributaries, including the Mae Ngao and Yuam Rivers, to increase inflow into the Bhumibol Dam. Officially framed as a response to drought, hydropower demand, and irrigation needs, the project overlooks the irreversible impacts it poses to Indigenous ecologies and local cosmologies. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), widely criticized for its opacity and tokenistic community engagement, leaves no space for local ways of knowing. As Laungaramsri (2000) has argued, the Thai state often renders upland communities "backward," paving the way for displacement under the guise of progress.

Still, the people of Mae Ngao are not passive recipients of state power. Their resistance takes many forms, including ritual, storytelling, protest, and participatory research. Increasingly, youth are playing a visible role in this movement through art. In 2023, during the

exhibition for Action on River Day, young villagers presented drawings and paintings that depicted buffalo drowning, rivers in tears, and community members mourning the ecological loss. These visual testimonies disrupted dominant narratives and voiced urgent calls for recognition, rooted in both grief and determination.

Later, a Children's Day drawing competition welcomed a broader set of participants. While positioned as a celebratory event, the contest surfaced tensions between aesthetic polish and political expression. Youth trained in school-art styles often received higher praise, while more critical or emotionally charged works were sidelined. However, these early acts of art-making represented crucial first steps in enabling young people to articulate their environmental truths in public, on their own terms.

Outside of exhibition spaces, youth have engaged in intergenerational learning through field walks and storytelling sessions with village elders. These informal yet intentional moments involved learning elder songs, stories, and ecological knowledge of river systems, medicinal plants, and signs of seasonal change. Through drawing and journaling, youth not only recorded these insights but also began restoring generational bonds frayed by development, displacement, and migration. These quiet acts of care are as political as they are pedagogical.

During the Action on River Day event, youth artworks were displayed alongside research coordinated with the Center for Ethnic Studies and Development (CESD) at Chiang Mai University. Large hand-painted banners lined the space, declaring: "No Dam. Yuam Diversion Project Should Be Eliminated," and "Validate the EIA without Community Participation. No Comprehension, No Accuracy." Youth and elders stood side by side, offering explanations and reflections to NGO visitors and grassroots organizers. This was not a cultural performance; it was a declaration of presence, sovereignty, and refusal.

These efforts reflect the Thai Baan tradition of co-produced knowledge, in which communities act as researchers of their own lives and landscapes (Sitthikriengkrai et al., 2024). Youth, working alongside elders, have conducted interviews, mapped riverside resources, and documented environmental changes. These small yet intentional acts of visual and narrative documentation serve as powerful gestures of reclamation. As Nixon (2011) reminds us, state development often creates "sacrifice zones"—places marked for destruction in the name of national benefit. Mae Ngao refuses to be one of them. Through art, research, and solidarity, the community asserts not only its right to remain but its right to be recognized, respected, and heard. This paper situates itself within that collective refusal, focusing on youth-led creative practices that not only resist extraction but also reimagine what justice can look like, rooted in place, memory, and care.

Methodology: Collaborative Ethnographic and Art-Based Approach

This study emerged through sustained engagement with the villagers of Mae Ngao as they responded to the ongoing threats posed by the Bhumibol Reservoir Inflow Augmentation Project. The methodological framework combines participatory action research (PAR), arts-based educational research (ABER), and ethnography, each chosen to center community agency, reject extractive knowledge production, and affirm local epistemologies. In this hybrid approach, research was not a one-way process of inquiry but a relational practice of listening, reflecting, and co-creating meaning across time and space.

In alignment with Leavy (2009), art in this study was not treated as a decorative outcome, but rather as a method of inquiry —an expressive mode for navigating experience, memory, and political struggle. For Mae Ngao youth, drawing and storytelling became ways of processing and making sense of their lives amid ecological and cultural disruption. As Knowles and Cole (2008) argue, art in qualitative research enables intersections between emotion, embodiment, and lived experience, intersections that proved vital in this fieldwork.

Between 2022 and 2025, I returned for multiple visits, co-shaping activities with local youth, elders, and researchers. These included art workshops, intergenerational field walks, youth-led exhibitions, and informal drawing and reflection sessions. Rather than extracting information, I approached these as relational encounters grounded in mutual trust.

My positionality, as a non-Karen researcher with prior experience in art education, required constant reflexivity. While I brought relevant experience and long-standing relationships with Karen communities, I remained conscious of the power dynamics inherent in research. I did not impose interpretation, but instead witnessed and supported. Activities were designed collaboratively with open-ended prompts that invited youth to engage through sketching, journaling, or observation. Following Tuck and Yang's (2014) ethics of storytelling, refusal was respected as a meaningful form of participation. Informed consent was an iterative and relational process, often discussed in family or group settings. Some artworks and writings were intentionally withheld to honor emotional boundaries and privacy.

Data analysis was conducted in accordance with grounded and dialogic principles. I did not apply rigid coding but looked for recurring emotional tones, symbolic motifs, and patterns of intergenerational meaning-making. Drawings of rivers as lifelines, of people weeping, of buffalo swimming through floods, or of harmonious coexistence with the forest were not interpreted as fixed signs but as what Smith (2012) calls "living texts", relational, situated, and deeply political. Ethnographic tools such as detailed fieldnotes captured gestures, silences, spatial dynamics, and sensory impressions that enriched my understanding of youth engagement. As Boal (1979) describes, these moments of art-making became "rehearsals for resistance", a space not for producing polished outputs but for imagining otherwise. This collaborative and decolonial methodology rejects the detached gaze of traditional research, instead offering space for co-thinking, emotional resonance, and justice-rooted storytelling. What follows are three interwoven art-based practices, including community exhibitions, drawing contests, and journaling, that illuminate the landscape of youth-led environmental resistance in Mae Ngao.

Three Modes of Art Practice

Art-based storytelling in Mae Ngao did not unfold through a single method or event. It evolved through a series of layered processes, some visible and public, others quiet and intimate. Each mode offered youth a different pathway into environmental justice discourse, aligned with their capacities, relationships, and emotions. What emerged was not a unified narrative, but a polyphonic expression of care, concern, resistance, and hope.

4.1 Community Exhibition: Visibility and Collective Voice

The community exhibition, held during Action on River Day 2023 in Mae Ngao Village, emerged as an extension of youth participation in a river study led by local elders. During that study, young villagers journeyed along the Mae Ngao River, learning about sacred ecological sites, traditional fishing practices, and the fragile balance between land, water, and livelihood. The exhibition became a space for transforming these learnings into visual testimony. Organized by village leaders in collaboration with a local environmental network, the event was held in the open-air pavilion adjacent to the temple. Youth were not only the featured artists. They also served as co-curators, designing signage, arranging displays, and welcoming guests, including representatives from NGOs and government officials.

The artworks on display revealed a powerful blend of grief, critique, and cultural pride. One painting by a 16-year-old girl showed a booted figure stepping on villagers' backs, an image inspired by elders' warnings that the dam project would deepen community suffering. Another illustration depicted the death of buffalo herds and river-based livelihoods, flanked by faceless officials shaking hands in political complicity. Other works contrasted "before-and-

after" landscapes: thriving forests and clear rivers transformed into scenes of pollution, flooding, and mourning. However, some drawings also celebrated what is still alive, biodiversity, seasonal rhythms, and ancestral knowledge, anchoring the stakes of what could be lost. Visitors moved slowly through the space, asking questions and reflecting with youth who acted as informal docents, offering insight into the stories behind each image. As Kester (2004) might describe, the event became a "conversational encounter" rather than a spectacle. Tensions, however, were palpable. Some parents feared that visibility might provoke retaliation. When officials associated with the project arrived, the youth noted how they pointed at maps and ignored local voices, behavior that deepened mistrust. Still, the young artists remained firm. As Bishop (2012) cautions, participatory art can sometimes mask power inequalities; however, in Mae Ngao, the youth used art not to please, but to speak. Their exhibition was not a performance; it was a practice of refusal, a demand for recognition. It became what Harney and Moten (2013) call a "fugitive public space": a temporary commons where villagers reasserted their stories on their own terms. Here, art was more than expression; it was a memory, an assembly, a resistance, and a call to be seen.

4.2 Drawing Competition: Playful Protest and Safe Participation

The village school hosted a drawing competition as part of Children's Day celebrations under the theme "Life on Mae Ngao and Environmental Justice." With crayons, colored pencils, and large sheets of paper provided by teachers, the event invited students to reflect on nature, community, and change through visual storytelling. The tone was festive and informal, less overtly political than other protest events, but still rich with meaning. Some children drew rivers, forests, houses, and boats, while others imagined an earth where people and animals coexist peacefully. Unlike speeches or demonstrations, the contest offered a gentle, accessible entry into environmental justice discourse for youth who may have felt unready or unsafe speaking out directly.

Nevertheless, beneath this surface of cheerful participation lay more complex dynamics. The judging process revealed an implicit bias toward technical skill: awards favored images with polished composition, realism, and "neat coloring." Images with emotional content and symbolic depth were often overlooked. One piece showed a wounded river spirit with bandaged arms and face emerging from the trees, rendered in bold lines and uneven shading. It went unrecognized by judges but left a lasting impression on facilitators and observers. This echoed concerns raised by Eisner (2002), who critiques formal art education for privileging surface aesthetics over expressive depth, and by bell hooks (1995), who warns that aesthetic hierarchies can marginalize the voices of those excluded from dominant cultural norms.

In this context, youth resistance took subtler, sometimes hidden forms. Some drawings incorporated surreal or unsettling elements, such as faceless government figures standing behind scales of justice, astronauts floating in space alongside endangered animals, or oversized eyes peering from the riverbanks. These images, while whimsical on the surface, carried implicit critiques of environmental neglect and political distance. They functioned as "hidden transcripts" (Scott, 1990), veiled but intentional challenges to dominant narratives, slipping beneath the radar of formal recognition. As Tuck and Yang (2014) argue, youth storytelling is often reduced to apolitical or therapeutic forms; yet these drawings quietly complicate that framing, offering layered critiques under the guise of play.

The drawing contest offered an inclusive and low-barrier space for youth participation in environmental justice; however, not all expressions were equally acknowledged. It became a site of both opportunity and constraint, where creative resistance emerged not through confrontation, but through symbols, shadows, and quiet subversion. In these flickering images, playfulness and protest coexisted, inviting viewers to look closer and listen differently.

4.3 Art Journaling: Emotional Processing and Intergenerational Learning

Among the most intimate and sustained forms of art-based storytelling in Mae Ngao was the practice of guided art journaling, developed through a series of intergenerational field activities. Youth participants, mainly between the ages of 11 and 15, joined elders on slow walks along the Mae Ngao River and through nearby forest trails. These were not structured lessons but meandering, memory-rich conversations, where elders would pause to point out a vanished plant, recall a long-lost buffalo trail, or gesture to a submerged site once used for rituals. The walks created space for shared observation and gentle reflection, grounding knowledge in place and relationship.

Equipped with sketchbooks, colored pencils, and water-based paints, the youth responded to soft, open-ended prompts: "What do you notice?" "What do you feel?" "What do you remember or imagine here?" After each walk, participants would sit alone or in pairs, sketching impressions or emotions stirred by the journey; tattoos on the arms of elders, children swimming in the river, fish leaping upstream. This process invited slow, sensory attention. It also created a private, affective space for youth to process what they had seen and heard. Unlike contests or exhibitions, journaling had no audience. Sharing was optional, and many youths chose to keep their journals entirely private.

This private mode of storytelling aligns with Cathy Malchiodi's (2007) insights into the therapeutic capacity of art, especially in contexts shaped by uncertainty or trauma. The journals held more than images. They became containers for grief, hope, and memory. They also resisted the pressure to perform or provide an explanation. Drawing on María Lugones' (2003) concept of loving perception, journaling in Mae Ngao became a practice of care, not only for the land but for the elders and youth who co-constructed these moments. Rather than passively receiving knowledge, youth responded through image, form, and feeling, creating dialogic texts that revealed how learning is shaped by relational presence. These visual narratives were not just documents; they were small acts of world-making.

Some youth later chose to share selected pages in exhibitions or a growing "village archive." Others refused entirely, emphasizing the right to keep their stories unexposed. This tension between private reflection and public narrative was crucial. As Eve Tuck reminds us, refusal can be a form of resistance—an assertion of dignity and control in a context often marked by surveillance and extraction. Journaling, then, became both a personal sanctuary and a political gesture. As Sarah Pink (2009) argues in her work on sensory ethnography, meaning often emerges not through verbal explanation, but through slowness, texture, and embodied presence. The soft scratch of a pencil, the hush that follows an elder's story, the smell of riverbank earth, these were the atmospheres in which environmental justice was not declared, but quietly felt and slowly imagined. In Mae Ngao, art journaling did not seek recognition. It held space for becoming.

Findings and Discussion

This section explores three interconnected themes that emerged across the different modes of art-based storytelling in Mae Ngao: (1) emotional ecology, (2) intergenerational bridges, and (3) the tension between visibility and safety. Each theme reveals how youth use art to process complexity, form relationships, and claim voice within and beyond dominant environmental justice frameworks. These findings highlight not only what youth create but also how they live through artistic practices as part of a broader resistance to environmental and cultural erasure.

5.1 Emotional Ecology: Feeling Through the River

Across the drawing sessions, journaling activities, and community exhibitions in Mae Ngao, what emerged most vividly was not overt protest, but an emotional ecology, a constellation of feelings that revealed how youth experience what Nixon (2011) calls "slow violence." Rather than visible confrontation, young participants expressed grief, longing, confusion, tenderness, and quiet rage through their creative work. Once while journaling, a youth said: “I feel calm when listening to the elder’s song about people and nature but I do not know how to draw that.” This emotional-intellectual tension, feeling something deeply while struggling to represent it, was echoed across many visual and written pieces. As Ahmed (2004) notes, emotions are not confined to individuals; they move through bodies, spaces, and histories. In Mae Ngao, these feelings were expressed through sketches, conversations, silences, and gestures, serving as both a form of expression and a means of understanding.

Art-making became a form of emotional literacy that went beyond verbal or legalistic environmental justice narratives. Youth used color, metaphor, and fragmented imagery to convey their attachments to place and to those who came before them. In one exhibition piece, the Mae Ngao River appeared as a weeping woman with fish swimming through her hair. A journal sketch depicted burning trees and rows of closed mouths, haunting symbols of voicelessness and ecological trauma. These expressions were not Abstract or metaphorical in the conventional sense; they were grounded in lived realities. The proposed dam was not just infrastructure; it represented rupture. As one elder murmured while viewing a painting, “That child drew what I feel but never say.” This moment exemplifies what Lugones (2003) describes as "world-traveling", the ability to enter another’s emotional world with humility and care.

What emerged was not a singular response, but a multiplicity of affective positions. Some youth expressed bold defiance; others conveyed sorrow or chose quiet withdrawal. Importantly, these responses were not categorized as right or wrong, political or apolitical. The value lay in their authenticity and diversity. Art offered a space where emotional nuance could flourish, where resistance did not have to be loud, and vulnerability was not a sign of weakness, but rather a source of wisdom. In this way, Mae Ngao’s youth articulated a form of justice that was not only about rights and recognition but about feeling, remembering, and holding space for emotional truths in a threatened world.

5.2 Intergenerational Bridges: Drawing With, Not About

A second key finding was the role of art in building intergenerational bridges between youth and elders, as well as between memories and futures, and between oral tradition and visual narrative. Art-making did not replace traditional storytelling; it layered onto it, offering new ways for youth to engage with ancestral knowledge and care practices. During field journaling walks, elders shared stories of the river spirit’s moods, medicinal plants, and the location of a now-vanished ritual site. Youth responded not as passive recorders but as interpretive co-creators. These moments were not about translation. They were acts of relational witnessing. Elders were not “informants,” but co-storytellers. Youth, in turn, became cultural stewards in their own right. This challenges the developmentalist framing of youth as “not-yet-knowers” or “future citizens” and instead centers them as active agents in place-based cultural transmission.

Art also enabled nonverbal reciprocity. Artwork was used as a means of mutual recognition between elders and youth, as well as between humans and entities that are more-than-human. In a participant's drawing, a turtle was holding a microphone and a flag with "no dam" as the symbol for voicing the views of others in Mae Ngao village. Importantly, these bridges were not always smooth. Some youth resisted elder authority, choosing to represent loss rather than reverence. This underscores that intergenerational dialogue, like all

relationships, involves negotiation and compromise. However, art provided a shared space in which such tensions could unfold in a generative way. These findings align with de Sousa Santos' (2014) call for an ecology of knowledge, where multiple epistemologies, not just scientific or policy discourses, are honored in the construction of justice. In Mae Ngao, storytelling was not just about preservation; it was about continuity through transformation, with art serving as the bridge between past and present.

5.3 Visibility vs. Safety: Who Gets to Be Seen

The third major theme to emerge from this research is the tension between visibility and safety, particularly for marginalized youth navigating cultural politics and public expression in contested spaces. Each of the three art-based storytelling practices explored in Mae Ngao village; community exhibitions, school-based drawing competitions, and personal art journaling carried different expectations and thresholds of visibility. With each came different risks, forms of recognition, and degrees of agency in choosing how and whether to be seen.

In the community exhibition, visibility became a form of collective presence. Youth stood beside their work, welcomed visitors, and used art to assert their connection to the land and their disapproval of the dam project. Yet even in this most public of formats, visibility was carefully negotiated. Some pieces were left unsigned, while others were displayed with minimal titles or without interpretation. This strategic ambiguity reflects what James C. Scott (1990) calls "hidden transcripts", forms of expression that convey critique while maintaining protective boundaries. For youth in Mae Ngao, participating did not always mean full disclosure. Instead, art became a medium through which they could speak truth carefully, balancing resistance with caution.

In contrast, the school-based drawing competition provided a different kind of visibility, one framed as non-political and sanctioned by institutional norms. While the contest appeared to offer a low-risk platform for expression, it imposed a different kind of constraint: aesthetic judgment. Artworks were evaluated based on conventional markers such as neatness, symmetry, and realism. Raw, emotionally charged pieces often went unrecognized, revealing how even seemingly neutral platforms can enforce normative filters. This dynamic illustrates what bell hooks (1995) critiques as aesthetic hierarchy, the privileging of specific visual languages over others, often tied to middle-class or institutional expectations. The contest encouraged participation, but it quietly shaped whose stories could be seen and validated.

The most private form of practice, art journaling, offered youth the most control over visibility. Unlike exhibitions or contests, there were no external audiences or evaluative pressures. Participants chose whether to share their pages, and many opted not to do so. Some revealed only fragments later in exhibitions or within peer groups, while others kept their journals entirely private. This right to opacity was central. In an era that often demands that youth "speak out" for justice, the ability to remain unseen became a crucial act of agency. As Claire Bishop (2012) notes, participatory art is not inherently liberating; it must be critically examined for how and when visibility is structured. Tuck (2009) similarly argues that refusal is not silence; it is a valid and protective mode of resistance, particularly when exposure risks retraumatization or appropriation.

Across all three modalities, one insight became clear: visibility must be chosen, not assumed. For the youth in Mae Ngao, art-making was meaningful not because it always resulted in public acknowledgment, but because it offered a spectrum of expressive choices—from murals and exhibitions to quiet journals and hidden metaphors. Justice work in this context does not begin with amplification; it starts with trust. To engage with youth storytelling ethically is to recognize that participation does not require performance, and that stories whispered in sketchbooks may carry just as much truth as those told aloud. In a landscape

shaped by erasure, the power to be seen or to remain unseen must rest with the storyteller.

Conclusion

This paper examines how youth in Mae Ngao village engage in environmental justice (EJ) storytelling through collaboratively developed art-based practices, including community exhibitions, drawing competitions, and personal art journaling, in response to the ecological and cultural threats posed by the Bhumibol Reservoir Inflow Augmentation Project. Rather than viewing art solely as a form of advocacy, this study foregrounds art as a relational and affective process that connects youth with elders, expresses grief, negotiates visibility, and asserts agency. These creative acts challenge dominant development narratives and technocratic tools, such as Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), which often exclude local, emotional, and spiritual knowledge. In doing so, Mae Ngao youth emerge not as passive participants, but as cultural authors of resistance, care, and continuity. Their stories—often quiet, fragmented, or withheld collectively form what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) calls an "ecology of knowledges," in which scientific, emotional, and ancestral ways of knowing coexist. The implications of this research extend beyond Mae Ngao, raising critical questions for policy, education, and research: How can institutions validate non-verbal and collective knowledge? How might schools integrate emotional and relational storytelling as civic practice? What does it mean for researchers to shift from extractive methods to ethical co-creation? Future directions include youth-led storytelling archives and integrating art-based environmental justice (EJ) into school curricula. As Audra Simpson (2007) reminds us, refusal is not silence; it is a form of protection. As bell hooks (1995) affirms, love and community are not sentimental, but acts of care. In Mae Ngao, youth art is not just protest; it is a commitment to remembering, protecting, and reimagining justice as a living relationship.

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Alone in the Crowd: An artistic approach to Loneliness, Anonymity, and Transit Spaces in Tokyo

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Abstract

This paper explores the interrelation between loneliness, anonymity, and urban life, focusing particularly on Tokyo as a paradigmatic case of hyper-modernity. Drawing from psychological, sociological, neurobiological, and cultural perspectives, it examines the structural and individual dimensions of loneliness in contemporary society. Artistic research complements this investigation: through the lens of a painterly work, the author reflects on her own experience of loneliness. The study considers how creative processes can transform isolation into productive solitude, and it highlights the cultural specificity of social expectations. Ultimately, it questions whether loneliness is inherently negative or if, under certain conditions, it may also be a generative state. Through aesthetic expression and embodied interaction, the painting fosters not only self-reflection but also shared resonance—making visible the invisible and connecting the disconnected. In doing so, the work demonstrates how artistic research can activate creative communities and serve as a catalyst for collective understanding, empathy, and discourse in the face of one of today's most pervasive emotional experiences.

Keywords: artistic research, urban loneliness, anonymity, Tokyo, Transit spaces

Introduction

Whether in pop music, visual art, literature, or cinema: loneliness is everywhere. It inspires some of the most powerful and intimate creative works across all artistic media. In fact, the overwhelming number of songs about solitude is itself a testament to the cultural ubiquity of loneliness.

In our present moment – shaped by digital transformation, increasing urbanization, post-pandemic social fatigue, and rising economic pressure – loneliness has become one of the defining social and emotional challenges of modern life. Despite a global network culture, or perhaps because of it, people across all generations are reporting growing feelings of disconnection and emotional isolation.

This paper investigates the phenomenon of urban loneliness by weaving together academic theory and artistic research. Inspired by the author's own experience in Tokyo, it seeks to understand how anonymity in megacities can be both a protective cloak and an existential burden. Through a combination of critical reflection and creative practice, the work poses fundamental questions: What is loneliness? What cultural structures sustain it? And can art be a way out—or a way through?

Grasping Loneliness

Loneliness is primarily associated with negative emotions and opens a domain of study that often requires a degree of personal and intellectual vulnerability. Unsurprisingly, the academic field of loneliness research was established relatively late. Among the foundational contributions are the insights of Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, one of the first psychologists to explore the topic in depth. She emphasized the terminological challenges in defining loneliness and points out that it is an emotional condition (or self-experience) that is subjectively perceived while remaining objectively elusive.

While loneliness is a deeply personal and subjective experience, it is also shaped by broader societal forces. Individuals experiencing loneliness are often stigmatized—seen as shy, unattractive, or socially deficient. This perception stems from societal expectations that prioritize productivity, consumption, and social integration. Those who deviate from normative developmental milestones, such as career success or family formation, risk social exclusion and internalized shame.

Sociologists Hurrelmann and Quenzel outline four key developmental tasks for young adults: qualification (integration into work life), consumption (assuming the role of a consumer), participation (adopting value systems), and bonding (forming relationships). Failing to meet these expectations often leads to marginalization, particularly in societies where hard work and independence are culturally valorized.

For example, in parts of East Asia, single, career-focused women in midlife are publicly labeled with derogatory terms like "leftover women"—a social branding that further isolates them and diminishes self-worth. The fear of becoming a burden or facing rejection leads many to hideaway further into isolation.

Elderly individuals and children, too, are vulnerable to hidden loneliness. Older adults may internalize social withdrawal as a form of dignity, avoiding contact to not inconvenience others. Children may mask loneliness out of shame or fear of disappointing those around them. Contemporary capitalism promises to soothe loneliness through consumption—be it through therapy, pharmaceuticals, or entertainment. From AI-enhanced sex dolls to "cuddle cafés" in Japan, market-based solutions provide surrogate intimacy while masking the deeper causes of social detachment. Meanwhile, antidepressants (like Prozac) gained popularity as quick fixes, reflecting a tendency to pathologize and medicate emotional discomfort rather than address its structural roots.

Ultimately, the societal lens reveals that loneliness is not merely a personal affliction but a byproduct of systemic pressures and cultural norms that discourage emotional transparency and authentic connection.

From an evolutionary and neurobiological perspective, human needs for intimacy and physical contact are deeply rooted. Comparable to "social grooming" in primates, human touch—such as hugs or closeness—stimulates the release of oxytocin and endorphins, promoting social bonding and reducing stress (Vitale & Smith, 2022).Loneliness, in turn, is linked to elevated cortisol levels, poor sleep, and heightened physiological stress responses resembling the "fight or flight" state (Cacioppo et al., 2006). Long-term effects may include hypertension, heart disease, and even increased risk of Alzheimer’s disease (Karska et al., 2024).

Moreover, studies show that the brain's response to social isolation mimics its response to hunger, suggesting loneliness acts as a biological signal, alerting individuals to a deficit in social connection (Moor et al., 2022).

A widely acknowledged definition within loneliness research was proposed by Peplau and Perlman (1982). They described loneliness as a negatively perceived emotional state that arises when an individual evaluates the quality and/or quantity of their social relationships as

unsatisfactory. Simply put, loneliness occurs when there is a discrepancy between the desired and the actual level of social connection (Luhmann, 2022, p. 12).

Following this definition, one might assume that individuals with few or no social relationships are inevitably plagued by distressing feelings of loneliness. Likewise, it would suggest that the greater the number of social relationships one has, the lower the risk of feeling lonely.

However, the waysides of this assumption became apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, when widespread social isolation affected populations globally. While statistical data show that many individuals reported increased loneliness and mental health issues during this period (Statista, 2023, pp. 4–23), it cannot be universally claimed that everyone who experienced isolation became lonely, unhappy, or psychologically harmed.

If social isolation does not necessarily lead to loneliness or have uniformly negative effects, this raises the question: Is loneliness inherently a bad thing?

Loneliness in Tokyo

With the continuous growth of mass societies in metropolitan areas, urban streets are increasingly filled not only with people, but with feelings of anonymity. While anonymity can sometimes be a matter of personal choice, it is often shaped by external circumstances. The more people we encounter on a daily basis and the more sensory overload we are exposed to in our environments, the less likely we are to remember individual faces, names, or interactions. Human information processing is limited; to function effectively, the brain filters sensory stimuli and selectively allocates attention in order to achieve specific goals (Bellebaum, Thoma, & Daum, 2012, pp. 47–48).

In this context, modern cities—with their flashing advertisements, endless crowds, and constant noise—can become overwhelming. Social interaction, in order to remain manageable in such spaces, tends to become functional. Urban dwellers often adopt goal-oriented behaviors and perform roles that reduce interpersonal engagement to its instrumental core. This makes everyday interactions more impersonal, as individuals become secondary to their assigned roles (Häußermann, 2011, pp. 17–18).

Helen Nissenbaum (1999) deepens the understanding of anonymity by connecting it to the idea of inaccessibility. In her view, anonymity does not merely involve the absence of names or identification, but the social inaccessibility that results from such distancing (pp. 141–144).

Urban theorist Georg Simmel described the metropolis as a place where abundance, acceleration, overstimulation, and emotional detachment intensify with population density. He characterized it as a space in which "pure objectivity in the treatment of people and things" becomes the dominant mode, turning individuals into "elements indifferent in themselves" and rendering the city "an area of the highest impersonality" (Simmel, 1903, cited in Häußermann, 2011, p. 19).

These dynamics are particularly pronounced in Tokyo. As of 2024, Tokyo remains the most populous metropolitan area in the world, with approximately 37.1 million residents (Times of India, 2024). The city's character is shaped by extremes: ancient traditions coexist with cutting-edge technology, and serenity can be found just meters away from intense, illuminated chaos. Despite—or perhaps because of—this juxtaposition, Tokyo has become emblematic of urban loneliness and social withdrawal.

Two Japanese based phenomena that illustrate this are *karoshi* (death by overwork) and *hikikomori* (severe social withdrawal). In Japan, the cultural pressure to perform, succeed, and refrain from burdening others contributes to these developments. *Karoshi* reflects the health and emotional consequences of extreme work culture. *Hikikomori*, on the other hand,

describes individuals who refuge from society, often isolating themselves at home for months or years. While rooted in cultural and societal contexts, both phenomena reflect the broader challenges of maintaining emotional well-being in hyper-dense, high-pressure environments.
These observations are not intended to universalize or pathologize Japanese society. Rather, they reflect a particular configuration of modern urban life that deserves attention in global discussions of loneliness. Tokyo, as a megacity, offers a uniquely dense and technologically advanced context in which to study how urban design, societal expectations, and cultural values intersect to shape emotional experiences.

Loneliness in artistic perspective

Artistic and philosophical perspectives offer alternative approaches to loneliness that differ from empirical disciplines. These established sciences often reduce loneliness to measurable aspects such as social isolation or the frequency of social interaction. However, such approaches fall short in addressing the deeply personal perception of loneliness and cannot fully capture its complex and subjective nature.

Art, by contrast, provides a space for personal interpretation, emotional resonance, and inner reflection. Traditions such as Zen Buddhism and even Plato's allegory of the cave emphasize that clarity and insight often arise not through external stimulation, but through focused stillness, disconnection, and self-awareness. In this sense, solitude becomes a potential space for recognition and transformation.

Contemporary life, however, offers constant distractions. Social media, pharmaceuticals, consumer culture, and hyperconnectivity often suppress emotional confrontation and mask inner states. As Willberg (2023) notes, modern society tends to pathologize solitude, distracting us from its creative and reflective potential (pp. 76–78).
In her book *The Lonely City*, Olivia Laing explores how urban loneliness can become a creative force. She reflects on the lives of artists like Edward Hopper and David Wojnarowicz, who transformed their isolation into powerful artistic expression. According to Laing, loneliness reveals what truly matters—and what connects us.Laing acknowledges how urban loneliness, while painful, can also become a space of creative force. She writes:

"Loneliness is a very special place. It isn't always easy to see […] but over the course of my travels I've come to believe […] that loneliness is by no means a wholly worthless experience, but rather one that cuts right to the heart of what we value and what we need. Many marvellous things have emerged from the lonely city: things forged in loneliness, but also things that function to redeem it" (Laing, 2016, p. 5).

This view frames artistic research not just as a way to represent loneliness, but to activate and transform it—both for the artist and for the audience.

Art project

One ordinary morning during Tokyo's rush hour, I found myself tightly wedged between strangers on a crowded metro train. Amid this moment of collective discomfort for all commuters, I experienced a strange sense of contentment and ease. In fact, squeezed between the bodies of complete strangers, I found myself beginning to enjoy the train ride—and felt oddly unsettled by this realization. Somewhat ashamed, I must admit that upon reflecting on the experience, I realized my body was longing for intimacy, for physical closeness.
I have to acknowledge that I found both joy and healing in being pressed between warm bodies during Tokyo's rush hour—sharing contact and physical warmth with fellow passengers, without owing anything to anyone or having to engage in any obligations. Prompted by this unusual reflection, the Tokyo metro became a fascinating place for me—standing in stark

contrast to the overstimulation and relentless pace of the city. Paradoxically, while the Tokyo metro embodies all the characteristics of urbanization, modernity, efficiency, and acceleration, it also offered something entirely different: a moment of local social deceleration. Because once aboard, everyone had to do the same thing: wait.

Over time, I began to use my daily metro rides as a space for quiet reflection and artistic observation. Instead of shielding myself from the crowd, I started to engage—silently and visually. On each journey, I would select one fellow passenger and sketch them discreetly in my notebook. Through this repetitive practice, I created imaginary bonds. I began to wonder what these people had for breakfast, where they were heading, what occupied their thoughts. Although no words were exchanged, and the connection remained one-sided, the act of drawing gave shape to a temporary, emotional companionship and closeness.



Schaeben, Anna Lorena: Sketches from Tokyo Metro, 2023, pen and alcohol markers on paper, each 15 cm x 10 cm.

Through these sketches, I gradually constructed a new kind of social network—one based not on interaction, but on attention, imagination, and artistic presence. In this way, my drawing practice became a method for processing my own feelings of loneliness and anonymity. It allowed me to transform unknown faces into meaningful figures, and to

recalibrate the imbalance between desired and available social connection (cf. Luhmann, 2022, p. 12). This personal archive of imagined relationships gave rise to the idea for my large-scale painting “Jibun ga nai”. The painting depicts a Tokyo metro car—the very transit space that had become my emotional refuge—and brings together the many anonymous passengers—whom I would call friends—I had drawn over time. Each figure on the canvas represents one of these “silent friendships.” The result is a visual community: a train filled not with strangers, but with people who, through drawing, had become part of my inner world.

In this sense, the painting is more than a representation—it is an extension of the relational process that helped me navigate as well as communicate my feelings. It reflects how artistic research can not only document experience, but actively intervene in it, transforming feelings of isolation into aesthetic presence and imagined companionship.



Schaeben, Anna Lorena: Jibun ga nai, 2024, acryl and oil on canvas, 200 cm x 160 cm.

The development of the painting—conceived within a broader process of artistic research—was guided by the intention to convey and spatially translate the affective experience of loneliness. Central to the conceptual design was the choice of format: the painting was produced on a life-sized canvas to encourage viewers to perceive themselves as fellow passengers within the depicted metro car. This scale enables the viewer to physically and imaginatively enter the painted space, becoming part of the scene and extending the artwork into the surrounding reality.

Regarding the choice of materials and technique, I worked primarily with acrylic and oil paint. The metro environment—the walls, windows, handrails, and floor—was painted using acrylics, a medium I chose for its synthetic, fast-drying qualities, underscoring the artificial and mechanical aspects of the metro space. In contrast, the bodies of the passengers were painted in oils, allowing for more nuanced blending, warmth, and depth—highlighting the organic, emotional dimension of the human figures. This interplay of materials embodies the tension between lifeless infrastructure and human vulnerability, routine and presence, anonymity and emotional resonance.

The working process was structured and layered. It began in Tokyo, during what I refer to as the "getting to know" phase, where I sketched fellow passengers from life. Later, I created some sort of digital collages based on the many sketches I created. These compositions were

allowing me to previsualize and plan the composition. I then transferred the layout onto the large canvas. Using masking tape to ensure sharp lines and structure, I painted the background in acrylics first, followed by the figures in oil paint. I deliberately painted from right to left (as a right-hander) to prevent smudging and allow for continuous observation and engagement with each character. A smaller experimental painting preceded this large-scale work, helping me refine the technical layering process.

To intensify this immersive experience and bridge the gap between painted representation and real-time interaction, digital elements were embedded into the canvas. Specifically, Near Field Communication (NFC) chips were placed behind the painted surface—strategically located where visual motifs such as smartphones or headphones appear. When the spectator holds their mobile device up to the corresponding areas of the painting, the embedded file automatically appears on the screen and reinforces the painting's experiential dimension. A total of seven NFC chips were integrated, each linked to a specific, contextually relevant file:

- **NFC 1 & 2** link to online games that reflect the urban alienation and repetitiveness of daily metro life, inviting the viewer to engage in playful, self-reflective interactions.
- **NFC 3**, located behind a painted AirPod, connects to a curated Spotify playlist on the theme of loneliness, including songs quoted in this paper.
- **NFC 4, 5 & 6** correspond to the painted advertisements inside the metro car. These fictional ads satirize absurd or paradoxical real-life Tokyo advertisements. For example, the banana ad mimics an actual sign I saw, yet reinterprets it through the lens of personal emotion. Japanese characters embedded in the ad spell out phrases like 「人ずつ　一人で」 ("Alone, one by one"), or 「私だけが寂しいの？」 ("Am I the only one who feels lonely?").
- **NFC 7** leads directly to the PDF version of this academic paper, creating a reflexive loop between the artwork and its scholarly context.

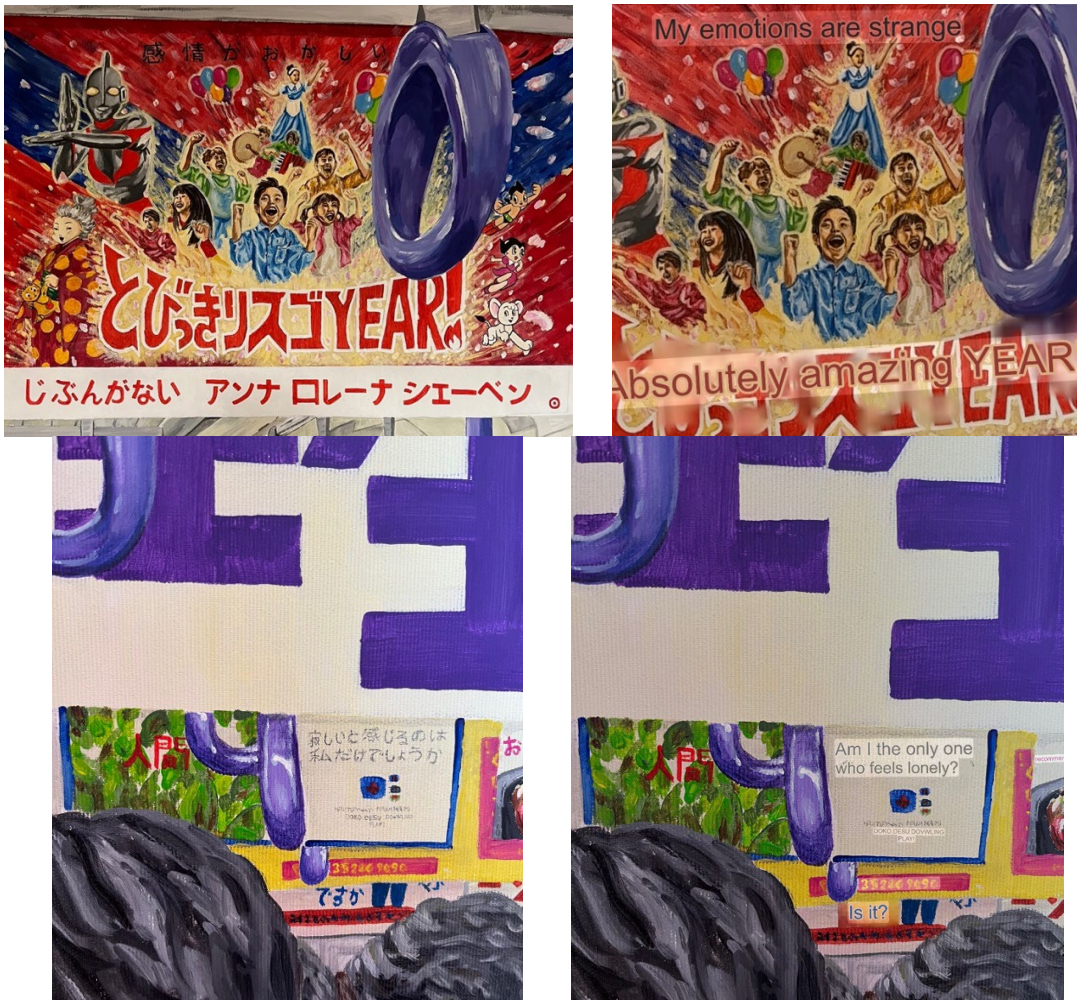
These embedded texts and digital extensions were conceived not as gimmicks, but as part of a deliberate strategy to update the medium of painting for the 21st century. Contemporary urban viewers are digital natives who navigate overstimulation, transience, and emotional disconnection. Through interactivity, the painting becomes a multisensory platform—offering not only visual engagement but sound, touch, and action. In this sense, it functions not just as representation, but as environment.



An additional concealed element is the title of the work itself, **"Jibun ga nai" (じぶんがない)**, subtly embedded in the canvas. This Japanese term/concept—less internationally known than "Ikigai" — describes the feeling of being internally empty or without a defined self, despite being surrounded by others (cf. Ozawa-de Silva 2021, p. 123). Positioned next to the title, the artist's name appears in katakana (アンナ・ロレナ・シャーベン), functioning as a discreet signature that visually blends into the painting.

Advertisements, as a form of visual communication, play a crucial thematic role in the painting. Drawing from the real-life environment of Tokyo's metro, fictional and sometimes absurd advertisements were created and embedded within the artwork. These emerged from reflections during daily commutes, often sparked by limited comprehension of the Japanese language and driven by emotional responses to the urban environment. Personal reflections were transformed into visual and textual content and incorporated into the work's layered structure.

Additional inscriptions are hidden within the painted metro advertisements—short phrases, fragments, and reflections that emerged during metro rides, particularly in moments of introspection and solitude. These textual traces serve as intimate, associative layers and invite viewers to discover and interpret their meanings within the broader thematic framework of the work.



Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated how artistic research—through a multimodal, interactive, and emotionally embedded practice—can offer a meaningful framework for exploring the complex phenomenon of loneliness. In the face of rushing digitalization, hyper-urbanization, and cultural expectations of constant performance and availability, feelings of disconnection and anonymity are increasingly common, particularly in global megacities like Tokyo.
Through the painting *Jibun ga nai*, this study demonstrates how art can not only represent emotional states but intervene in them. By transforming daily moments of estrangement into sketches and eventually into a collective painting, the project constructed a visual space of imagined belonging. The work turned a transit zone—normally impersonal and fleeting—into a site of emotional significance and aesthetic presence. The integration of digital technologies such as NFC further extended the painting's function from visual artifact to experiential interface, bridging physical and virtual modes of interaction.

The project illustrates that loneliness is not necessarily a condition to be avoided or pathologized, but can instead be embraced as a space for reflection, transformation, and creative potential. Artistic practice offered a unique pathway to process personal feelings of detachment and to open a public dialogue about shared vulnerability, particularly in contexts of urban anonymity and there with contributes to the construction of creative communities.

My project began as a way to understand myself and my own feelings of loneliness and anonymity. But through my artistic research it grew into a dialogue between people, societies, cultures and disciplines. The essence of this artwork lies in artistically catalyzing my own

loneliness in order to enter a (wordless) dialogue with the (lonely) audience and to open a space for shared reflection about loneliness and anonymity. Simultaneously my hope and approach is that it continues to ask: How the arts – in its uniqueness – can help us build emotional creative communities … even interculturally and in transit?

In conclusion, I would like to point out that this paper is based on my master's thesis (2024), which can be consulted by further interests or for deeper insights if desired. The following link provides access to my website where the academic work is accessible: www.annalorenaschaeben.com

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Media Portrayals Of The 30 September Movement In Indonesia: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

This study explores the contrasting media portrayals of the 30 September Movement in Indonesia across two regimes. The 30 September Movement occurred in 1965, during which six military generals and one lieutenant were kidnapped and killed, allegedly by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). In line with Barthes' concept of myth, this study argues that the media plays a crucial role in constructing myths about the 30 September Movement and identifies significant differences in media portrayals between the New Order and Reform eras. Employing the content analysis method, this study analyzes the film *Penumpasan Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI*, which was disseminated during the New Order era, alongside four works from the Reform era, including documentary films *The Act of Killing* and *Eksil*, as well as two novels, *Gadis Kretek* and *Cantik Itu Luka*. Research findings indicate that due to the militaristic nature of the New Order era, media portrayals of the 30 September Movement emphasize the heroic actions of the military while portraying PKI as brutal savages. Conversely, non-fiction media portrayals during the Reform era focus on humanizing the members of PKI by highlighting the mass killings of alleged communists in 1965-1966. The fictional media portrayals of the movement also tend to present more empathetic views of the Indonesian Communist Party members. However, the fictional works analyzed in this study often depict left-leaning characters as shallow and easily influenced. Additionally, this study found that media portrayals during the Reform era actively tried to construct new, more humane myths regarding the Indonesian Communist Party.

Keywords: 1965 Communist Purge, 30 September Movement, Cold War, Indonesian media.

Introduction

This study will focus on the media representation of the 30 September Movement in Indonesia. Under Soeharto's dictatorship regime during the New Order era, the government strictly controlled and heavily censored Indonesian media. This resulted in the mainstream media only disseminating narratives approved by the government, including those about the 30 September Movement. However, after the mass protests in 1998, which led to Soeharto's resignation, Indonesia entered the Reform era, characterized by freedom of the press and freedom of expression recognized by the country's constitution. Civilians, especially those working in the film and book publishing industry, eventually began creating works to counter the dominant anti-communist narrative built by the Soeharto regime.

Previous studies have analyzed the 30 September Movement in terms of media portrayal, especially the government propaganda movie called *Penumpasan Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* (*Crushing the Treachery of the Indonesian Communist Party and the September 30 Movement*, 1984) by director Arifin C. Noer, distributed during the New Order. Beta et al. (2011) focused on how the movie portrayed the kidnapped generals as the victims, pushing the audience to identify with them, and how the generals eventually became the symbol of the nation and state ideology. Machell (2017) dissected the movie and several other films depicting

the communist massacre in 1965 to understand the process of truth-seeking and history reconstruction.

Another movie that was discussed in a lot of studies about the 30 September Movement is *The Act of Killing,* a documentary film by Joshua Oppenheimer, Christine Cynn, and an anonymous Indonesian director, which provides the killers' perspectives from the communist purge. Melnik (2020) proposed that the movie offered a new narrative and contributed to reconstructing Indonesia's collective memory of the 1965 tragedy. Sutopo (2017) criticized the documentary film as it was seen to abandon previous academic studies related to the killings.

Despite the extensive research on the 30 September Movement media portrayal, there is still no study comparing media portrayals of the incident during the New Order and Reform era, considering the different political situations. Therefore, this study intends to explore the contrasting media portrayals of a single historical event between the two regimes. This study uses content analysis as its methodology and aligns itself with Barthes' concept of myth (1972) to analyze media portrayals of the 30 September Movement. Barthes explained that myths are not fixed; they can appear, change, disintegrate, and disappear completely. Moreover, myths are filled with the motivations of their creators in an attempt to achieve a desired state.

Using this perspective, this study sees that the media plays an important role in building myths about the 30 September Movement in Indonesia. In the context of this study, the Soeharto regime built a myth, or narrative, through a propaganda movie that the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) betrayed the country and trampled the nation's ideology, later addressed as the 30 September Movement. However, after the New Order era ended, people gained more freedom to express their political opinions, including about the 30 September Movement. Artists, especially directors and writers, eventually built narratives to counter the anti-PKI narrative disseminated by the previous government. This study argues that there are significant differences between the New Order and Reform eras regarding media portrayals of the 30 September Movement.

This study will analyze five media products, including the *Penumpasan Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* movie from the New Order era, two documentaries from the Reform era called *The Act of Killing* and *Eksil*, and two Reform-era novels called *Gadis Kretek* and *Cantik Itu Luka.* Several scenes mentioning PKI and the 30 September Movement will be analyzed, then compared with one another. This study considers that fiction as a literary work can help make sense of historical events such as the 30 September Movement. Additionally, this study aims to explore if there are any differences in media portrayals of the 30 September Movement between fictional and nonfictional works.

The 30 September Movement

To understand the shifting media portrayal of the 30 September Movement, it is crucial to understand the incident itself. However, there is still limited knowledge about what truly happened during the attempted coup. This section will try to explain the different narratives about the 30 September Movement, specifically the dominant narrative disseminated by the Soeharto regime (hereafter addressed as the Lubang Buaya narrative) and the narrative related to the Cold War, made known after the release of declassified U.S. government documents.

In his book *Pretext for Mass Murder*, Roosa (2006) tried to decode what happened during the 30 September Movement. While it is called 30 September, the Movement was made known to the public on the morning of October 1, 1965, over a national radio broadcast. Relaying an alleged statement from Lieutenant Colonel Untung, the national radio station announced that an internal army organization called the 30 September Movement had taken control of several strategic locations in Jakarta, including Merdeka Square and Halim Air Force Base. This move was made to prevent a "counterrevolutionary coup" by the Council Generals. Lieutenant Colonel Untung stated they acted out of loyalty to the current president, Soekarno.

The Movement had arrested several generals the night before and would take further action soon.

The 30 September Movement troops targeted seven high-ranking military generals. They were divided into seven groups, assigned to kidnap one general each. However, the Minister of Defense, General A. H. Nasution, managed to escape, and the group abducted his adjutant out of confusion. These six generals and one lieutenant were brought to Lubang Buaya, an uninhabited grove near the heart of Jakarta, three of them already dead after being shot and stabbed in their house. It was believed that the troops shot the remaining four officers and dumped all seven corpses down a well in Lubang Buaya.

Based on the Lubang Buaya narrative, Major General Soeharto, commander of the Army's Strategic Reserve, played a key role in containing the Movement. After learning about the kidnappings, Soeharto appointed himself as the interim army commander, assuming that Commander of the Army Ahmad Yani had already been killed. Through minimal intimidation, Soeharto managed to take over Merdeka Square. He then proceeded to order President Soekarno, who was negotiating with leaders of the Movement in Halim, to flee because he wanted to attack the air base. After Soekarno left for Bogor in West Java, Soeharto and his troops managed to put an end to the Movement on October 2, 1965.

The dominant narrative spread during the New Order only covered the Movement until the heroic acts of the military under Soeharto's order. However, after the release of the declassified U.S. documents in 2017, it became clear that there is more to the story than a mere attempted coup. The declassified files revealed that Soeharto supervised mass killings targeting the Indonesian Communist Party (hereafter addressed as PKI) members in 1965-1966 and gave permission for the military and local paramilitary groups to kill anyone thought to be a communist.The files also show that the U.S. government had full knowledge of and gave monetary support for the anti-communist purge.These files ultimately confirmed the ties between the mass killings and the Cold War happening in the West around the same period.

In his book *The Jakarta Method*, Bevins (2020) outlined the U.S. government's involvement in communist purges in Indonesia. His research revealed that days after the Movement happened, the U.S. embassy in Jakarta sent a cable to the U.S. State Department, planning to help the Indonesian army by spreading the story of the PKI's guilt, treachery, and brutality if they could find a way to do it without revealing their involvement. They particularly targeted key individuals in the Army, including Major General Soeharto, to overthrow Soekarno. Soekarno was seen as a threat as he formed alliances with left-leaning countries and strongly expressed his opposition to the Malayan Federation formed by the British.

Assisted by the U.S. government and ultimately the Western Bloc, the Indonesian army was set into motion. According to Bevins (2020), they began spreading anti-communist propaganda, starting with the island of Sumatra. The Army weaponized anti-communist local leaders, such as Aceh's military commander Ishak Djuarsa, who instructed the locals to kill the PKI members as they were regarded as *kafir* (infidels). Other regions closely followed, including Java and Bali. It did not stop with only the PKI; every organization affiliated with the Communist Party and the members' families were affected.

The U.S. government realized that the Army did not need arms; they needed information regarding who to kill. The CIA and the U.S. embassy then compiled lists with thousands of names of communists and suspected communists. In November 1965, the Army captured and killed PKI leader D. N. Aidit in Boyolali, Central Java. Referencing a fake document, they announced that Aidit admitted his ploy to take over the country. Aidit's execution ultimately led to the dissolution of the PKI. With the mass killings happening across the country, the economic situation deteriorated, especially with Soeharto working behind the scenes, collaborating with businessmen to restrict the supply of essential goods. On March 11, 1966, Soekarno was allegedly forced to sign a letter handing over his presidency to Soeharto.

With that, the New Order era began, and the U.S. government had reached its goal of dethroning Soekarno, ultimately placing an authoritarian leader who sided with them.

Development of the 30 September Movement Media Portrayals

After claiming his presidency, Soeharto became Indonesia's president for 32 years. His regime was characterized by its *Dwifungsi* policy, allowing military personnel to participate at all levels of the Indonesian government, economy, and society. Another characteristic is the strict implementation of Pancasila as state ideology, emphasizing societal interests above individuals. The government eventually exploited Pancasila's vagueness. They would remove political opponents and forbid criticism by deeming them threats to the nation's stability. This led to a depoliticized Indonesian society, which was justified as a way to reach economic growth.

However, Indonesia's economy ultimately went into disarray after the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997. This incident triggered a series of demonstrations, calling for Soeharto and his cronies to be taken to court and for the government to revise the constitution. The crisis climaxed when security forces killed four demonstrators from Trisakti University, which set off riots and lootings in several cities in Indonesia. In May 1998, Soeharto announced his resignation, and per the constitution, Vice President Habibie assumed the presidency. The fall of Soeharto essentially marked the end of the New Order era and the start of the democratic Reform era.

The sudden shift from authoritarianism to democracy, naturally, brought many changes in Indonesian society. In the context of this study, press freedom and the release of political prisoners played a big part in changing the narrative about the 30 September Movement. During the New Order, the dominant narrative was disseminated through education and mandatory annual screening of the film *Penumpasan Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* (*Crushing the Treachery of the Indonesian Communist Party and the September 30 Movement*), released in 1984. The propaganda movie (hereafter addressed as the *G30S/PKI* movie) was the first and only film about the 30 September Movement released during the New Order.

Therefore, it is not surprising that after the New Order era ended, creative workers celebrated their freedom by sharing stories about the PKI and the 30 September Movement from their perspectives. Banned and censored books during the New Order era were redistributed by publishing companies and adapted for the big screen, achieving massive popularity even among younger generations. Numerous Reform-era novels also centered on the 30 September Movement and featured communist-leaning main characters. The sudden surge of books depicting the 30 September Movement and the PKI was accompanied by an increase in documentaries and fictional films. This phenomenon demonstrates that the 30 September Movement and PKI have transitioned from taboo subjects to mainstream topics that attract public attention.

As mentioned, this study will analyze five media products that depicted the 30 September Movement. Since there was only one media portrayal of the Movement during the New Order, this study will only focus on the *G30/PKI* propaganda movie. On the other hand, this study chose four media from the Reform era to analyze: the documentary films *The Act of Killing* and *Eksil*, and the novels *Gadis Kretek* and *Cantik Itu Luka*.

The Act of Killing (2012) focuses on the communist massacres in 1965-1966. The documentary follows several individuals who proudly executed the alleged communists during the purge. Alternatively, *Eksil* (2022) talks about Indonesian students who are stranded and unable to return to the country after Soeharto's presidency in 1966 because they refused to pledge allegiance to the new regime. The film features interviews with several exiles, including Asahan Aidit, the younger brother of the PKI leader.

The novels analyzed in this study featured PKI members and left-leaning individuals as their main characters. *Gadis Kretek* (Ratih Kumala, 2012) tells the story of a tobacco company run by a wealthy family. It was revealed that the family patriarch had close ties with the PKI and had to make a deal with a tobacco company owner to save himself from the 1965 massacre. On the other hand, *Cantik Itu Luka* (Eka Kurniawan, 2002) is an epic historical fiction, focusing on the life of a prostitute and her daughters. The book features a communist character who was an active member of the communist party and eventually became the regional leader.

As stated above, several scenes related to PKI, communism, and the 30 September Movement will be chosen and analyzed in this study. In particular, this study will focus on myths surrounding the Soeharto regime, the fallen generals of the 30 September Movement, the PKI members and left-leaning individuals, and the family members of the alleged communists. These are the main elements that will be compared between the New Order and Reform era media products, as well as the nonfiction and fiction works.

These four media products were chosen due to their popularity among the general public, especially among the younger generation, compared to other media products depicting PKI and the 30 September Movement. Both *The Act of Killing* and *Eksil* are critically acclaimed and garnered international attention. *The Act of Killing* was nominated for Best Documentary Feature at the 86th Academy Awards, while *Eksil* won Best Documentary Feature at the prestigious Indonesian Film Festival. *Gadis Kretek* was adapted into a Netflix show in 2023, creating huge social media buzz shortly after its release. Meanwhile, *Cantik Itu Luka* has been translated into 34 languages. Their positive reception shows that these media products are important tools in shaping the 30 September Movement narrative in the new era of Indonesia.

Analysis and Discussion

Penumpasan Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI

The film *Penumpasan Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* begins by showing President Soekarno's deteriorating health condition and the country's poor economic situation. It then leads to a scene of a PKI member saying that now is the right time to seize power. The PKI leader D. N. Aidit believes that the military was planning a coup, and they must act first. In another scene, the PKI members planned to kidnap seven generals, stating that it was Aidit's suggestion.

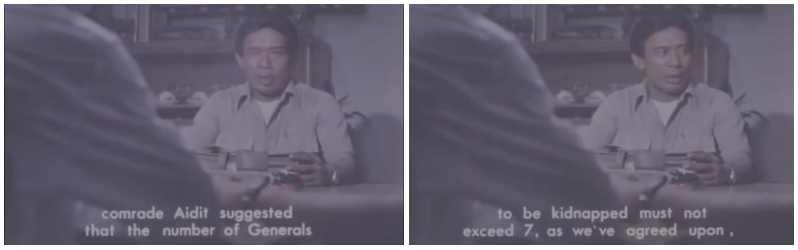


Figure 1. A scene from *G30S/PKI* of PKI members discussing the kidnapping.

In the next hour, the movie shows scenes of the generals' daily lives and their families leading up to the kidnapping. This is seen as a way to evoke sympathy and enable the audience to identify with the generals. By showing the familial side of the generals, the audience would feel the incident closer to their reality as they can see the fear of the wives and children. One scene shows the daughter of General Nasution admiring her father's photo and dressing up in military clothes. The girl then said she wanted medals like her father, and the older family members said she could have a medal if she did something good for the country. This can be translated into an attempt by the government to paint the military as role models.

The third act of the movie begins by showing how the generals were being interrogated and tortured by the PKI members. The party members were seen dancing and singing cheerfully after successfully capturing the generals. Another scene shows the generals being threatened with razors and sickles. This sequence portrays PKI members (and by extension, communists and leftists) as brutal savages who would not show mercy to their targets.

In the latter part of the movie, Soeharto is depicted as the hero who saves the country. Through simple negotiations, he was able to crush the Movement. He was also shown as a charismatic and commanding figure, being able to intimidate the Movement troops into surrendering. In one scene, his character explicitly stated that PKI was the mastermind behind the Movement, and he knew their tactics well. It portrays Soeharto as an intelligent leader who could not be easily deceived.

The last hour of the movie shows how the Army found a house that was used as the headquarters of PKI to interrogate and torture the generals. The Army found a well with corpses inside. Accompanied by haunting background music, the movie then shows how PKI members dumped the blood-soaked bodies in the well. The scene continues with original audio clips from Soeharto while overseeing the extraction of corpses from the well. He insinuated that the communist youth volunteers may have had some involvement in the killings. The scene also shows the deformed faces of the deceased generals. This sequence further emphasizes just how ruthless the PKI members were.

It is also important to note that the movie shows scenes of civilians discussing communism in between. In one scene, a married couple is shown worrying about the communist jargon, and the husband calls it hypocritical. They went on talking about their daily life, occasionally inserting Islamic sayings, indicating that the Muslims do not align themselves with communist values. This narrative is also reinforced in the last part of the movie, in which it shows the public gathering to pay their respects to the fallen generals. In the background, an audio recording of General Nasution was played, saying that the generals will return to their Creator as heroes. This scene stood out because, during the New Order era, the anti-communist narrative worked hand in hand with the anti-atheist narrative. All atheists were regarded as communists and vice versa. By stating that God is an important part of the Army as a whole, this movie positioned them as opposing the evil, atheist communists, and ultimately became the protagonist in the narrative.

Through the *G30S/PKI* movie, the Soeharto government built three important myths related to the 30 September Movement. First, the fallen generals were both victims and heroes. Second, the PKI members and communists were the inhumane villains. Lastly, the Army and, by extension, then-Mayor General Soeharto protected the nation's ideology.

The Act of Killing and Eksil

The Act of Killing is a documentary film that focuses on what happened after the 30 September Movement, namely the communist purge in 1965-1966, from the killers' perspective. The most striking individual interviewed in the movie is Anwar Congo, a member of the paramilitary group Pancasila Youth (*Pemuda Pancasila*) in North Sumatra. Filmed 40 years after the purge, Congo took the filmmakers to an abandoned part of a building where they used to kill the alleged communists. On the site, he demonstrated how he killed his victims. Congo recalled that he got lists of the communists from a local newspaperman, Ibrahim Sinik. In another interview, Sinik stated that he interrogated the communists in his office. Whatever their answer was, he would alter it to make the public hate the communists.



Figure 2. A scene from *The Act of Killing* of Congo (right) demonstrates his method of killing.

The next scene shows the Pancasila Youth mass gathering. The leader of the paramilitary group made a fiery speech in front of thousands of members, saying all Pancasila Youth members are heroes because they helped exterminate the communists and fight the left-wing extremists. This speech has a similar narrative to General Nasution's speech from the *G30S/PKI* movie in its attempt to instill nationalism in the audience and depict armed groups as heroes. That being said, while the speech in *G30S/PKI* was shot in a way that made the audience feel sympathetic and patriotic, this scene in *The Act of Killing* was framed to inflict anger and disgust because right after this speech, the scene continues with the Pancasila Youth's leader playing golf while sexually assaulting the caddy girl.

At the end of the first hour, Congo consoles his old friend Adi Zulkadry, who also participated in the killing, because he keeps getting nightmares about the massacre. His friend recommended that Congo seek help from a psychiatrist. However, this recommendation did not come from a place of concern. As the movie progresses, Zulkadry says that he thinks Congo keeps getting nightmares because his mind is weak and cannot process the killings. Unlike Congo, Zulkadry feels no remorse, clearly stating he deals with his crime by finding an alternate perspective to justify the purge.

During the last hour of the movie, Congo and his friends try to re-enact how they burned down a village during the purge. In the sequence, one of Congo's juniors in the gangster group, Herman Koto, talks about the sexual assaults they committed on alleged communist women, including raping a 14-year-old girl who was related to a PKI member. After they were done with the re-enactment, the children involved in the production were crying as the filming became too chaotic and scary for the kids. One of them is Koto's daughter. He is then shown trying to calm his daughter down.

This scene captures the irony of the killers. On one hand, they believe they have the right to murder the "communists" and strip their families of their human rights. However, they strive to live a normal life outside of their history as killers. They have children and want to protect their family like everyone else. *The Act of Killing* portrays this contradicting identity throughout the film, which can be interpreted as the filmmakers' way of triggering the audience's rage toward the killers for their inhumane acts and hypocrisy.

Similarly, *Eksil* talks about Indonesian students who could not return to the country and became stateless after Soeharto's presidency. The first part of the documentary focuses on how the Soekarno regime sent young scholars to study abroad. The vision was that after graduating, the students would return and apply their knowledge in various sectors. However, they could not return to Indonesia because they refused to support the Soeharto regime. Some of them were also labeled as communist supporters. *Eksil* compiled interviews from ten students who could not return to Indonesia. Three interviewees will be discussed in this study.

The first is Chalik Hamid (deceased), who was sent to Albania to study political science. He planned to bring his wife and newborn child with him once he settled in the new country. However, after the Movement, his wife was imprisoned due to her connection with Hamid. His friend eventually married Hamid's wife to protect her and the baby. Hamid then started his new

life by seeking asylum in the Netherlands. In his old days, Hamid began planting bamboo and banana trees in his home to ease his longing for Indonesia.

Hamid mentioned that many people think the exiles are living a happy life abroad, but in truth, they keep thinking about their homeland, which they cannot easily return to. This shows the nationalism of the exiles, even though the country tossed them away. It can be interpreted as a way of stating that these exiles are no less patriotic than the government, the Army, or the fallen general from the Movement, as was portrayed during the New Order era.

Another scene portrays Djumaini Kartaprawira (deceased), who was sent to the Soviet Union. In one scene, Kartaprawira reminisced about when his parents died and he could not attend their funeral in Indonesia. He could not sleep for months because of heartbreak and immense sadness. These two scenes of Hamid and Kartaprawira captured their familial side and everyday lives, causing the audience to feel that they were "one of us". If this tragedy happened to them, then it can happen to anyone.

The last scene is of Asahan Aidit (deceased), the younger brother of D. N. Aidit, the PKI's infamous leader. He was sent to Moscow to study philology. Asahan talked about his older brother, who was a devoted Muslim, ultimately crushing the narrative of PKI as the enemy of Islam and every other religion in Indonesia. Asahan managed to return to Indonesia after Soeharto's resignation, but could not stay close to his family as he was still stigmatized. In the end, Asahan said it would be hard for the exiles to forgive the Indonesian government, which made them the nation's enemies. This statement signifies that the New Order regime did, indeed, build a narrative cornering those who did not align with the government by claiming them as threats to the nation.

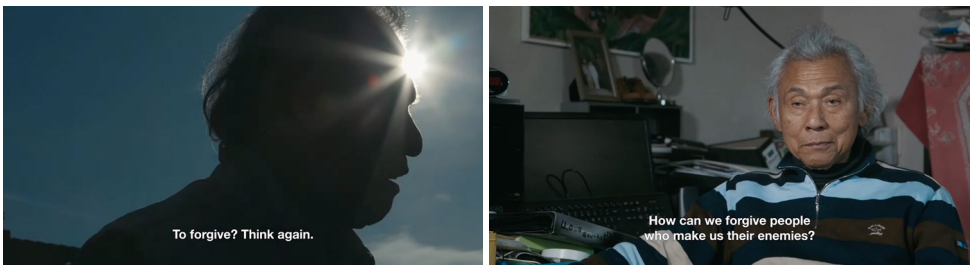


Figure 3. A scene from *Eksil* of Asahan Aidit.

Both *The Act of Killing* and *Eksil* essentially show that the Soeharto regime was not the ideal patriots they painted themselves to be. While they do not explicitly put all the blame on Soeharto's government, both films shifted the narrative from *"PKI members are ruthless killers"* to *"the New Order regime would do anything to retain their power"*. In addition, *The Act of Killing* and *Eksil* built new myths about the Movement by showing that the fallen generals were not the only victims – the PKI members, their families, and even students who were sent abroad were all affected by the event.

Gadis Kretek and Cantik Itu Luka

In analyzing *Gadis Kretek*, this study will focus on the character Soeraja, the male lead with close ties to PKI in the 1960s. The first passage that mentions PKI portrays it as a wealthy party with a lot of money to spend on campaigning. Soeraja started getting involved with the party after getting friendly with a press owner who printed both Soeraja's wedding invitations and PKI's banners. After a while, Soeraja had the idea of making a new cigarette brand for PKI, later named the Red Sickle cigarette. This passage shows how massive the party was in its glory days, especially in the Javanese countryside.

The next passage about PKI mentioned the names of the fallen generals, even though it was not addressed as the 30 September Movement. Just days before his wedding, Soeraja had

to flee his town after finding his acquaintances dead in the river. *Gadis Kretek* explicitly stated that a death squad was established in Soeraja's city, even mentioning that the Army went from door to door to arrest everyone and anyone who had the slightest relation with the PKI.

> Meanwhile, a death squad had established itself in their city. And no longer were its members covertly slaughtering those involved with the PKI and throwing them into Pepe River before dawn; instead, in broad daylight, they were banging on the front doors of people who had been involved with the PKI.
>
> (Excerpt from the translated version of *Gadis Kretek*)

The Army captured Soeraja's fiancée, Jeng Yah, because of their romantic relationship. Even her father was arrested for giving his blessings to their engagement, and because his cigarette brand used red cigarette paper, which was associated with the PKI. Inside the prison, Jeng Yah reunited with Sentot, a suitor she had once refused, who had joined the military. In an unexpected turn of events, Jeng Yah and her father were set free with Sentot's help. However, their time at the prison left Jeng Yah and her father forever changed. Jeng Yah was devastated as she still had not heard any news about Soeraja. Her father, on the other hand, had no spirits left after his cigarette brand got banned.

Jeng Yah did not know that Soeraja managed to escape and started working for Pak Djagad, Jeng Yah's father's rival in the cigarette business. Pak Djagad noticed Soeraja's talent for making cigarettes. On top of that, his daughter fell in love with Soeraja. With that in mind, Pak Djagad proposed a deal: Pak Djagad would erase Soeraja's PKI-related past and become his father-in-law, and in exchange, Soeraja would share the cigarette's secret recipe he had learned from Jeng Yah.

Soeraja agreed to marry Pak Djagad's daughter and became an equal partner in his cigarette company. Upon discovering that her recipe was stolen and sold under a different name by her ex-fiancé, Jeng Yah was furious. She attended Soeraja's wedding ceremony and struck his forehead with a kerosene lamp. Years later, Soeraja still feels guilty but never attempts to reach out to Jeng Yah and her family until his last breath.

Slightly different from *Gadis Kretek*, *Cantik Itu Luka* features Kliwon, a main character explicitly mentioned as a communist. He is portrayed as a handsome and intelligent troublemaker, frequently stealing from the neighbors and running away without paying after sleeping with prostitutes. At first, Kliwon was desperate to sleep with the famous prostitute Dewi Ayu, but after visiting her house, Kliwon met eight-year-old Alamanda, Dewi Ayu's eldest daughter. From that moment on, he switched his interest to Alamanda. He started visiting Dewi Ayu's house more often, offering to walk Alamanda and her younger sister Adinda to school every morning.

Eventually, he realized that Alamanda could not return his love, as she was only a child. Kliwon never recovered from his gloom. After a series of events, he began calling himself Comrade Kliwon, establishing his new identity as a communist even though his mother opposed his leaning. It is worth mentioning that Kliwon's late father had been a communist, and he formed a friendship with an old PKI member when he was thirteen.

Years after their first encounter, Kliwon reunited with fifteen-year-old Alamanda. It was around this time that Kliwon became a PKI cadre. Kliwon eventually began dating Alamanda, but after Kliwon left for university, Alamanda was raped by Shodancho, the head of the village's military district. Out of shame, Alamanda married Shodancho, and brokenhearted Kliwon focused all his efforts on PKI. Six months later, Kliwon officially became a full member of the PKI. He spread communist propaganda to fishermen and founded a union for them. With his charisma, Kliwon quickly became the leader of his village's PKI branch.

Under Kliwon's leadership, PKI bloomed in the village. The party members would decorate the town in red and force communism to be taught in schools. Interestingly, Shodancho, as the local authority figure, complied with the communists. When Kliwon and the village's PKI branch started to get inflexible, Shodancho would play along, including arresting a group of young men for singing rock and roll songs.

> The communists pressured the schools, even the kindergartens and the schools for the disabled, to teach the "Internationale" to their students. And of course, they plastered pictures of Marx and Lenin on the classroom walls, all in one line with the portraits of national heroes.

(Excerpt from the translated version of *Cantik Itu Luka*)

However, the anti-PKI narratives ultimately reached Kliwon's village after the 30 September Movement. The army and police entered the town after noticing PKI's rapid development under Kliwon's leadership. During this flurry of events, Kliwon did not take charge as a reliable leader. He was more concerned with his newspaper, which had stopped coming since the military took charge. Eventually, the communists were wiped out by the Army, accompanied by anti-communist sympathizers, in a quick massacre. Without much restraint, Kliwon was captured by Shodancho on his veranda. It was decided that Kliwon would be executed the next day. Despite that, he was not devastated because Kliwon had grown tired of being a communist and managing PKI.

In the end, Kliwon's execution was canceled. The Army spared him – only beaten up, then tossed in the field behind the military headquarters. Adinda, Alamanda's younger sister, was the one who found Kliwon. She dragged him to the hospital and stayed until he regained consciousness. After waking up, Kliwon rebuilt his life by marrying Adinda. Years into their marriage, Kliwon eventually had an affair with Alamanda and was confronted by Adinda. Shortly after, he killed himself in his room.

Gadis Kretek and *Cantik Itu Luka* depicted the PKI activities in Indonesia's countryside. Stripped away from the capital city's melee during the 30 September Movement, both novels still portray the Movement in how it affects the characters' lives. The narratives in *Gadis Kretek* and *Cantik Itu Luka* are more similar to the Reform-era documentaries discussed previously, focusing more on the events that followed the Movement. However, it is worth noting that the two novels portray PKI-leaning characters rather negatively.

Soeraja and Kliwon are both portrayed as fairly shallow and materialistic. Soeraja only became friendly with PKI after realizing he could make a deal out of them. He did not make any effort to learn about the party and what it stands for. Soeraja, too, essentially sold the secret recipe of Jeng Yah's cigarette to make a name for himself in the business and wipe his PKI-related past. Not only betraying Jeng Yah and her family, Soeraja essentially only decided to marry Pak Djagad's daughter because he saw it as more beneficial.

Similarly, Kliwon is explicitly shown as a selfish character. Almost everything he did, he did for himself and his enjoyment. There was no logical reason why he became a communist; it was simply because of his sorrow. Moreover, Kliwon is portrayed as a pedophilic character, being romantically interested in Alamanda when she was still eight and Adinda when she was still fifteen. Even though Kliwon was initially depicted as an intelligent young man, he grew to be an unlikeable figure in *Cantik Itu Luka*, a rigid communist leader who forced the ideology into the village but was unreliable in dire times.

Through Kliwon and other minor communist characters, *Cantik Itu Luka* particularly depicts the PKI poorly. It is shown as a party that used Kliwon's physical appearance to lure young girls into becoming cadres and pressured schools into teaching communism. To some extent, the communists in the book are also portrayed as naive followers of Kliwon, but even Kliwon himself expressed his exhaustion from being an active party member.

Therefore, it can be concluded that while *Gadis Kretek* and *Cantik Itu Luka* portray the 30 September Movement through an alternative perspective, both novels depict communists and PKI-leaning characters as gullible. In the process, these novels built another myth: that people did not associate themselves with PKI and communism because they agreed with the ideology; they were just swayed – in Soeraja's case, by money; in Kliwon's case, by his loneliness; and in Kliwon's comrades' case, by their leader's charisma.

Compared to the Reform-era films, both novels may seem less sympathetic to the left-leaning characters. However, *Gadis Kretek* and *Cantik Itu Luka* still depict these characters humanely by reinforcing the same *"They are just like us"* narrative built by the documentaries. By writing their mishaps and errors, *Gadis Kretek* and *Cantik Itu Luka* also proposed three-dimensional, realistic characters and cleverly avoided portraying them as powerless victims against the government. This is an element that was missing from the films, as their limited run time did not allow the documentaries to explore each of their interviewees in a detailed manner.

While the films tend to only focus on the interviewees' experiences concerning PKI and the 30 September Movement, these novels have more room – and in a sense, time – to build myths around the characters, not only about their connection to the Movement. More importantly, *Gadis Kretek* and *Cantik Itu Luka* put forward the narrative that while these characters are flawed, their status as victims of the Movement cannot be easily dismissed, as it affects their character journey and development. However, whether this myth is counterproductive, especially among the sympathetic narratives about PKI built by other Reform-era media, is still open for interpretation.

Conclusion

As previously stated, the media plays a crucial role in making sense of the world, including historical events such as the 30 September Movement. Even years after the incident, new myths about the Movement are still being built, especially in entertainment media. The narrative has certainly shifted from the New Order to the Reform era. While the generals are still regarded as the victims, Reform-era media products raised an important narrative by showing PKI members and the exiled students as victims of the Movement as well.

Moreover, Reform-era media products have dismantled myths about the Soeharto regime that were built during the New Order. The documentaries analyzed in this study challenged the dominant narrative by presenting accounts and testimonies of those who experienced the aftermath of the Movement. The Soeharto regime went from being regarded as the protector of the nation's ideology to the puppetmaster behind the 1965-1966 mass killings.

While nonfictional works in the Reform era tend to be more sympathetic towards the PKI and alleged communists, the fictional works discussed in this study offer another point of view. Left-leaning characters are portrayed to be more naive and shallow, yet this can be seen as a way to show that these communist characters are just mere humans, living their mundane lives until the Movement happened. Using their unique approach, the fictional works can still be seen as rather humanizing the PKI members. Furthermore, the increasing number of fictional works about the 30 September Movement and PKI made the topic more accessible and less intimidating, especially for the younger audience, as they can be easily consumed as entertainment.

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Developing A Conservation Guidebook For The Lion And Dragon Dance Team

Siwat Visuthirungsiuri

Abstract

This research develops a conservation guidebook as a documentation tool to support community-led conservation for Lion and Dragon Dance communities. While some aspects of the tradition are preserved in institutional collections, much of the living heritage remains in community spaces, often undocumented or without formal conservation support. The template created in this project is designed to work with Lion and Dragon dance communities, offering a flexible approach that records the physical condition, stories, and cultural context of objects. The guidebook aims to empower communities to document, care for, and sustain their heritage in ways that are meaningful and practical for the community.

Keywords: Conservation, Conservation Guidebook, Lion and Dragon dance, Community-led conservation, Documentation tools, Living heritage

Introduction

Lion and Dragon Dance are ancient performing arts that originated in China, with roots tracing back to the Han dynasty (Li, 2017). The Lion Dance, in particular, has become an important part of Chinese cultural celebrations, symbolising strength, good fortune, and protection from Nian (年), an evil spirit in Chinese folklore. The Lion Dance is traditionally performed to scare away Nian and bring blessings to the community (Yap, 2022). Both Lion and Dragon Dances are performed at various events, including Chinese New Year, weddings, business openings, competitions, and cultural festivals. Today, they are practised around the world by Chinese diaspora communities and beyond, representing Chinese cultural heritage and bringing together people of all ages and backgrounds (Yap, 2022).

Yet, behind these vibrant performances, the craft of making Lion and Dragon costumes is slowly disappearing, and fewer people are learning how to make them in the old way, putting this important cultural practice at risk. These costumes were once made by skilled artisans using special materials and techniques passed down through generations (Mo, 2013).

This paper explores the process of developing a conservation guidebook specifically designed for the Lion and Dragon Dance community by adapting institutional and museum-based conservation practices to suit the needs of a community context. While collecting institutions often have access to resources such as controlled environments, trained staff, conservation laboratories, and funding, many community-based living heritage groups who also care for important cultural materials operate with limited resources, tools, funding, and formal conservation knowledge. Yet, these communities continue to care for and pass on cultural materials through lived practice, often outside the museum and institutional context (Sloggett, 2009).

In many cases, communities already have their own ways of preserving heritage, drawing on embodied knowledge, practical skills, and intergenerational learning. However,

there remains a knowledge gap, particularly in relation to technical conservation methods, long-term preservation strategies, and documentation practices that support the care of tangible heritage materials (Sloggett, 2009).

The aim of this project is to bridge that gap by creating adaptable conservation tools that centralise hands-on knowledge while also being flexible to suit the specific circumstances and needs of each Lion and Dragon Dance troupe.

Community-based conservation has gained increasing attention in recent heritage discourse, particularly following the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), which emphasises the agency of communities in defining and preserving their own heritage (UNESCO, n.d.). There is a growing recognition that institutional, top-down conservation models may not fully address the realities or values of community heritage work.

The proposed guidebook will be developed as a documentation tools in a digital format, designed to enhance accessibility for community members. A digital format enables the integration of multimedia content, supports ongoing updates, and facilitates wider distribution. The guidebook will serve as both a practical tool and an educational resource, supporting community-led efforts in conservation, documentation, and intergenerational knowledge exchange. By incorporating moving image practices, the guidebook translates complex content into accessible visual forms, making it more effective for communication within the community.

This particular research paper focuses on the initial phase of developing a prototype conservation guidebook, laying the foundation for a long-term resource that can be adapted, expanded, and developed by communities themselves. The broader project is designed as an ongoing initiative to introduce the concept of conservation to the Lion and Dragon Dance community and to establish a new tradition of post-maintenance care that extends the lifespan of objects, materials, and knowledge.

It is important to note that this paper presents a developmental research plan rather than final outcomes. The guidebook is still in the planning phase and will require future funding and partnerships for full implementation. The framework proposed here is intended to support future grant applications, initiate collaborations with conservation institutions, and inspire similar initiatives among other lion and dragon dance groups communities around the world.

Research Question

This paper explores the question: How can a documentation template function as a conservation guidebook for the Lion and Dragon Dance community by adapting instructional practices?

A documentation template that is accessible, easy to use, and flexible. It avoids technical language and invites participation from all community members, regardless of background or training. This approach transforms documentation into an act of conservation, supporting the preservation of both material objects and intangible cultural knowledge.

Methodology

This project adopts digital ethnography as a key methodological approach to explore how community-led conservation practices can be developed and supported through digital environments. By engaging with the Lion and Dragon Dance community both online and offline, the research focuses on how cultural knowledge is shared, adapted, and documented through digital means.

Community-Based Conservation and the Role of Conservators

Historically, conservation methods were often scientific and focused on restoration. The field, largely developed in the West, emphasised material analysis. Art conservation is a complex job that involves different areas of knowledge (Wharton, 2021). Conservators need to know how objects were made, how they can get damaged over time, and why they are important to people and culture. They use history to understand when and why an artwork was made, and science to understand how it was made and what has happened to it. People often use the words "conservation" and "restoration" to mean the same thing, but they are different. Restoration means fixing or improving the look of an object that is damaged or aged, so it looks better again. Conservation is more about stopping further damage and protecting the object for the future (Wharton, 2021).

Additionally, conservation is not only about objects but also about intangible cultural heritage, such as music, dance, festivals, languages, and skills passed down through generations (UNESCO, n.d.). These are often shared within communities and can be more difficult to preserve because they are not physical objects. Conservators can work with communities to help document, record, and support the practice of these cultural traditions so they continue into the future.

Conservators in institutions play an important role in discussions about cultural materials. However, what is seen as important to conserve is often decided by the institution itself. These decisions may not always include the needs of the wider community or reflect bigger social issues. Conservation work is often shaped by the goals and limits of the institution. This can create a gap between the institution and the people who are connected to the heritage. Conservators need to involve communities in the conservation process, so they can help decide how their cultural materials should be preserved and shared with the public. However, there has been a lack of engagement with the people who are connected to the materials being conserved. It's essential to involve them in the conservation process, especially when it comes to deciding how they want their heritage to be preserved and presented to the public.

Why Conservation Training Matters

Conservation is more than just fixing or maintaining objects. It is a discipline grounded in knowledge, care, and understanding. For the lion and dragon dance heritage, this means recognising the unique stories, materials, and techniques behind every lion head, flag, drum, and costume. Each object is different. Its age, material composition, condition, and

cultural significance all influence how it should be cared for. Without the proper knowledge, there is a risk of applying unsuitable methods, using incorrect materials, or making decisions that unintentionally harm the object or the cultural meanings it holds.

In many cases, communities rely on hands-on experience, passed down informally, to look after their cultural materials. While this practice is invaluable, it often lacks formal training in conservation principles such as understanding material science, environmental factors, and ethical decision-making. In Thailand, as in many places, there can be a tendency to focus on the "how-to" learning techniques without first asking the fundamental questions of What, When, Where, and Why. But in conservation, theory is just as critical as practice. It provides the foundation for making informed, careful decisions that respect both the material and cultural values of the object.

This is similar to the medical profession. Just as doctors must train for years, specialising in areas like surgery, cardiology, or oncology, conservators need in-depth learning to understand different materials and objects, whether textiles, metals, paper, or composite materials like those found in lion dance equipment. Each specialty has its techniques and requires years of practice and study.

For community-based conservation, training does not have to mean a formal degree. It can include learning through workshops, mentorships, guidebooks like this, and collaborative practice. The key is recognising that conservation is not just about fixing things. It is about understanding the object, the community's needs, and how to care for cultural heritage in a safe, ethical, and sustainable way.

Without proper training, there is a real risk of damage, whether through using the wrong adhesive, applying inappropriate cleaning methods, or failing to consider long-term preservation needs. These mistakes can result in the loss of cultural value, historical information, or even create safety hazards. Watching a few online videos is not enough. Proper conservation skills take time, reflection, and practice.

This guidebook aims to support lion and dragon dance teams by providing a foundation for community-led conservation. By blending theory and practice, it offers practical tools, templates, and knowledge-sharing methods to help teams care for their heritage with confidence. With the proper training and collaborative effort, we can ensure that the lion and dragon dance heritage remains vibrant and meaningful for future generations.

Relationship Building in the Conservation Process: The Conservator as Facilitator

In community-engaged projects, relationships are often the most crucial part of the work. A conservator can also take on the role of a facilitator, someone who connects people, ideas, and knowledge in the conservation process. This means working closely with community members, experts, partner organisations, and even investors. Instead of making all the decisions alone, the conservator-as-facilitator creates a space for dialogue and collaboration. They guide the process but also listen carefully to different perspectives,

especially those of the community connected to the object. This ensures that decisions are made together, in ways that respect cultural values.

Decision-making is a crucial part of this collaborative project. It is essential to establish from the outset who holds the responsibility for making final decisions, particularly regarding actions that may affect the materials. This could involve identifying a community leader, a designated representative from the Lion and Dragon Dance team, or determining the role of the conservator within the project. Clear decision-making structures must be agreed upon before any conservation interventions take place, ensuring that the process respects both the community's authority and cultural values, as well as the technical expertise of conservators. Addressing these roles and responsibilities early and with patience is key to building trust (Message, 2021), transparency, and shared ownership of the project's outcomes.

Conservation Tools with communities

The Druk Preservation Project in Bhutan is a powerful example of community-based conservation. It empowers monks members of the religious community to become conservators of their sacred art, including thangkas, statues, murals, and architectural sites. Rather than relying solely on external experts, the project provides monks with hands-on training in traditional conservation methods, blending local knowledge with international conservation standards.

Since its inception, the project has restored over 400 thangkas and established a conservation centre in Bhutan to ensure this work continues. By creating a model where each generation of monks teaches the next, conservation knowledge stays within the community (The Druk Foundation for Art Preservation, n.d.). This approach demonstrates that when properly supported, community members can lead the preservation of their cultural heritage, safeguarding both the material and the cultural meaning of these objects. As the project founder said:

"My goal has always been not just to train this first generation of monk conservators, but to create a tradition of conservation that they can pass to the next. Who better to restore sacred religious art than the monks themselves?" (Jose, n.d.)

Another powerful example is the Warmun Art Centre Flood Recovery Project in Australia. In 2011, a flash flood devastated the Warmun community and swept away hundreds of contemporary artworks created by Gija artists. The rescue and conservation efforts brought together a wide network of people: local community members, art centre staff, mining companies, logistics providers, and the University of Melbourne's Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation (CCMC).

This project went beyond technical conservation; it became a model of two-way learning. Gija elders, artists, and community leaders played a central role in decision-making, sharing knowledge about ochres, materials, and the cultural significance of the artworks. Their insights shaped conservation practices and were documented alongside technical records. University staff and students learned directly from Gija elders through site visits,

interviews, and collaborative workshops, while Gija artists travelled to Melbourne to guide the process.

This partnership has grown into an ongoing model of two-way learning, where Gija knowledge is recognised as an essential part of conservation education and research. It has also created opportunities for Gija employment, education, and cultural transmission.

The Warmun project demonstrates how community-led approaches can shape conservation decisions, ensuring cultural values are respected and technical solutions align with community needs. It reminds us that conservation is not just about preserving materials; it is also about building respectful relationships, sharing knowledge, and creating long-term partnerships (Nodea & Sloggett, 2021).

Ultimately, there are no fixed solutions in conservation. Every community and every heritage is different, there is no single method or rule that applies to all. Solutions must be adapted through time, care, and collaboration.

Development of the Conservation Strategy for Lion and Dragon Dance

The Lion and Dragon Dance tradition has been preserved in various ways, particularly within institutional settings such as museums and archives. However, beyond these collections, the living heritage of Lion and Dragon Dance continues to thrive globally through active performances, training, and community practice. Many community groups hold their collections of lion heads, dragon flags, photographs, and video recordings of performances. Some even possess antique items of historical significance, yet these are often not well preserved, catalogued, or documented in a systematic way.

This project adopts a proactive, practice-based approach to conservation. The first step involved the author joining the Lion and Dragon Dance community and building relationships with group members to better understand their needs, priorities, and values. Through direct engagement, visual examination of community-held collections, and informal conversations, it became clear that there was an urgent need for documentation, archiving, and basic conservation care.

A key question that emerged was how to create a documentation tool that goes beyond recording the physical condition of objects. The aim is also to capture the stories, knowledge, and cultural context that give these objects meaning within the community.

Documentation is a fundamental aspect of conservation. It creates essential records about the condition, materials, history, and significance of objects or practices (Lazarus Lane, 2021). For cultural heritage like Lion and Dragon Dance, documentation is not limited to noting wear and tear or identifying damage. It also includes the stories of who made an object, when and where it was created, whether it was locally made or imported, and the role it plays within the community. These stories are often held in the memories of specific individuals, such as elders, knowledge holders, and performers. Capturing these details can offer important

insights into how an object was used, the materials involved, and how it might be cared for or repaired in the future.

This process is not just about collecting data; it is about co-creating knowledge with the community. Respecting the expertise of those who use and care for the objects is central to ensuring that cultural meaning is accurately and respectfully represented.

Documentation can take many forms: written records, photographs, videos, interviews, or drawings. Each medium captures different aspects of knowledge, from the intricate details of craftsmanship to the sounds, movements, and emotions of performance. Using a variety of methods helps ensure that knowledge is preserved in the most accessible and engaging ways for the community.

The documentation template developed for this project is designed to be flexible. It is a practical guide that can be adapted by each team according to their needs. Communities are encouraged to record information in whatever format feels natural, whether handwritten notes, photos, video recordings, or voice interviews. By co-creating the template with the community, the project ensures that it reflects the lived experiences and practical realities of those who care for the heritage.

Workflow for a Conservation Strategy Using the Documentation Template

This workflow outlines a step-by-step approach for Lion and Dragon Dance communities to use the documentation template as part of a broader, long-term conservation strategy. It emphasises flexibility, collaboration, and regular review, ensuring that conservation is an ongoing, sustainable practice that can grow with the community's needs.

1. Establish a Team and Roles
Form a small working group within the Lion and Dragon Dance team, including members with different roles, performers, elders, caretakers, and those interested in heritage care. If possible, seek occasional advice from conservators or experts who can offer technical guidance. Assign responsibilities for documentation, storage, and maintenance.
2. **Gather and Organise Existing Materials**
Collect all available information, including photographs, videos, old costumes, flags, oral histories, and performance records. Identify gaps in knowledge and areas needing attention, such as fragile objects or undocumented items.
3. **Use the Documentation Template**
Begin using the documentation template to record information about each object, practice, or story. Choose the format that suits your team, whether written notes, photographs, or video interviews. Collaborate with others to fill in details and ensure accuracy.
4. **Store and Backup Documentation**
Organise completed templates in both physical and digital formats. Store physical records in a safe, accessible space within the community, and back up digital files regularly in multiple locations (such as external hard drives or cloud storage).
5. **Review and Update Regularly**
Schedule periodic reviews, for example, every 6 or 12 months, to update records. Add new information as objects are repaired, used in performances, or as new stories

emerge. Ensure the team understands that conservation is a long-term, evolving process.

6. **Integrate Conservation into Community Practice**

Share the importance of documentation and conservation with the broader team. Encourage participation in simple care practices, such as safe handling, regular cleaning, and basic repairs following appropriate methods. Use the documentation template as a living tool that supports the community's day-to-day activities, not just as an archive.

7. **Build Capacity and Knowledge**

Organise informal training sessions, knowledge-sharing activities, or workshops to build skills within the team. If possible, collaborate with conservators to learn about preventive care, materials science, or risk management.

8. **Plan for the Future**

Use the documentation and conservation practices to support long-term planning. This might include applying for grants, seeking support from cultural institutions, or developing educational programs for younger generations. The documentation template can serve as an important resource when seeking funding or recognition for heritage work.

Documentation Template for the Lion and Dragon Dance Communities

Documentation Tools Template	
Title	A short name or identifier for the object.
Object Number	A unique code or number to help track and organise multiple items.
Dimensions	Height, width, depth (in cm or inches)
Images	Photographs of the object from multiple angles; close-ups of important features.
Who Shared this Information?	Name(s) of the person, team, or community group providing the information.
Date of Documentation	When the object was documented (day/month/year).
What is the Object or Item?	Type of object (e.g., lion head, flag, drum, costume).
Who Made it and When?	Maker name (if known), place of origin, and approximate date of creation.
How is it Used in Performance?	Description of how and when the object is used (e.g., parades, competitions, temple events).
Special Stories or Significance	Any cultural meanings, associated rituals, or stories linked to the object.
Related Materials	Any photos, videos, or documents that provide additional context or information.
Condition and Care Tips	Notes on current condition, care practices, or advice for handling, cleaning, or storing the object.

Table 1: Documentation tools template for Lion and Dragon Dance communities.

How to Use the Documentation Template and Recommendations

It is meant to be flexible; there is no single correct way to use it.

- Adapt the Format: The template can be used by hand, on a computer, or as part of a digital or printed form. Each team can choose what works best for them.
- Choose the Right Medium: Documentation can include photos, videos, audio recordings, and sketches, in addition to written notes. These different forms can help capture details that might be hard to explain in words.
- Focus on What Feels Relevant: Not every section of the template will be needed every time. Teams can adjust, skip, or add sections based on what feels useful for their context.
- Work Together: Whenever possible, fill out the template in conversation with others. This can help ensure information is more accurate and that different perspectives are included.
- Store and Share Carefully: Keep records in both physical and digital formats, and make sure files are backed up when possible.
- Update Regularly: The template is not a one-time task. It's helpful to return to it and make updates when objects are used, repaired, or when new stories are shared.
- Use the template in ways that suit the community. Whether it's writing by hand, typing on a computer, taking photos, or recording videos, choose what feels most natural and practical.

When needed, seek advice from conservators. They can provide technical support and offer guidance on materials and care while learning from the team's own knowledge and experience.

Conclusion and Future Development

This paper presents the development of a documentation template as a starting point for creating an accessible conservation guidebook for the Lion and Dragon Dance community. By combining conservation knowledge with community-based practices, the project reimagines conservation as a living, relational process rather than a purely technical task. The guidebook template is designed as a flexible tool, adaptable to each community's needs. It encourages the inclusion of diverse knowledge systems, ranging from material care tips to stories, meanings, and performance contexts, ensuring that heritage care is deeply embedded in the cultural values and practices of the community.

The use of digital platforms, such as Instagram, offers an accessible entry point for sharing documentation, but this comes with challenges such as limited archival capacity, platform dependency, and the risk of content loss over time. As technology and AI continue to evolve, it is critical to maintain backups, adapt content across platforms, and explore longer-term digital preservation strategies.

One of the most important insights from this project is the role of the conservator as a facilitator, someone who supports community decision-making rather than imposing external solutions. Building trust, creating space for dialogue, and co-designing documentation tools together with the community have been key to the project's success.

Looking ahead, the next phase of the project will involve testing the documentation template with more Lion and Dragon Dance teams, gathering feedback, and refining the tool based on lived experiences. The long-term vision is to make the guidebook an open-source resource that other cultural groups can adapt to their specific needs.

Ultimately, this project advocates for a model of conservation that is more inclusive, collaborative, and responsive, one that recognises cultural heritage as a living practice, and empowers communities to care for their own traditions in ways that make sense to them.

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Collective Animation As Well-Being Creative Practice

Thanut Rujitanont

Abstract

The paper presents two participatory animation workshops - *Scratch Your Anger and Flip It!* (2021) and *On the Other Way Round* (2022) – conducted in Thailand with high school students, university students, and members of the general public. These workshops explore how animation-based artistic practices can promote emotional well-being, self-reflection and interpersonal exploration. Utilising 'scribble art' and 'collective drawing' as experimental animation techniques, the workshops aimed to reframe animation as a process of well-being creative practice and community engagement. The first workshop responded to the internal impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown, integrating animation and mental health support through expressive, individual drawing exercises. The second workshop expanded the boundaries of animation beyond industrial production by facilitating collaborative charcoal animation and shared sensory observation, emphasising perception, embodiment, and collective creation. Drawing on participant reflections and group discussions, the paper examines the affective and relational dimensions of these creative processes. Participants reported emotional release, a sense of engagement, and enhanced well-being through their involvement. These findings suggest that animation, when approached as a collaborative and reflective practice, holds significant potential for fostering emotional expression and social connectedness. The research contributes both practical methodologies and theoretical perspectives to the field of animation studies, proposing drawn animation as a participatory medium for artistic research, emotional well-being, and participatory cultural practices.

Keyword: Animation, creative practice, artistic practice, well-being

Introduction

Scratch Your Anger and Flip It! (2021) was a joint artistic workshop collaborated between Graphy Animation, a company dedicated to fostering animation culture in Thailand, and Persona Studio, an art therapy service centre. On *the Other Way Round* (2022) was an artistic workshop conducted by Klowerº, an artist duo redefining animation through interdisciplinary practices, in partnership with the Digital Art department at Rangsit University, and the Creative Economy Agency.

This paper examines two participatory animation workshops through a retrospective reflection approach. Drawing on the author's experience as the facilitator of the former workshop and consultant for the latter, this paper provides an overview of two animation workshops, examining whether animation practices can serve as a participatory approach to well-being. Retrospective reflection enabled the author to unpack his observations and the collected data as integral components in a broader process of expanding theoretical and methodological practices in animation. This reflective process prompted contemplation not only of what had been documented, but also of the underlying threads that wove meaning between the two workshops.

These interdisciplinary workshops were initiated with support from a Thai Health Promotion grant in 2021 and later by a support from Museum Siam in 2022.

Purpose

The aim was to explore whether the process of creating drawn animation could serve as a well-being creative practice, introducing participants interested in applying animation to various personal and professional contexts, to three key subject areas: well-being, self-reflection and interpersonal exploration.

Precedence

The concept for the workshops can be traced back to 2021, when the author was enrolled in RE:ANIMA European Joint Master in Animation. While undertaking a group project for the Creative Animation Ateliers course in Luca School of Arts in Belgium, the author and his classmates - from Thailand, Lebanon, and Brazil - were interested in creating a dialogue between the ideas of individuality and communality through an animation project titled HOMESITE. The creative animation process, shaped by diverse cultural backgrounds, proved valuable as a catalyst in this exploration. HOMESITE was conceived as an investigation into the acts of building and inhabiting collectively. Various experimental processes were explored, including simultaneous and cycle-based approaches, aiming to examine the relationship between personal privacy, communal space and the bond formed among the directors. These methods sought to investigate what triggers action, reaction, or non-reaction when the directors were confronted with specific objects, items, or images. The final group project resulted in a poetic, process-based short animation of approximately seven minutes.

Approach

While developing the workshops for participants, we were aware that COVID-19 may have had long-term effects on individuals, including heightened anxiety and a pervasive sense of life instability. These emotional challenges were often compounded by long-distance policies, which disrupted routine social interactions and reshaped the relationship between individuality and community. In response to these issues, we propose the animation process as a practical and therapeutic intervention. As a creative medium, animation has gained growing recognition in recent years for its capacity to facilitate self-exploration and emotional expression.

A several studies have highlighted the therapeutic potential of animation, particularly in clinical and educational contexts (Ashworth & Mason, 2013; Hani, 2019; Tabana, 2024; Young, 2022). Additionally, some researchers have explored its integration into mindfulness practices (Barton & Hosea 2017). Nevertheless, empirical and theoretical research in this area remains relatively limited. One notable initiative in this field is HEART (Healing Education Animation Research Therapy), a UK-based programme that integrates animation into therapeutic and educational practices. HEART employs creative, participatory methods to support emotional and psychological well-being, especially among marginalised and vulnerable populations (Hani, 2019, p.27).

This paper focuses on positioning the animation workshop model as both a therapeutic and mindful practice, offering space for reflection, interaction, and emotional expression. The two workshops discussed are designed as collaborative group activities while maintaining sensitivity to individual experiences—mirroring the collective yet personal nature of animation production, detached from the goal-oriented workflows typical of the entertainment industry.

Therapeutic work

The term "therapeutic work" is rarely and inconsistently defined within the context of animation. When used, it is often applied in a loosely manner. In this paper, the term refers to the embodiment of emotional and psychological experiences through animated form—making visible and tangible the exploration of emotions, relationships, and reflections on past and present experiences (Hani, 2019, p.7). Animation's diverse creative processes offer meaningful ways to engage individuals' interests and abilities, supporting person-centred therapeutic approaches (Ashworth & Mason, 2010 p. 8-9). However, our aim is not to establish a specific animation technique, tool, or methodological guideline. Rather, we approach animation as a participatory process—an open-ended exploration of its therapeutic potential. The final outputs are not assessed through conventional artistic evaluation criteria but are instead validated through the individual and collective experiences that emerge during the workshop process.

By prioritising process over pre-planned outcomes, the technical aspects—such as setting up the space, equipment, and fostering comfortable interaction between participants—presented unique challenges. With expert advice from *Persona Studio* in the field of art therapy, a specific setup and set of tools were developed to support the animation process for multiple participants, aiming to be effective and welcoming.

Mindfulness practice

In The **Mindfulness of Drawing Workshops**, Barton & Hosea (2015) designed their animation workshop around principles of bodily awareness and interconnected drawing exercises. Grounded in mindfulness practices, the workshops explored how drawing and animation-making could support participants in coping with stress, change, and uncertainty—particularly within the context of higher education. Drawing from Buddhist principles and practices, the project introduced the process of making animation as a mindful activity to art and design students through a series of experimental workshops.

These workshops aimed to create a specific environment that enabled participants to focus on bodily sensation and sound. Activities were structured in two main phases: beginning with individual, introspective drawing, and then progressing toward collaborative drawing tasks. This progression supported a shift from personal awareness to relational awareness, fostering both self-regulation and interpersonal connection.

Emerging research supports the therapeutic value of mark-making in structured settings. For example, Curry & Kasser (2005) found that colouring structured patterns, such as mandalas, can reduce anxiety and promote a meditative state by encouraging focused attention and inner dialogue. Similarly, Barton & Hosea (2017) argue that mindfulness and mark-making practices hold potential for developing **sustainability literacies**, such as self-awareness, ecological awareness, personal resilience, and interconnectedness.

The repetitive and process-driven nature of animation offers a fertile ground for adapting these findings. Just as colouring complex mandala designs can promote deep engagement, so too can the rhythmic, repetitive motions involved in drawn animation. This study suggests that such creative processes—when carried out in a mindful, embodied way—can serve not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a therapeutic and educational tool, contributing to the development of mindful animation practices and potentially informing future animation therapy approaches.

The first workshop: Scratch Your Anger and Flip it! (2021)

Participants

The artistic workshop was a 3-day workshop conducted via an online platform (Zoom). The sessions took place on August 7th, 21st, and 28th, 2021. Each session lasted approximately two hours, with an additional one-hour exchange session held on the final day. A total of 34 participants attended the workshop - 10, 10, and 14 on each respective day. Most of the participants were high school students who directly applied to us on an online platform, along with several university students and adults.

Objectives

Supported by the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, the workshop aimed to explore the relationship between private space and collective well-being during a critical period - the highly restrictive COVID-19 lockdown in Thailand. Since it was not possible to conduct the workshop in person, we used the opportunity to explore the participants' experiences of anger and how it could be expressed and released in a healthy way within their own home environments. The screen, through distant, became a shared public space for this collective exploration.

Approach

We brainstormed the design of the workshop process and discussed several key issues, including whether participants would feel comfortable drawing in front of others and what types of exercises would practically and effectively allow them to express their feelings in a public setting.

One exercise, scribble art, was suggested by Persona Studio. It was considered suitable because it is accessible to everyone, regardless of their familiarity with art. The process is also simple and intuitive, enabling participants to externalise their feelings, emotions, and thoughts, and to connect with their inner selves.

Flipbook animation was selected as a complementary activity by Graphy Animation. It was seen as an approachable way to introduce animation without overwhelming participants with technical complexity. Since books are familiar objects, even flipping a single page can reveal a trace of one's inner world. In comparison, while scribble art works on the level of the unconscious, flipbook animation provides a conscious opportunity to animate, manipulate, and transform those inner experiences.

Introductory Activity

At the beginning of the workshop, participants were asked to choose one of ten prepared line drawings, each featuring different shapes and colours, in response to the question "what is your mood today?". Each participant then explained their choice and shared a bit about their day as part of an introductory activity designed to foster familiarity and connection among the group

Scratch Your Anger

In the first stage, participants took time to find and set up a comfortable space to begin the workshop, while also preparing the drawing materials we had sent: large sheets of paper, old books, and oil pastels. The art therapist then guided them through a scribble art exercise, encouraging them to recall any resentment or emotions they wished to release, and to reflect on their present feelings.

Participants began "scratch their anger" through expressive drawn lines. A gentle reminder from the art therapist encouraged them to do only what they felt comfortable, avoiding anything that felt forced or unwelcome. After some time, once the participants had

finished scribbling, the art therapist allowed a reflective moment for them to observe their work and consider its meaning. This stage concluded with a group sharing session, where participants discussed their emotions and experiences related to the act of scribbling.

Flip It!

In the second stage, the facilitator invited participants to select an element or part of their scribbled drawings from the previous activity. They were encouraged to revisit these visual elements, engage with them more intentionally, and interact with them creatively. Some participants selectively chose colours, lines, or shapes they liked, while others picked elements that evoked embodied memories experienced during the scribbling process. As they made their selections, the facilitator encouraged them to recall what they had felt and thought, and to use their creativity to extend and develop the drawn lines. These lines could be extended, transformed, metamorphosed, or animated in any direction the participants desired. This process allowed participants to explore their inner selves freely and to address emotional gaps or interact with the emotions and feelings they had expressed on paper.

The facilitator then introduced the flipbook-making process, guiding participants through redrawing and animating their selected lines. This frame-by-frame technique, along with the act of drawing, served as a metaphor for reclaiming control over the unconscious emotions revealed through the earlier scribble art. Each frame—or page—could be seen as a residue of their artistic performance. The traces of lines—whether smoothly animated or disconnected and flickering—represented the interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogues the participants engaged in.

Over time, each participant created a flipbook as the culmination of their individual journey. They were then invited into a collective experience, flipping through, animating, and sharing each flipbook as a reflection of their personal journey during the workshop.

Participant Evaluation Through Animation Workshop

During a group discussion at the end of the workshop, some participants felt comfortable sharing their deep and personal emotional journeys, while others chose not to. Most expressed a positive response to the scribble lines they had created. Some spoke of revisiting vague, long-lost memories or reconnecting with missing experiences—either within themselves or with people from their past. Several participants mentioned feeling mentally lighter compared to how they felt before attending the workshop. A few noted that the experience of drawing without self-judgment was especially impactful—something they rarely encountered in traditional art education. All participants expressed a desire to engage in the process again, curious about how their experiences might differ in the future.

As the workshop prioritised process over product and involved personal storytelling and intimate sharing—within a safe, non-recorded environment—most participants chose to keep their animated flipbooks private. One participant described his flipbook as “a second-by-second emotional diary,” explaining that he could recall what he was feeling and thinking with each page he flipped and each line he animated. A few participants shared that they neither wanted to keep their flipbooks nor send them to the facilitators, but also did not wish to destroy them, as doing so might evoke uncomfortable emotions. In response, the art therapist offered a mindful suggestion: to find a special place—such as beneath a favourite tree in their garden—and bury the flipbook there. This symbolic act provided a gentle and meaningful way for participants to release their emotions, offering a peaceful and compassionate closure to their experience.

By the end of the workshop, only four participants chose to share their flipbooks with us and granted permission for them to be retained and made public. The rest chose to keep their creations for themselves.

The second workshop: On the Other Way Round (2022)

Figure 1 Participants during the workshop



Note. Photo from the On the Other Way Round (2022) workshop. Courtesy *of* Klower[o]. Used with permission.

Participants

The artistic workshop was an onsite 1-day workshop. A total of 30 participants were accepted, including art and animation students, illustrators, graphic designers, animators, and members of the general public from other professional backgrounds. The age range was 15 to 52, with half of the participants between the ages of 20 and 30.

Objective

Participants were selected through a public open call, which included questions about their interests and backgrounds, along with a specific question: 'What is your definition of animation?'. The goal was to gather a variety of perspectives to make a vibrant dialogue around questioning and experiencing the animation medium as a collective art practice, encouraging participants to contribute their individual viewpoints while reflecting on their communal meaning of animation during the workshop.

Approach

The workshop was divided into five stages, with a reflective session at the end of each stage.

Icebreaker Activities

The workshop began with an introductory drawing activity titled *From HOME to HERE*. Gathered around a large sheet of drawing paper, participants were asked to draw lines

representing their commute from home to the workshop venue. Throughout the activity, each participant shared their own form of visual communication and learned about others' unique commuting stories. They each occupied individual spaces on the paper yet shared the surface collectively.

Figure 2 Introductory drawing activity *From HOME to HERE*



Note. Photo from the On the Other Way Round (2022) workshop. Courtesy *of* Klower[o]. Used with permission.

Visual Perception and Observation

Participants were instructed to explore their immediate visual perception through the movement of their hands. Uniquely, the workshop was designed so that they could not see their drawings as they created them. A sheet of paper was taped beneath the table and hidden from view, requiring them to draw what they observed without looking at the page. This setup created an unfamiliar, alternative experience that contrasted with conventional drawing practices. Participants were encouraged to disregard the final outcome, focus less on visual accuracy, and avoid drawing from memory or preconception. Instead, they were invited to draw directly from observation, engaging more with the form of the object than with the individual lines.

This experimental activity used a contour drawing technique, which emphasises outlines to capture eye movement. While their eyes remained fixed on a specific object, their "hand's eye" was tasked with recording what was seen. The process subtly posed a reflective question: *Do we truly see what we look at?*

During this stage, participants worked individually but within shared physical proximity, remaining subtly aware of each other. The activity fostered a dual focus: an internal interaction—between the hand, eye, and mind—and an environmental one—between the participant and the observed object. Although each person was engaged in a personal process, their presence within the same space created a quiet form of collective intimacy. Their mutual focus and silent observations reflected off one another in a way that would not have been possible in isolation. This shared, unspoken connection unfolded through the dimensions of both space and time.

Figure 3 Visual perception and observation



Note. Photo from the On the Other Way Round (2022) workshop. Courtesy *of* Klower[o]. Used with permission.

Collaborative Charcoal Animation Exercise

In this stage, participants worked collectively on large sheets of drawing paper taped to the wall. They were instructed to gradually create a visual representation of their "soul," animating each step using a frame-by-frame technique in what became a collaborative *soul journal.* The process emphasised improvisation through interaction, encouraging participants to respond to one another's visual contributions.

At each frame, participants were given time to draw and observe each other's work. This approach encouraged them to incorporate and adapt to the visual elements drawn by others. As the activity progressed, the blank spaces on the paper slowly filled with improvised, unplanned lines that required ongoing negotiation and mutual adjustment. This evolving, shared drawing became a metaphor for how individual lives intersect, influence, and are shaped by one another in real life.

Each participant pursued their own visual journey yet had to continually reconcile their intentions with the contributions of others. The process reflected the delicate balance between personal expression and collective harmony. Negotiation happened organically—through verbal dialogue, body language, and visual cues. The resulting drawings served as visible traces of these interactions, capturing the essence of both individual presence and collective connection.

This stage ended by observing the results on the large papers.

Figure 4Collaborative charcoal animation exercise



Note. Photo from the On the Other Way Round (2022) workshop. Courtesy *of* Klower[o]. Used with permission.

Audio Perception and Observation

In this stage, the instructions were designed to create a focused environment, allowing participants to engage deeply with sound—both recorded and perceived—through subjective listening. They explored this experience through a three-step drawing exercise that emphasised sensory awareness and interpretation.

Step 1: Participants listened to a recorded sound and drew continuously without lifting their hands throughout the playback. This exercise encouraged them to loosen their ears and flow with the sound, without becoming too attached to any specific visual form or representation.

Step 2: They listened to the recording again, this time with the freedom to lift their hands and add any details they wished. This step emphasised the malleability and ambiguity of sound—its *unform*. Rather than fixing on a single image or interpretation, participants were invited to explore the shifting, uncertain nature of perception. The added details reflected how observation and interpretation evolve over time. Afterward, they discussed their listening experiences, sharing thoughts, images, and emotions that had surfaced during the exercise.

Step 3: In the final stage, each participant exchanged drawings with the person opposite them. As the recording played one last time, they responded to the existing marks on their partner's sheet, interacting visually with what had already been created. This step highlighted the collective nature of human experience—how we build, adapt, and respond to one another's contributions in shared environments.

Visual and Auditory: Observation of Movement through Dance Theatre

The final stage of the workshop was designed as an amalgamation of all the previous stages, emphasising the participants' holistic, embodied perception. Rather than focusing on a specific part of the body or isolating any single sense, this stage required participants to engage

fully with the live movements unfolding in front of them. A timing clock acted as a prompt, encouraging them to remain present and attuned to the moment.

During this session, participants observed a live performance by Sineenadh Keitprapai, a performing artist and Butoh practitioner. Butoh is a form of Japanese avant-garde physical theatre that explores primal emotions through expressive, often slow and meditative movement. Positioned in a circle around the performer, participants watched as Keitprapai moved in the centre.

Every two minutes, participants captured what they observed by drawing on sheets of paper placed on the floor in front of them. At the sound of the timer, they shifted to the next sheet, continuing the process. Through this repetitive, circular movement, participants were invited to reflect: Were they observing the performer? The other participants? Or the marks and traces left behind by previous turns?

This exercise implicitly required them to synthesise the sensory skills they had developed in earlier stages—listening, observing, sensing, and responding—to capture and interpret the live, evolving moment in front of them.

Figure 5 Observation of movement through dance theatre



Note. Photo from the On the Other Way Round (2022) workshop. Courtesy *of* Klower[o]. Used with permission.

Participant Evaluation Through Animation Workshop

During the group discussion at the end of the workshop, participants responded positively to the collective creative process, which was entirely new to them—regardless of their background in art. They unanimously agreed that the act of creating together, especially the process of taking turns drawing, helped them become less attached to the notion of craftsmanship and more focused on being present in the moment. When no single mark could be attributed to an individual, the separate sheets of paper transformed into a collective artwork, filled with the traces of everyone involved.

Several participants highlighted an increased sense of self-awareness and spatial awareness, particularly during moments of observing movement and listening to others. All participants acknowledged a broadened perspective on what animation can be—recognising it as a serious art form, not merely a genre within the entertainment industry.

Conclusion

Through the specific artistic process of frame-by-frame drawn animation, the two animation workshops effectively promoted emotional well-being, self-reflection, and interpersonal exploration. The repetitive act of animating using experimental techniques demonstrated the potential of reframing animation as a creative practice that supports well-being and fosters community engagement. By incorporating scribble art and collective drawing, the workshops showcased these methods not only as innovative animation techniques but also as conceptual tools for introspection and shared experience.

These practices contribute to a growing understanding of how animation can serve as a medium for emotional expression, social connection, and creative well-being.

Limitation, Future Research and Potential Applications

Due to the time constraints of the workshops, the duration of activities allowed only limited observational outcomes. This has led to a strong interest in organising a longer-format workshop camp in the future.

The collaborative exchange among facilitators, the art therapist - Prachayaporn Vorananta, art educators, the performer - Sineenadh Keitprapai, and participants was highly positive. While it took some time for everyone to become familiar with each other's disciplines, concerns, and priorities, the process clearly demonstrated that animation is a multidisciplinary practice with rich potential for further exploration as a collective art form.

Acknowledgement

This paper could not have been completed without the contributions of Persona Studio, represented by Prachayaporn Vorananta, whose support and guidance were instrumental throughout the sensitive processes of the workshop “Scratch Your Anger and Flip It!”. The author also extended his deep appreciation to Klowerº, represented by Keawalee Warutkomain and Wardphan Dukjsambandh, for their meticulous work on the workshop “On the Other Way Round”, in collaboration with the dedicated team from Rangsit University. In particular, Warutkomain played a crucial role in documenting the workshop through detailed notes and observations.

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Bibitulit: People's Technology and Artistic Practice as Instruments of Social Critique

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Abstract

This article discusses the *Bibitulit* interactive installation series, which uses people's technology—particularly the TOA—to examine the relationship between sound, technology, and power in Indonesian public spaces. Employing a practice-led research approach, *Bibitulit* recontextualizes the TOA as a symbol of sonic domination and a tool of social control, creating participatory experiences that reveal hidden power dynamics in daily life. The eight works produced between 2017 and 2023 combine readymade objects, sensors, and microcontrollers to explore issues such as sonic control, symbolic obedience, information distortion, and the representation of minority voices. Installations such as bowing TOAs and layered sound distortions go beyond technological aesthetics, functioning as social critiques of inequalities in public sound hierarchies. This article shows how people's technologies like TOAs can be transformed into agents of critique within contemporary art practices, creating spaces for reflection on who speaks, who listens, and how sound mediates power relations.

Keywords: TOA, people's technology, interactive installation, sonic domination

Introduction

As a country characterized by multiculturalism, multiethnicity, and multi-faith, Indonesia's religious affiliations play a significant role in shaping social life. In most regions, the majority of the population is Muslim, which results in the widespread presence of mosques. Each day, the call to prayer (adzan) is broadcast five times at dawn, noon, afternoon, evening, and around 7 PM, using horn speakers installed at mosques.

Horn speakers have been used in Indonesia since the 1930s, first documented at the Great Mosque of Surakarta (Hanggoro, 2018), and gained popularity under the name TOA after distribution by PT Galva in the late 1960s (Petrik, 2022). However, their use has sparked controversy. Some argue that loudspeakers in mosques disrupt the solemnity of worship and may even contradict Islamic principles (Hanggoro, 2018).

Its role has transcended technical functions, transforming into a symbolic instrument that reflects the ideological and political architecture of society. In the post-1965 context, during which mass killings of members and sympathizers of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) occurred, TOAs were even used to mark areas as "PKI-free," creating a soundscape saturated with political power and ideological surveillance. In such an atmosphere, sound technology like the TOA functioned not only as a communication tool but also as a symbol delineating ideological boundaries and reinforcing a systematic climate of fear, as recounted by a visitor to the *In the Midst of Chaos, There is Also Bibitulit* exhibition, who noted that TOAs were used to mark PKI-free zones, affirming ideological dominance and fostering structural compliance.

The Bibitulit series also responds to the phenomenon of the Meiliana case in Tanjung Balai in 2016. In this case, a citizen's complaint about the mosque's TOA volume led to blasphemy charges and a 1.5-year prison sentence. Her lawyer argued that the issue was not

about religious doctrine, but rather the technical aspects of sound broadcasting in public spaces (Monza, 2018).

The Tolikara case in Papua occurred in a unique context where Muslims are a minority. In 2015, protests against the use of TOAs during Eid al-Fitr prayers escalated into clashes, shootings by security forces, and the burning of houses of worship and shops. Vice President Jusuf Kalla stated that the conflict was triggered by the use of TOAs, as reported by CNN Indonesia (Armenia, 2015)

Both cases illustrate the tension between freedom of expression, intolerance, and public comfort in the use of sound in shared spaces. These events demonstrate that the TOA is not merely a tool but also a medium that mediates identity conflicts and enforces social control.
Bibitulit creates interactive installations combining readymade, sensors, and microcontrollers. This article discusses the socio-cultural context of TOA use, the creative process of eight Bibitulit works, and concludes that representing social phenomena in art is reinforced through (1) direct interactivity fostering audience engagement, (2) use of electronic devices as responsive media, and (3) contextual selection of TOA as a symbol of sonic domination and power structures.

Purpose

Personal Perspective Shift on the Object (TOA)

Horn speakers, or TOAs, are a very familiar technology in Indonesian society, especially in religious contexts. They are used not only for broadcasting the call to prayer but also for announcements of condolences, religious sermons, and even social activities in mosque communities. The identity of TOA as the "voice of the mosque" is deeply embedded in public perception. This was evident in my own experience when purchasing a TOA for the Bibitulit installation artwork from a second-hand goods area in Bandung. The seller asked, "Is this TOA for a mosque?" In a rush, I replied, "Yes," to which he responded by offering a low price, believing it would bring him blessings.

The horn speaker (TOA) was selected as the primary artistic object in the Bibitulit installation series, not merely for its distinctive physical form but for its symbolic significance. With its trumpet-like shape, sturdy yet lightweight design, and widespread presence in Indonesia's public spaces, the TOA embodies the integration of people's technology into the socio-cultural landscape. The Bibitulit series repositions the TOA as a medium that embodies power relations and social dynamics, exploring its role in shaping acoustic experiences and public perceptions.

The TOA is not merely perceived as a technical device, but as an ideological medium. It commands public spaces with unquestionable authority. In Bibitulit, I position the TOA as an artifact of power that warrants examination and redefinition through artistic practice.
My interest in the TOA emerged from personal experiences, such as on a Christmas Eve that coincided with a major Islamic holiday. Living near a mosque, I heard a sermon broadcast through the TOA urging Muslims not to extend Christmas greetings. As a Muslim, I was surprised and reflected on how Christians must feel during their sacred celebration. I began to wonder: what if a similar situation occurred during Eid al-Fitr, with prohibitions coming from another religion? This experience marked a turning point in my understanding of the TOA—not merely as a messenger, but as a tool of domination operating without negotiation.

Figure 1 *Use of horn speakers installed atop a mosque dome in Medan (North Sumatra) as part of a sound system for the call to prayer and religious announcements.*

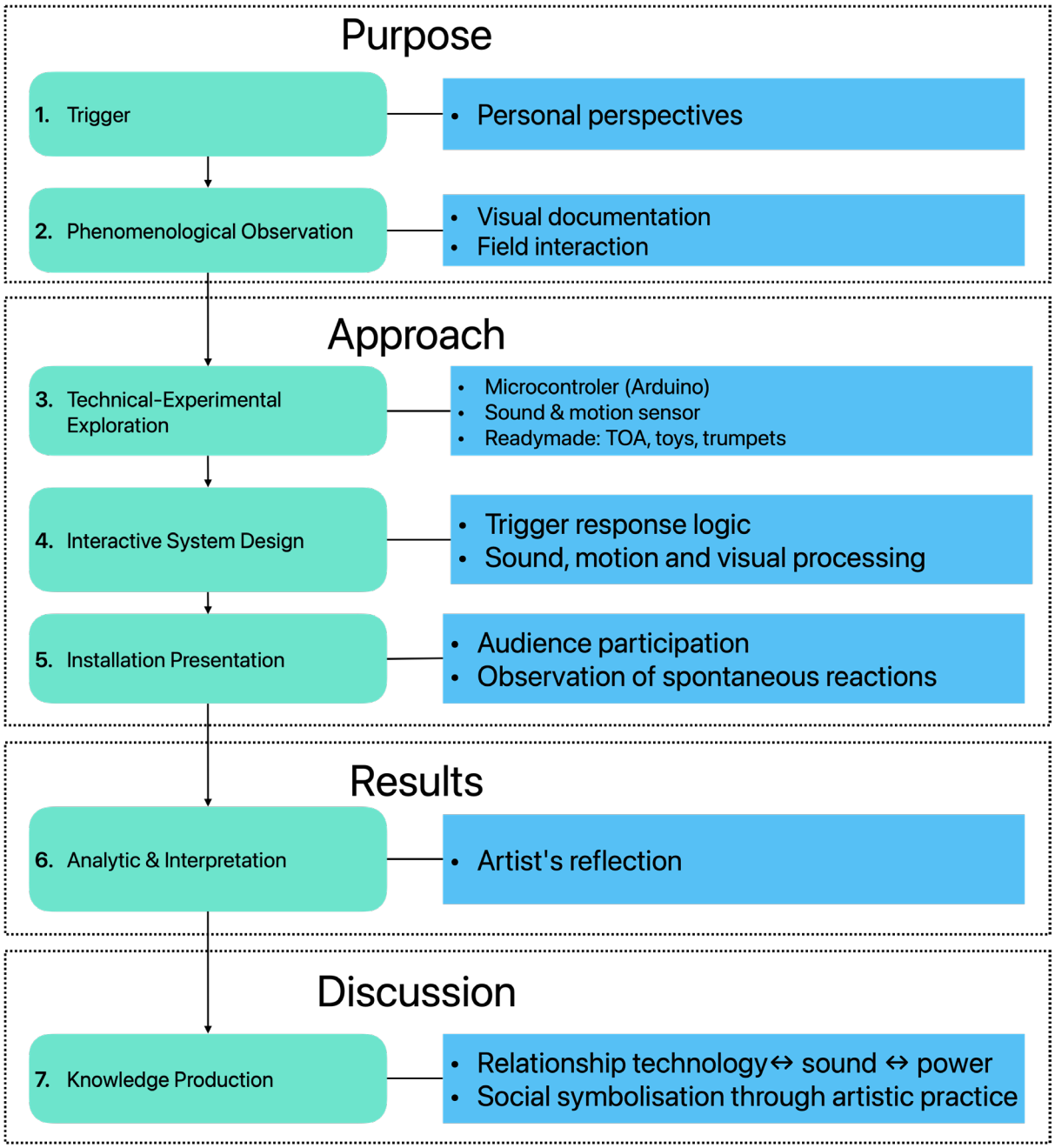


Note. Photo by Moch. Hasrul (2025).

Furthermore, the TOA is part of what I call "people's technology," a communication tool present in the everyday lives of Indonesians: from mosques and street vendors to campaign vehicles. Its familiarity renders it an affordable yet potent symbol of domination. This prompted me to reflect: who holds the right to voice? How is sound used as a strategy of control?

My solo exhibition featuring seven Bibitulit series works at Kedai Kebun Forum deepened this reflection. A shopkeeper shared that her child had difficulty sleeping because the sound from the artwork kept "playing in her head." Sound affects both physical and psychological aspects. In my work, the TOA penetrates consciousness not through logic, but through echoes resonating within the audience's body: as psycho-acoustic residues of inaudible yet persistent power relations.

Figure 2 Summary of Bibitulit process flow.



Note. Created by Moch. Hasrul (2025)

Initially, I viewed the TOA as a symbol of collective strength. However, through research and artistic creation, this meaning shifted: the TOA emerged as sound control technology that regulates space, perception, and even the boundaries of social consciousness. My artistic practice became a means to deconstruct this power and reintroduce it as critical discourse within the art space.

Aligned with McLuhan's (1971) concept that technology shapes social perception, within this framework, the TOA or horn speaker emerges as one of the prominent technological objects in Indonesian society due to its multifunctional role and strong symbolism in public spaces. Echoing Marianto's (2017) emphasis on the need for reflective interpretation of reality,

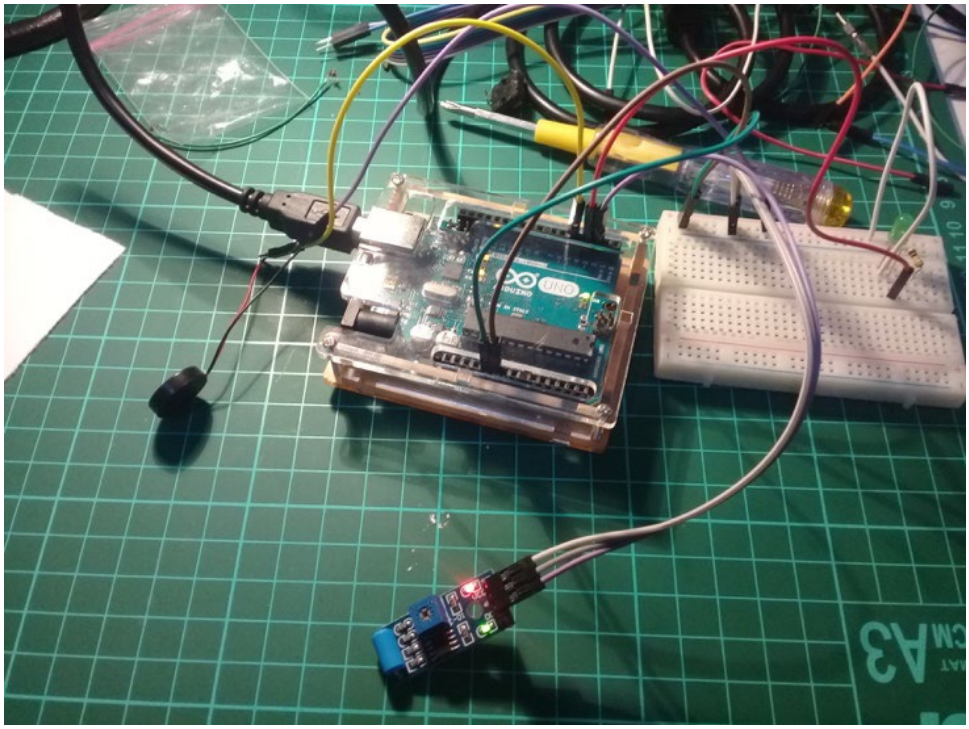
Bibitulit positions artistic practice as a means to interrogate and dismantle structures of power embedded in the auditory realm. Through this approach, the project contributes to expanding the role of contemporary art as a critical response to the politics of sound in multicultural societies.

Approach

Technology as Interactive Infrastructure in Bibitulit Works

The Power of Bibitulit is the first work in this series where I explored the use of sensors and microcontrollers to introduce interactivity. The initial concept centered on using the TOA as the primary visual element in the installation.

Figure 3 Early experiment using a vibration sensor and Arduino to trigger responses from drum interaction



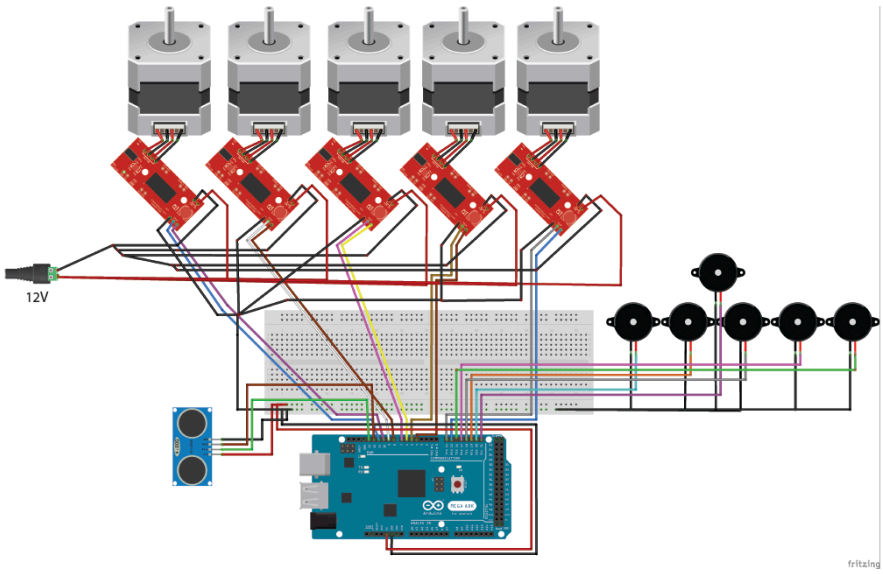
Note. Photo by Moch. Hasrul (2018)

As documented in Figure 3, the development process involved extensive trial and error, particularly in sensor selection. Vibration sensors were chosen, considering that the drum would be struck by the audience, producing detectable physical vibrations. Technically, sound sensors were feasible but were excluded due to potential acoustic interference. Positioned behind the drum and near the horn speaker, sound sensors risked capturing extraneous sounds, potentially causing uncontrollable feedback loops that would disrupt the interactive system and diminish the participatory experience.

In *In the Midst of Chaos, There is Also Bibitulit*, I used sound sensors to trigger the movement of a modified toy tank and created a mini horn speaker using 3D printing technology. This process was the result of five months of independent experimentation and hands-on learning, including the assembly of Arduino-based microcontroller systems, programming with Java-based Arduino IDE, and selecting batteries and electronic components suited to the toy's power needs and spatial constraints.

Mechanically, the tank's movement retains the toy's original drive system; the work does not alter its mechanical construction but replaces the existing electronic components with a programmed microcontroller and sensor circuit. The installation operates on a cause-effect logic: when the sensor detects a striking sound, the toy tank's motor and speaker activate simultaneously, generating movement and sound that create a structured chaotic atmosphere for several seconds. This structured chaos emerges from the programmed synchronization of multiple tanks, each responding to the same input with random movement and sound. The tanks move and collide unpredictably, yet the overall system maintains a rhythmic pattern determined by the sensor input and programmed response, blending the order produced by the drumbeat pattern with the randomness of the tank movements within the installation.

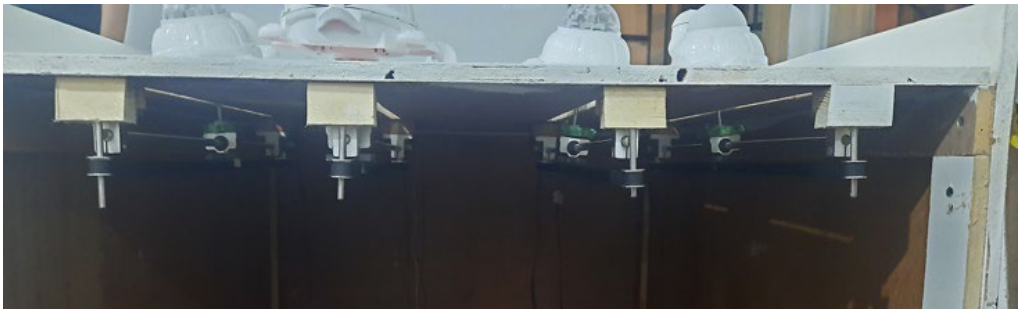
Figure 4 Schematic of the interactive system in In Matters of Bibitulit, There Can Be Distortion, illustrating stepper motors, sensors, and Arduino-based control.



Note. Photo by Moch. Hasrul (2018)

In *In Matters of Bibitulit, There Can Be Distortion*, ultrasonic sensors control a stepper motor that rotates the horn speaker up to 180 degrees, emitting layered sounds with different pitches from each speaker. This system was developed through experiments assessing the load-bearing capacity of the stepper motor to support the horn speaker and assembled with components such as microcontrollers, sensors, servos, and other electronic devices. The program was adapted from open-source scripts sourced from the internet and modified to meet the performative needs of the work. Each sensor activation triggers rotation, sound, and directional changes, creating a symbolic narrative about information distortion. Various electronic devices and schematics are depicted in figure 4.

Figure 5 Row of stepper motors driving synchronized rotational movement of turtle toys in Age of Bibitulit.

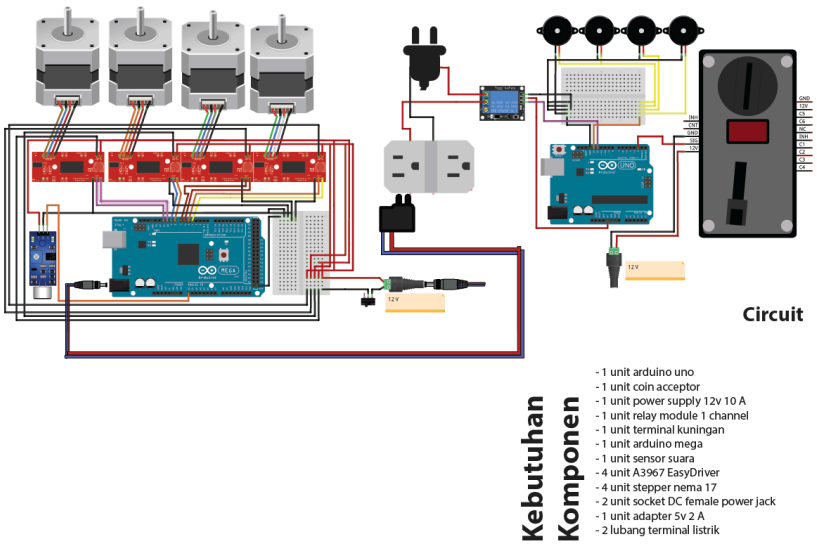


Note. Photo by Moch. Hasrul (2018)

The development of *Age of Bibitulit* continues the technical exploration initiated in *In Matters of Bibitulit, There Can Be Distortion*. Although both works employ similar electronic components, such as stepper motors, they differ significantly in mechanical aspects. In *Age of Bibitulit*, the stepper motor is connected to a lever and shaft system driven by a belt, enabling simultaneous movement of the turtle toys mounted atop the system. As shown in Figure 5, beneath the installation stage, several stepper motors are linked to a horizontal shaft that precisely controls the rotational movement of these toys.

This mechanism introduces new technical dynamics, forming rhythmically coordinated movements both technically and symbolically. Technically, this movement pattern is generated by the synchronization of mechanical components and the electronic control system, creating a consistent rhythmic pattern rather than mere random motion. Symbolically, the seemingly harmonious rhythmic movements suggest a narrative about how capital power—here symbolized by coins—can regulate, control, and create an illusory order within social life. Thus, *Age of Bibitulit* not only presents mechanical complexity but also offers a critical reflection on the relationship between technology, control, and social representation.

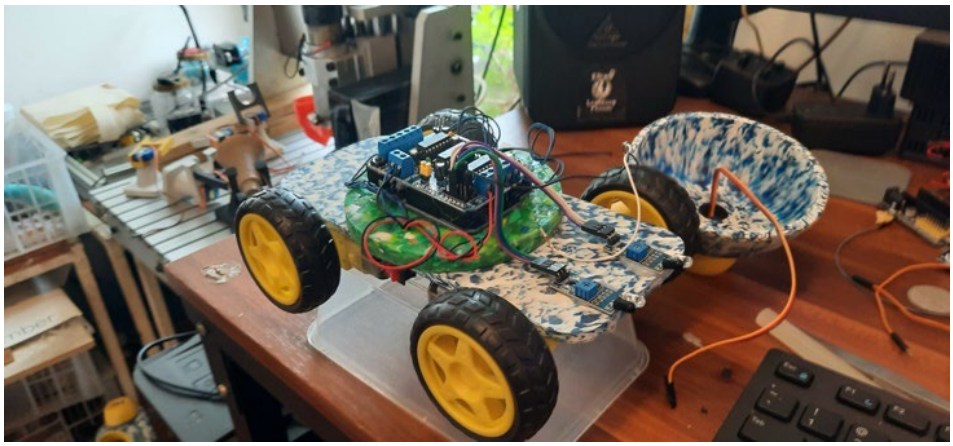
Figure 6 Circuit setup of Age of Bibitulit with Arduino, coin acceptors, sensors, and stepper motors for synchronized control.



Note. Photo by Moch. Hasrul (2018)

Figure 6 illustrates the electronic mechanism of the installation and lists the components needed. The system is activated for 30 seconds upon the insertion of a coin. During this interval, a stepper motor initiates rotation, while sound from the buzzer speaker is generated in response to audio input detected by a sound sensor.

Figure 7 Electronic component assembly for the Grumpi piece.



Note. Photo by Moch. Hasrul (2021)

A similar approach is applied in Grumpi, a technical successor to In the Midst of Chaos, There is Also Bibitulit. The successful modification of a plastic toy tank—utilizing its factory-installed movement system and replacing its electronic circuitry with a programmed microcontroller—served as a foundation for further technical development. In fact, in Grumpi, the entire system, including mechanical movement and electronic circuitry, is independently constructed without relying on factory components, unlike the use of plastic toys.

The movement system is designed using DC motor modules equipped with gearboxes, mounted beneath a chassis made from recycled HDPE plastic by my self. The electronic system is developed using Arduino devices and shield modules that allow simultaneous control of four DC motors. The entire microcontroller circuit and its components are placed atop the chassis, then enclosed by a dome-shaped cover made from recycled HDPE plastic.

The primary difference between Grumpi and In the Midst of Chaos, There is Also Bibitulit lies in technical aspects: in Grumpi, the system design is initiated from scratch, making the assembly and placement of electronic components more flexible, as elements can be freely arranged according to the work's design and performativity requirements.

Through a series of technical explorations evolving from one work to another, *Bibitulit* demonstrates how artistic practice can embrace technology as a conceptual infrastructure that shapes both aesthetic and critical experiences. Each interactive system designed—whether using sensors, microcontrollers, or movement mechanisms—not only serves as a presentation medium but also establishes cause-effect relationships that guide audience participation toward awareness of hidden power structures in everyday life. The rotational movement of the stepper and the sounds with different pitches represent information distortion, the coin-based trigger symbolizes capital as a system initiator, the audience's shouts act as a catalyst resembling cheering in competition, while the drum beats represent interruptions or attempts to stop. This has been deliberately constructed to facilitate the ideas within these works, creating interactive experiences that are not only visual and mechanical but also imbued with critical reflections on power relations in life. A deeper explanation of this reflection will be discussed in the results section.

Ultimately, all works in Bibitulit form input-output systems functioning as socio-political metaphors—from simulations of domination to representations of pseudo-participation. The TOA no longer merely produces sound but acts as an active agent creating participatory experiences, fostering critical awareness, and opening interpretive spaces on how sound operates as a control technology within society.

Results

Explanation of the Concept of the Bibitulit Body of Works

Figure 8 The Power of Bibitulit Installation



Note. Photo by Moch. Hasrul (2017).

The Power of Bibitulit is an interactive installation that explores horn speakers (TOA) as symbols of sound dominance in Indonesia's public spaces. Inspired by everyday realities, this work reconfigures the relationship between sound, power, and public participation through interactive strategies and sonic repetition.

The work presents several horn speakers, and an iron drum made out a barrel mounted on a metal scaffolding and a wooden. The TOAs simultaneously emit a distinctive, loud sound that saturates the space. Striking the drum halts the TOA sound for a few seconds, but immediately afterward, the TOAs resume with louder and more chaotic sound. This interaction creates a continuous cycle of disturbance and response.

Rather than producing silence or structural change, audience intervention generates new, more dominant, and shocking noise. In this context, the work critiques how attempts to interrupt existing noise with louder sounds merely add new layers of noise, while the old noise persists. This reflects how forceful interjection not only fails to silence the old sound but also reinforces the cycle of noise and power that is difficult to break.

Figure 9 Vox Populi, Vox Bibitulit Installation



Note. Photo by Moch. Hasrul (2017).

Vox Populi, Vox Bibitulit is an installation that explores the power of collective sound as a form of political expression in contemporary Indonesian society. It was inspired by the massive demonstrations in Jakarta in 2016, which were sparked by a speech by Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama—who happened to be non-Muslim—that was perceived by some groups as blasphemy for quoting a verse from the Qur'an. This work represents how mass voices can serve as tools of resistance and new pressure within socio-political dynamics.

Visually, the installation places several horn speakers (TOA) atop a scaffolding mounted on a pickup truck bed, facing a single chair positioned at the center of the space. The audio system, programmed via microcontroller, plays loud sounds randomly and gradually, creating an atmosphere of intense sound pressure. Audience members sitting in the chair cannot escape the sound assault; in fact, the noise intensifies when they sit, creating an auditory experience that is both physically and psychologically challenging.

The interaction requires activation by sitting in the chair and also generates emotional engagement: the public is positioned as an authority figure experiencing public pressure from the unstoppable collective sound. With the escalating sound cycle, the work illustrates how anyone seated as an authority figure still receives the sound generated by the people. *Vox Populi, Vox Bibitulit* invites the audience to reflect on their position within the landscape of political noise: are they part of the voicing crowd, or merely targets of the sound itself?

Figure 10In the Midst of Chaos, There is Also Bibitulit Installation



Note. Photo by Moch. Hasrul (2018)

In the Midst of Chaos, There is Also Bibitulit reflects the reality that horizontal conflicts within society do not arise on their own but are always instigated by certain parties. In this work, the simple action of the audience striking an iron drum becomes a metaphor for the hidden hands that provoke and spread chaos, ultimately dividing society. When the drum is struck, the chaos begins, illustrating how fragile peace can be shattered by a small push. The recurring cycle of the toy tanks' movement and the blaring TOA sound symbolizes how every society today also has its own "weapons"—conflicts that, though seemingly trivial, can be triggered repeatedly to create chaos that is difficult to stop. In this way, the work invites the audience to reflect on their position within the circle of conflict: as instigators, victims, or part of the conflict itself.

In the Midst of Chaos, There is Also Bibitulit symbolically presents the iron drum as the trigger of conflict, toy tanks as militant entities that can be quickly mobilized, and horn speakers as representations of how communication technology transforms into a destructive discourse weapon. This work highlights social issues related to conflict triggers, artificial conflicts created for political gain, and the role of individuals in participating in conflict. Through seemingly light interactions with intimidating sonic and visual impacts, the work raises audience awareness of the importance of social responsibility in facing the flow of manipulated information. Hate speech can easily spark such artificial conflicts, and individuals play a crucial role in responding to violence. This idea is conveyed through sensor-based and auditory interactions that demonstrate the potential for participation—whether as instigators or observers—while emphasizing the need for critical awareness and social responsibility. Ultimately, the work raises the question: to what extent are we aware of each mechanism of artificial conflict that occurs?

Figure 11 In Matters of Bibitulit, There Can Be Distortion Installation



Note. Photo by Moch. Hasrul (2018).

In Matters of Bibitulit, There Can Be Distortion is an interactive installation reflecting on how information can undergo distortion during its reproduction in public spaces. Inspired by the Meiliana case in Tanjung Balai mentioned above (please explain above), this work constructs a sonic and visual experience simulating the process of meaning deviation due to information twisting by power, media, or public opinion.

The work features seven TOA units arranged linearly, from the largest to the smallest. The first and largest TOA remains stationary and emits the initial sound with a loud and stable tone. The other six TOAs respond alternately, each with gradually increasing pitch and rotating 180 degrees. The rotation and pitch changes are controlled via an Arduino microcontroller system that regulates the rhythm and sequence of sounds. This interaction creates the impression of information distortion, from the original sound to increasingly unstable echoes.

Rather than merely being an audio installation, this work invites the audience to realize how narratives can change through repetition and dissemination. From an initially neutral sound, information undergoes distortion, eventually creating a new, biased version. This work serves as a metaphor for how opinions can be manipulated, used as tools of justification, and even employed to criminalize individuals or certain groups—as often happens when framing or public discourse is directed to legitimize particular actions. In a society increasingly noisy with opinions and framing, this work invites reflection: are we still capable of recognizing the undistorted voice of truth—if the truth itself is increasingly obscured by echoes constantly being twisted?

Figure 12 Age of Bibitulit Installation



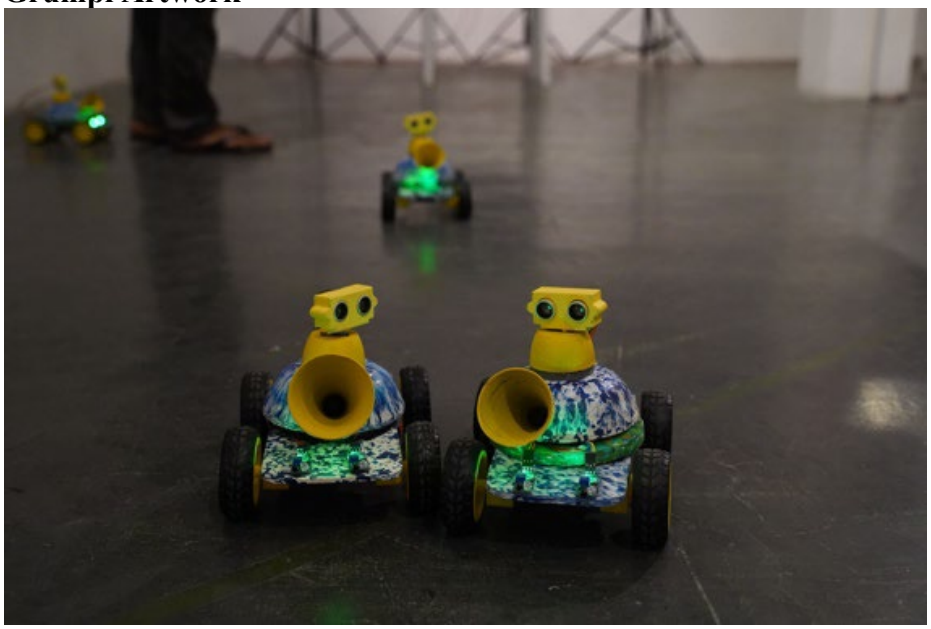
Note. Photo by Moch. Hasrul (2018).

Age of Bibitulit is an interactive installation simulating social competition as a mechanically conditioned system and questioning how horizontal conflicts are often engineered for power interests. The installation consists of a rectangular arena with five straight lanes serving as tracks for plastic toys—some shaped like turtles, others as toy cars—each equipped with mini horn speakers (TOA). On the front side of the arena, there is a coin slot where the audience have to pay Rp. 1000,- to activate the system.

After the game is started, the audience needs to cheer on the toys (i.e. make as much noise as possible) to make them move forward. As soon as the cheering stops, the toys will move back. Meanwhile, some other cars equipped with TOAs will light up and move without relying on audience interaction. The entire system will stop and become inactive until the next coin is inserted. This pattern creates an absurd and noisy interaction cycle—reflecting the dynamics of social competition that are unequal and systematically manipulated.

Through the symbolism of the thousand-rupiah coin as a spark of capital, this work highlights how conflict can occur because society, consciously or not, contributes capital to create the contest. Turtle toys as social actors mobilized by audience shouts, and mini TOAs as noise dominating public spaces, form a metaphor for how public participation is often trapped within systems deliberately designed to provoke conflict for greater interests. *Age of Bibitulit* invites the audience to reflect: are we truly participating with full awareness, or are we merely part of a contest ignited by capital?

Figure 13 Grumpi Artwork



Note. Photo by Moch. Hasrul (2022).

Grumpi is an interactive installation cr
itiquing the phenomenon of digital buzzers and the manipulation of public opinion in online spaces. This work features five small robot units shaped like vehicles with plastic camouflage, each equipped with mini horn speakers continuously emitting disruptive sounds. These robots are programmed using microcontrollers to automatically follow moving objects in front of them, creating an intense physical and auditory experience for the audience.

When the audience approaches, the Grumpi robots immediately detect movement and chase them, colliding at high speed while continuously emitting noisy sounds. This experience illustrates how social media buzzers operate: they are aggressive, without clear identity, and they provide no room for dialogue. The symbolism of small vehicles as disguised entities, horn speakers as representations of digital propaganda disturbances, and automatic sensors as metaphors for algorithms operating beyond human control, reinforces the message of this work. Grumpi raises important issues about how digital disturbances have transcended virtual boundaries and have real psychological and social impacts. Through this direct experience, the work emphasizes the urgency of media literacy and digital ethics, encouraging the audience to recognize the importance of safeguarding online spaces from systemic and ‘invisible’ yet very real chaos.

Figure 14 If You Obey All the Rules, You Miss All the Bibitulit Installation



Note. Photo by Moch. Hasrul (2022).

If You Obey All the Rules, You Miss All the Bibitulit is an interactive installation that explores the phenomenon of blind obedience to authority. In this work, several brightly coloured mini horn speakers are 3D-printed and mounted on servo stands that allow them to automatically bow toward the audience. Each speaker is equipped with a distance sensor that triggers the bowing motion when someone approaches. Placed around pillars or columns, these TOAs appear to show respect or acknowledgment to the audience, but in a mechanical and pre-programmed manner.

This gesture creates an ambiguous symbolic experience: on the one hand, the TOAs seem friendly and submissive, yet on the other, they continue to emit dominant sounds that cannot be interrupted. The work visualizes how, in modern society, authority can present a friendly face while still instilling control. The TOAs bowing to 'honour' the audience is not a product of consciousness but the result of a pre-programmed automatic system.

This piece raises issues about the symbolic mechanisms of power that appear accommodating but actually reinforce dominance, as well as the lack of critical awareness in society toward socio-political structures. Through this installation, the audience is invited to reflect on their role in facing authority: are they thinking subjects, or passive bodies accepting symbolic interactions without questioning the intentions and structures behind them?

Figure 15 The Game is Not Lost or Won Until the Last Bibitulit Goes



Note. Photo by Moch. Hasrul (2023).

The Game is Not Lost or Won Until the Last Bibitulit Goes (2023) is an interactive installation that highlights the imbalance of sound within social structures and the struggle of minority voices to be heard amid dominant power. The work constructs two sonic layers—sound from above representing established authority, and sound from below symbolizing grassroots voices—which clash in intensity within a shared installation space. Horn speakers are positioned both overhead and at ground level, creating a spatial experience that invites the audience to compare the directionality and power of sound.

On the other hand, the audience is provided with squeeze horns they can play, representing a form of participatory expression from below, striving to counteract the dominance of sound from above. The interaction unfolds as the audience moves freely within the space, listening to sounds from various directions, and gradually begins to play the horns to amplify the noise from the lower tier.

This spatial disparity of sound acts as a metaphor for social hierarchy, wherein minority voices are often relegated to the background rather than brought to the forefront. The symbolism of the TOA above as authority, the TOA below as a voice of resistance, and the squeeze horns as a collective voice that must be asserted, frames the installation as a critique of unequal systems of representation. The work underscores the importance of inclusivity and the recognition of marginalized voices, urging us to question: does our social system truly allow all voices to be equally heard?

Artwork Analysis: Case Studies from the Bibitulit Body of Works

Building upon the previously discussed ideas and conceptual frameworks of the *Bibitulit* series, this section offers an in-depth analysis of the eight artworks produced between 2017 and 2023. The analysis systematically examines the main themes, key symbols, forms of interactivity, and social issues embedded in each piece. The following table provides a comprehensive overview of the *Bibitulit* body of works, highlighting their critical engagement with the interplay between sound, people's technology, and power structures within Indonesia's public spaces.

The table below presents a structured analysis of the eight works in the *Bibitulit* series, outlining their main themes, key symbols, forms of interactivity, and the social issues they address. These categories were developed to systematize the understanding of each work's

conceptual framework and its critical engagement with sound, technology, and social dynamics in public spaces. The choice of categories stems from close observation and analysis of each work's aesthetic, technological, and socio-political dimensions. By presenting this information in a comparative format, the table reveals thematic continuities and variations across the series, illustrating how each piece builds upon or diverges from the central motifs of sound, control, and resistance. This summary is not merely a classification of elements but also a tool for readers to recognize the layered meanings and structural critiques embedded in the *Bibitulit* series.

Table 1 **Analytical Description of Works in the Bibitulit Series Based on Theme, Symbolism, Interactivity, and Social Issues**

Title	Main Theme	Key Symbols	Form of Interactivity	Social Issues
The Power of Bibitulit	Sound domination in public spaces	TOA, metal drum	Striking the drum temporarily halts the TOA	Critique of sound as a tool of power and social control
Vox Populi, Vox Bibitulit	Collective pressure and political participation	TOA, single chair, scaffolding, pickup truck bed	Sitting on the chair triggers intense sound	Mass voice as a tool of pressure and new domination
In the Midst of Chaos, There is Also Bibitulit	Hate speech and horizontal conflict	Metal drum, toy tanks with TOA	Striking the drum activates tanks and TOA sounds	Critique of conflict manipulation through propaganda
In Matters of Bibitulit, There Can Be Distortion	Information distortion in public spaces	TOAs of varying sizes, stepper motor	Proximity sensor triggers TOA rotation and sound changes	Meaning distortion in information dissemination
Age of Bibitulit	Social competition and manipulation of participation	Toy turtles and cars, coins, TOA	Coins + audience noise trigger toy movement	Engineered public participation systems
Grumpi	Buzzer algorithms and digital disruption	Small robot with mini TOA	Motion sensor triggers robot to chase audience	Manipulation of public opinion and digital chaos
If You Obey All the Rules, You Miss All the Bibitulit	Symbolic obedience to authority	Bright-colored TOA, servo, proximity sensor	TOA bows when audience approaches	Critique of seemingly accommodating yet dominant authority
The Game is Not Lost or Won Until the Last Bibitulit Goes	Sound inequality and minority struggles	TOAs above and below, toy trumpet	Blowing the trumpet triggers sound from below	Hierarchy of sound and unequal social representation

Note. Created by Moch. Hasrul (2025)

Discussion

Patterns of Social Representation in the Bibitulit Series

Among the eight works in the *Bibitulit* series, a set of recurring representation patterns emerge, revealing the complex interplay between sound, people's technology, and power in Indonesia's public spaces. These patterns are not immediately apparent but are the result of detailed analysis involving close observation, comparison, and critical reflection on each artwork's conceptual framework, symbolic elements, interactive forms, and socio-political contexts. By integrating documentation of the works' material and aesthetic qualities with considerations of broader cultural and political discourses, this discussion sheds light on how recurring motifs—from interactivity as political metaphor to sound as an epistemic medium—illustrate the entangled dynamics of power, control, and participation in contemporary society.

Interactivity as Political Metaphor

Works like *Age of Bibitulit* (2018) and *Grumpi* (2021–2022) employ interactive systems not merely to engage audiences but to reveal how public participation is often manipulated by pre-structured systems. In *Age of Bibitulit*, audience-generated noise is required to move the toy forward, but only if the system is activated by a coin, depicting how social systems artificially mobilize the public. In *Grumpi*, a small robot automatically chases the audience, reflecting the algorithmic behavior of buzzers that attack randomly and without negotiation—participation occurs but is choreographed.

Distortion and Ambiguity as Aesthetic and Critical Strategy

In Matters of Bibitulit, There Can Be Distortion (2018) directly utilizes sound distortion as a metaphor for information deviation. The TOA is programmed to play sounds with increasing pitch as it rotates, creating an echo effect that diverges from the original sound. This distortion serves not only as a visual and sonic strategy but also as a conceptual approach to demonstrate how public opinion, media, or power can warp messages until they lose their original meaning. Ambiguity becomes part of the critique: the audience is no longer certain which sound is authentic.

People's Technology as Ideological Symbol

TOAs, squeeze horns, and coin acceptors in these works are elevated not merely as media or technical apparatuses, but as symbols of power embedded in everyday practice. In *The Power of Bibitulit* (2017), the horn speaker becomes an inescapable sonic instrument, representing authority that cannot be interrupted. Meanwhile, in *If You Obey All the Rules, You Miss All the Bibitulit* (2022), the gesture of a bowing TOA ironically symbolizes a form of power that appears accommodating but remains controlling. The deployment of mundane objects emphasizes how ideology infiltrates through familiar, 'populist' forms, challenging the audience to interrogate how everyday tools become vectors of influence and compliance.

Space and Sound as the Power Structure

In *The Game is Not Lost or Won Until the Last Bibitulit Goes* (2023), sound is orchestrated across two spatial layers—upper and lower soundscapes—to construct a visual and auditory metaphor of social hierarchy. The elevated placement of the TOA represents the dominance of institutionalized power, whereas the sounds from below (emanating from audience-held horns) can only be heard when actively amplified. This spatial distribution of sound acts as a signifier of representational inequality, highlighting how social structures operate through directional, volumetric, and positional dynamics of sound.

Participation as Covert Control

In *Vox Populi, Vox Bibitulit* (2017), a hidden switch embedded in a chair triggers the sound system. When the audience sits, the TOA's output becomes increasingly intense and overwhelming. Here, participatory experience becomes a mechanism of pressure: the audience cannot halt the sound, and their physical presence inadvertently activates aural domination. This kind of interaction portrays how control in public spaces is often subtly woven into daily encounters that appear benign or passive, thereby revealing participation as a form of orchestrated subjugation.

Sound as an Epistemic Medium

Across the *Bibitulit* series, sound emerges not only as an aesthetic element or communicative tool but also as an epistemic medium—it shapes how things are understood, accepted, or rejected within the social sphere. From the inescapable voice of *The Power of Bibitulit* (2017) to the embattled minority voice in *The Game is Not Lost or Won Until the Last Bibitulit Goes* (2023), these works compel us to reflect on how sound structures knowledge, legitimizes authority, and silences multiplicity. In this context, sound acts as an agent of socio-political articulation, mapping/shaping the limits of thought and recognition in public discourse.

Conclusion

In the Bibitulit series, the TOA is not merely a technical object, but a symbol of sonic power that colors Indonesia's socio-political landscape. These works reveal how people's technology contains hidden hierarchies and control, while presenting a critical and participatory platform for reflecting on the relationship between sound, power, and representation in public spaces.

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Voices In Consonance: Crafting Asean Identity Through Music, Culture, And Youth Collaboration

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Abstract

This article explores the formation of a musical community within the ASEAN context through the case study of "C ASEAN Consonant," a contemporary ensemble composed of young musicians from all ten ASEAN member countries. Founded under the motto "In Music We Share, Through Music We Change," the ensemble aims to promote cultural collaboration, the integration of shared identity, and the development of regional awareness of cultural values. The study highlights the role of music as a cultural tool capable of crafting a shared emotional and cultural space within ASEAN. Music is presented not merely as an "art of sound" but as an "art of coexistence," a platform that empowers the younger generation of Southeast Asia to carry forward the cultural legacy in creative and sustainable ways.

Moreover, the article points out that over the course of more than a decade (2015–present), the C ASEAN Consonant project has faced multifaceted challenges : social, cultural, economic, political, and public health-related; particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely impacted cultural mobility in the region. Nonetheless, the project has remained resilient, inspiring both musicians and audiences across Southeast Asia.\

Keywords: musical community, ASEAN, contemporary music, transnational culture, C ASEAN Consonant

Introduction

The full integration into the ASEAN Community encompasses more than just the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which emphasizes economic cooperation and regional prosperity. It also includes two other crucial pillars: the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). A deep understanding of both shared and diverse cultural roots is essential for building a genuine sense of ASEAN citizenship.

C ASEAN Consonant offers a compelling case of how local musical experiences—beginning in Thailand—have expanded toward regional cultural engagement. Initiated in late 2015 by C asean with support from Thai Beverage Public Company Limited, the ensemble was founded on the belief that music, as a universal human language, can unite people beyond linguistic, cultural, religious, political, and economic differences. In a region of over 600 million people marked by ethnic diversity, national music traditions serve as powerful bridges for connectivity.

The project began with collaboration among master musicians from all ten ASEAN countries, who agreed to form an ensemble of national instruments, each played by a selected youth musician. Well-known songs from each country were arranged and performed together. This process required extensive rearrangement and deep understanding of each piece's lyrical content and cultural background. In doing so, the project allowed young ASEAN musicians to appreciate the beauty of cultural preservation, respect one another’s differences, and recognize the importance of sustaining musical heritage. This creative musical collaboration lays the foundation for a shared ASEAN identity grounded in cultural diversity.

In the broader era of globalization, musical cultures are no longer confined to geographical boundaries but have become powerful mechanisms in constructing imagined communities (Anderson, 1983) across ethnic, religious, and linguistic divides. The C ASEAN Consonant project exemplifies the potential of music as a borderless language that unites diverse regional voices into a dynamic exchange of cultural expression within the ASEAN community.

Conceptual Framework

This article draws on two key conceptual frameworks to analyze the formation of a transnational music community in Southeast Asia. First, Benedict Anderson' s theory of *imagined communities* provides a lens through which we understand how ASEAN identities are constructed not only through political or economic integration, but also through shared affective experiences—of which music is a powerful medium. Music, in this sense, becomes a tool for forging symbolic unity among diverse nations.

Second, Tia DeNora's approach to *music as social practice* allows us to examine music not as an isolated artform, but as an embedded cultural activity that shapes and is shaped by human interaction. Within the context of C ASEAN Consonant, music-making emerges as a form of collaborative social behavior that cultivates mutual understanding, negotiates cultural boundaries, and fosters a sense of belonging.

Together, these perspectives frame C ASEAN Consonant not simply as a performing ensemble, but as a dynamic cultural space where youth participation, shared creativity, and regional identity converge.

Project Development

Initiated in 2015 with support from C asean—a social enterprise promoting regional collaboration through creativity—C ASEAN Consonant brings together musicians under the age of 30 from ASEAN countries. Selection criteria include musical talent, communication skills, and intercultural openness.

Defining itself as "the one and only ASEAN traditional ensemble," the group uses the universal language of music to weave together the region's musical heritages, acting as a bridge for mutual understanding and collaboration through live performances centered around youth. Ten musical prodigies from ten ASEAN countries are chosen to co-create captivating performances with traditional musical instruments in a series of C ASEAN Consonant concerts. This project has become a platform for the young generation to develop, share, learn, and preserve the traditional music of ASEAN.

C ASEAN Consonant has made young blood of ASEAN become more aware of the beauty of preserving their local traditions and, at the same time, respect the differences. Emphasizing the importance to preserve their traditional music heritage, they will find the way to craft out our ASEAN identity amidst cultural diversity.

Thus, the project serves not only as a musical platform but also as a youth-centered initiative for preserving and reimagining ASEAN's traditional music within a modern global context.

Objectives and Operating Principles

The project's key objectives are:

- To form a hybrid ensemble that honors ASEAN's cultural roots
- To nurture youth leaders in the region's musical cultures
- To promote cross-sector collaboration among scholars, artists, and audiences
- To transmit and preserve folk traditions through contemporary means

Its guiding principle is Active Participatory Music-Making, emphasizing hands-on learning, performative engagement, and collective meaning-making through inclusive collaboration.

Challenges in Practice

The development of C ASEAN Consonant has not been without its challenges—many of which reflect the very diversity the ensemble seeks to celebrate. Among the most pressing are:

- Variations in musical systems, including differences in tuning, rhythmic cycles, melodic scales, and structural forms
- Distinct instrumental techniques and performance contexts rooted in each cultural tradition
- Diverging approaches to learning music—oral transmission in some cultures versus written notation in others
- The ongoing need for sustainable organizational structures and long-term funding mechanisms

A particularly intricate challenge lies in the integration of a vast array of Southeast Asian instruments into a single ensemble. These include: *kulintang* (a row of horizontal gongs) and *rabana* (one-sided drum) from Brunei; *tro sao* (high-pitched fiddle), *tro ou* (low-pitched fiddle), and *skor* (goblet-shaped drum) from Cambodia; *kendang sunda* (two-headed drums), *saluang* (bamboo flute), and *kacapi* (zither-like instrument) from Indonesia; *khaen* (bamboo mouth organ) from Laos; *gambus* (plucked lute) and *sape* (boat-shaped lute) from Malaysia; *saung kauk* (arched harp) from Myanmar; bamboo instruments from the Cordillera region of the Philippines; *bansuri* (side-blown flute) from Singapore; *ranat ek* (xylophone) and *khlui* (end-blown bamboo flute) from Thailand; and *đàn bầu* (monochord zither) and *đàn t rưng* (bamboo xylophone) from Vietnam. Among them, the *khaen*—a symbol of Lao cultural identity—was officially inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2017.

Bringing these instruments into dialogue requires more than musical arrangement; it demands cultural translation, sensitivity, and a shared willingness to listen. This process has unfolded through experimentation, intensive dialogue, and what organizers describe as "sonic negotiation"—a process best understood not as a formula but as an evolving, collaborative journey.

That spirit of adaptability was especially crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic, when global lockdowns restricted physical gatherings and cross-border exchanges. Rather than halting the project, this disruption became an unexpected catalyst for innovation. The ensemble transitioned to digital collaboration, co-creating music online and delivering consistent, high-quality virtual performances. C ASEAN Consonant pioneered new ways to present ASEAN performing arts through computer screens—transforming the virtual stage into a site of intercultural connection. These digital productions not only sustained momentum but also broadened public engagement, inviting viewers not just to watch, but to participate in the evolving narrative of a region bound together by sound.

Project Outcomes

Over the past ten years, the project has produced tangible results:

- Over 50 new compositions and arrangements with educational scores
- A wealth of multimedia content shared across digital platforms
- Recognition on international stages and by global institutions
- Use as a resource in academic research, theses, and music education
- A growing young audience interested in contemporary folk expression

These outcomes speak to more than artistic achievement—they represent a reimagining of ASEAN identity through sound. The ensemble' s performances have introduced regional and international audiences to a rich spectrum of Southeast Asian instruments rarely heard together on one stage. The creative recontextualization of these instruments—whether the *saung kauk* of Myanmar, the *đàn bầu* of Vietnam, or the *kulintang* of Brunei—has expanded awareness of the region's musical heritage beyond national borders.

Significantly, the ensemble' s recordings and performances have become living archives of Southeast Asian creativity. Their music has been featured in cultural festivals, diplomatic events, academic conferences, and social media campaigns. Audiences—both within and outside the region—are now able to encounter ASEAN through a new sonic lens that is vibrant, youthful, and deeply rooted.

Moreover, the project's emphasis on documentation and knowledge-sharing has resulted in valuable teaching resources. The production of scores, educational videos, and bilingual materials has helped formalize and transmit traditional musical knowledge in ways that are accessible to the next generation. In doing so, the ensemble bridges the gap between oral tradition and digital-age pedagogy.

Perhaps most importantly, the project has instilled a deep sense of pride and ownership among participating youth. They are not merely performers, but cultural storytellers and custodians of heritage. Their success proves that tradition, when nurtured through collaboration and creativity, can be not only preserved but reimagined and celebrated on a global stage.

The ensemble' s performances have introduced regional and international audiences to a rich spectrum of Southeast Asian instruments rarely heard together on one stage. The creative recontextualization of these instruments—whether the *saung kauk* of Myanmar, the *đàn bầu* of Vietnam, or the *kulintang* of Brunei—has expanded awareness of the region's musical heritage beyond national borders. This has not only enhanced appreciation but also inspired new artistic collaborations and research initiatives focused on Southeast Asian traditional music in contemporary frameworks.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The project's core strength lies in its flexible model of musical community that values: **Collaboration – Communication – Creativity – Trust – Egolessness – Friendship – a Family-like environment**

Through rehearsals, residencies, and intercultural workshops, participants learned to adapt musically and socially. The process of mutual listening—whether aligning the pitch systems of a *đàn t rưng* and a *ranat ek*, or coordinating rhythmic patterns between a *kendang sunda* and a *skor*—helped cultivate trust and respect across cultures. These embodied musical encounters fostered not only technical skills but also the ethics of co-creation.

What emerged was not simply a musical ensemble, but a living model of what a culturally empathetic ASEAN might look and sound like. The young musicians became ambassadors of pluralism, forging friendships that defied national borders and musical styles that transcended traditional forms. In learning to play together, they learned to listen—deeply and without prejudice.

Importantly, the ensemble also challenged conventional hierarchies of musical prestige. Instruments often excluded from formal education or performance circuits—such as the *sape* and *kulintang*—were brought into the spotlight. This not only empowered local traditions but questioned the boundaries of what counts as "valuable music" in institutional and international arenas.

The ensemble' s decentralized pedagogy, in which knowledge was shared horizontally among mentors and peers, offered an alternative to the master-apprentice model still prevalent

in many ASEAN contexts. It demonstrated how cultural sustainability could be rooted not in preservation alone, but in adaptation, dialogue, and trust.
Future recommendations include:

- Establishing long-term, multilateral funding and institutional support to ensure continuity
- Integrating the ensemble's practices into ASEAN-based educational curricula as models of intercultural learning
- Encouraging governments and cultural bodies to adopt music as a tool of diplomacy, healing, and identity-building in an age of fragmentation
- Developing digital platforms to document, archive, and distribute the ensemble's work for broader regional and global impact

Ultimately, the C ASEAN Consonant experience invites us to reimagine community not as a fixed heritage but as a continuous composition—an open, dynamic, and participatory soundscape in which every voice matters, and difference becomes the harmony rather than the dissonance.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated how C ASEAN Consonant exemplifies the role of traditional music as a tool for constructing shared identity within the diverse sociocultural landscape of Southeast Asia. The ensemble' s mission—promoting the notion of "ASEAN as One" amidst multiplicity, providing a platform for intercultural youth collaboration, preserving musical heritage, and cultivating peace and friendship through sound—offers a model of how music functions not merely as an art of sound, but as an art of coexistence. It is through this lens that the project nurtures intergenerational cultural continuity and innovation.

Significantly, C ASEAN Consonant, the one and only ASEAN traditional ensemble, employs the universal language of music to build a symbolic bridge intertwining the region' s diverse musical heritages. In doing so, it strengthens bonds of mutual understanding, cross-cultural friendship, and collaborative imagination across national boundaries.

As a dynamic space for creation and conversation, the ensemble redefines what it means to perform tradition in the 21st century. It resists the notion of tradition as something static, instead inviting audiences to witness its living, breathing form—reshaped by young hands, informed by ancestral echoes, and projected toward a future of shared resonance. This vision of tradition-as-innovation is particularly powerful in ASEAN, a region too often viewed through lenses of economic or political calculus. Here, music becomes a counterpoint to division: a unifying rhythm of hope.
In an age marked by geopolitical tensions, cultural erasures, and generational disconnection, C ASEAN Consonant stands as both symbol and sound of what is possible when young people come together not in competition, but in collaboration. It invites us to imagine an ASEAN not only integrated by policy—but harmonized by empathy.

Ultimately, the ensemble not only contributes to the artistic landscape but also plays a critical role in the broader project of regional integration and identity formation. C ASEAN Consonant emerges as a resilient cultural voice—one that resonates with memory, innovation, and the possibility of a harmonious Southeast Asian future.

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Intercultural Hand Loafing

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Abstract

In the impossibility of talking about music, sound is the immateriality that plays from a distance. The projection of the Other is the desire to dialogue and create porous spaces for a common future. This is the voice that challenges itself in the face of the incompleteness of the Other, of creation and the labyrinth of emotions. Inscribed in a historical and cultural context and imbued with diversity and epistemological complexity, the approach of vibrant bodies is the cadence for listening to the sound worlds of our contemporary times.

Keywords: Listen to the Other; Epistemologies; Decolonization; Worlds in Sounds; Contemporary Percussion;

Introduction

Intercultural Hand Loafing by Rodrigo Cordeiro is a reflective and research-driven exploration of the role of sound, music, and artistic practice in fostering intercultural dialogue and decolonial thinking. Rooted in contemporary percussion and informed by a background of academic and artistic inquiry, the work highlights the need to create open, non-hegemonic artistic spaces that embrace diversity and alternative epistemologies.

The project focuses on "Listening to the Other" — a methodology and philosophical stance that seeks to dismantle colonial structures in music education and performance. Through a poetic and critical autoethnographic approach, the author investigates how vibrant bodies, sonic alterity, and intercultural soundscapes can build a common future based on equity, justice, and creativity.

Practical examples of this work include workshops and performances with percussion students in Portugal, promoting improvisation, the use of diverse musical traditions (African, Brazilian, European), and collaborative creation processes. These initiatives aim to expand conventional educational frameworks by integrating popular, diasporic, and contemporary knowledge systems.

Ultimately, **Intercultural Hand Loafing** advocates for an inclusive, critical, and transformative practice of music-making that recognizes the Other not as an external entity but as an integral part of the creative and educational journey.

The Other and the Wanderer

Being the most imperfect entity that language is, to speak with the Other is to confront the impossibility it implies. This serves as the starting point for initiating a utopian dialogue, which, in its trajectory, carries an expression shaped by the freedom and expressiveness that sustains us. "Listening to the Other" is part of an extensive research project I have been developing, also grounded in my doctoral thesis (THESIS), which reflects the need to create new and alternative tools to engage with difference. This unknown Other represents my desire to be part of a contingent that interacts with other vibrant bodies in understanding the contemporary world. For an insurgent madness, I join hands with equity, justice, and artistic practice.

In this context, "no hay camino, se hace camino al andar" (Machado, 1998), suggests that memories, histories, and continued practices form the core foundation of the thinking I advance into practice. In other words, it is a process of doing-thinking and thinking-doing, inscribed within a sonorous alterity.

The artistic journey I have undertaken is marked by wandering—being a person who trembles at every sound and every gesture that confronts them. It is perhaps an uncommitted way of refusing to categorise what I do not intend to justify, embracing the new and the multifaceted artistic possibilities that surround us. Thus, a rigorous listening to the endogenous, the emancipation of humanity in constructing non-hegemonic sound worlds, and the constructive critique of our contemporaneity are central to my approach.

The epistemologies intertwined with my body represent a continuous unlearning and sources of transformation. It is in their diversity that I find the difficulty in attributing mono-identities, as the artistic traces break through physical barriers. From oral and written knowledge (physical and active libraries) to instrumental interpretation/improvisation and the astonishment of the new, and the cohesion of thoughts and artistic practices, these are inter-temporal bridges with archived spaces that I aim to open in order to realise my (in)capacity and latency in urgent action, considering the social and economic inequalities imposed upon us today.

The wandering I practice is attentive and active in decolonial actions. Not only within the political and economic spectrum, but primarily in the possibility of discontinuing colonial regimes and structures entirely, transforming them to construct open artistic spaces and works. The reverence for the “Mother Tongue: European Identities in Heritage, Pedagogy, and Repertoire” and the proposed actions and discussions raised in the face of the dissatisfaction and incapacity of existing academic models is inescapable. The presence of the West on the global stage is a complex force, with toxic propensities in its relationship with the Other. However, by reflecting on the issues that arise in its society and its sensitivity, we can move towards new worlds, especially sound worlds.

As a European, I carry within me a significant academic weight that neither represents me nor provides artistically for other forms of exploration or "Cultural JamSessions." It is a homogenous circuit saturated with political phenomena and cultural industries that are educated to respect market laws and neoliberal ideologies. This approach has led to divisions and conflicts, weakening the construction of the common in an individualistic and solitary journey. Although several European states acknowledge the need to address past atrocities, it is the construction of the future that we must accomplish through an atonal listening. This is a reflection of the artistic and academic sphere in Portugal, a country reinforced by emigration and diasporas that are given little representation or space to experiment or to have a margin for error/progression. This symphony of bodies is our incapacity for silence—an inability to recognise the different layers that inhabit it and the violence it carries. In this case, the dichotomy of silence is attributed to those who are passive in its encounter, and the powerlessness of those who inhabit it, to reveal themselves from within. This segregated world also exists within the Portuguese artistic community, where equity is a fog in theory and a colossus in jurisdiction. Thus, amplifying the scale of the damage and barbarities beyond borders is a concept, and only that, sustained by thinkers and authors, not intending to substitute or compare the afflictions. Rather, it aims to locate the abysses in both domains through intersubjectivity and map Other possibilities to eliminate dogmas and demagogic borders.

Currently, human abilities are colonised across different fields, with a particular focus on artistic practice and education in institutions that develop strategies and plans using methods and tools that are insufficient. For instance, as a musician and student of orchestral repertoire at university, the hegemonic interpretations imposed upon certain works limited my ability to improvise and create around these pieces, to extend the scores to new sonorities, different

interpretations, and conceptualisation of (in)temporal instruments—in essence, breaking the prescribed parameters. The capacity of educational institutions to embrace technologies further delineated their use as a means to an end, resting upon something unknown without paying attention to the (anti)naturalness instilled in us. Without dismissing the knowledge and value they carry, technologies offer us "Non-Things,"whose binary systems we fail to question. As we time-travel—through video and audio recordings that assist us—showcasing their physical form somehow incapacitates human memory and accentuates the need for belonging.

This example highlights the bonds of Artificial Intelligence, a world governed by instantaneity, success-driven policies, and quantitative modes. A dimension of surviving sonorities imposed as a tragic chorus of society. Therefore, percussion reinforces human abilities (ethics and aesthetics) alongside a new listening, calling upon bodies to come together and construct new dialogues.

Sound Worlds in Percussion

This is the moment for a pause. Now is the time to slow down. Not a definitive pause, but enough to listen to the musical CO2we breathe and, from the knots within us, untangle knots from Others.

These words are insufficient. I would invite the Other into my world so that, together, with theirs, we may express languages that extend and settle in the body like a map of ongoing ideas and emotions. To touch my body, an instrument, a sound that, in some way, transports us into an intersubjectivity filled with memories. Like ships that dock in harbours bathed in sound worlds, something happens, and we respond.

We are conscious of how emancipated an artistic moment can be—whether it is a drum circle, a roda, or any other JamSession. The strings that stretch human proximity are the listening to the Other and the will to be together. The disquiet of alterity is humanity in sound. As a person/artist, I am a researcher who coexists within the academy but primarily outside it. This is because I view academia as a funnel limiting artistic freedom, as the shadow of the unexpected. Acknowledging the fragilities of academic institutions in enabling intercultural artistic transformations, the possibility of creating wanderings and auto-ethnographies, both inside and outside the academy, intersects with other knowledge and sound worlds—for example, recognising and including the Griots or artisans of knowledge.

In conclusion, the creation of new epistemologies requires the inclusion of Other knowledges that surround us, from popular and contemporary traditions, for spaces of transformation and construction.

Figure 1 – World Music – Sound Gestures – IV
Performance in Conservatório de Música de Coimbra with percussion students, Portugal. 2023.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkM5BxGv4u4
Rodrigo Cordeiro

To provide a practical example of what I intend to convey, the video “World Music – Sound Gestures – IV” is based on a workshop held at the Conservatory of Music in April 2023, an artistic moment organized with percussion students over two days. This workshop includes elements such as Gestural Signals—rhythmic symbolism, interaction, and improvisation.
The foundation for initiating communication is anticipated through the participants' engagement, requiring sensitivity in the sharing of space and the hierarchical structure that the event unfolds. With this cordiality established, the sound of speech serves as the starting point for constructing and organizing rhythm and bodily movement. The “Clave de Sabar” is one of the rhythmic elements, accompanied by other African/Wolof branches, and intersected by signals.
The interaction with students and artists becomes a labyrinth of improvised emotions, marked by contrasting dynamics. Pre-rehearsed are the “Breaks,” rhythmic patterns related to and inspired by African traditions and languages.
Throughout the performance, we can observe other elements arising from the adaptation of musical instruments (with a greater focus on musical language), the reuse of previously performed works (through improvisation and deconstruction), and the integration of other rhythms and cultural sound gestures.

Figure 2 – Músicas no Mundo
Performance in ARTAVE with percussion students, Portugal. 2020.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbaTPr5yCew
Rodrigo Cordeiro

This project was carried out during the 2019/2020 academic year at the Escola Profissional Artística do Vale do Ave (Artave) with students from the 10th to the 12th grade. It is a moment that presents a variety of works composed and organized through the interaction with the students. The works were developed within the school context, with diverse stage arrangements, a variety of instruments in terms of form and technique, bodily movement, and incorporating improvisation.

The elements that structure this performance are based on rhythms from the West African coast and Brazil, *Alborada del Gracioso* by M. Ravel, rhythmic motifs and patterns by Steve Reich, and themes by Zeca Afonso (Portugal).
Finally, two examplesbuilt on the conceptual framework of the previous academic year’s project (*Música no Mundo*), in 2020/2021, included elements and influences such as *Stomp*, J.S. Bach, and C. Wilcoxon.

Figure 3 – Artave Percussion Group
Performance in ARTAVE with percussion students, Portugal. 2021.
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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16G6lVSXWYg
Rodrigo Cordeiro

Figure 4 – Artave Percussion Group
Performance in ARTAVE with percussion students, Portugal. 2021.



https://youtube.com/watch?v=et2Xg55d6LA&t=106s

Rodrigo Cordeiro

Finally, to outline what I aim to bring to a debate that is shaping up to be complex and diverse, the creation of new epistemologies must include *Other* knowledges that surround us. From the outset, the presence of both popular and contemporary traditions creates spaces for transformation and construction.

In the process I am involved in, honoring *wandering* is imperative. It permeates daily life and involves unlearning in order to continue building oneself—that is, having a perspective on *Other* phenomena that require alterity to map out hospitable strategies.

The academy I attend persists with monotonous methodologies. I believe it is urgent not only to provide students with the ability to build themselves through orality and writing but also to challenge teachers/mentors. From a position of (mis)interpretation, they too must be willing to challenge themselves with proposals for the content they teach. Thus, it becomes a debate of an open book that is created by thinking, and in its transcription and writing process, it can also ignite a certain desire for freedom. Within academia, interpretation and reinterpretation as a final project deepen tones to limit the author's tools and their expressiveness in relation to *Other* artistic activities and movements. Typically, the stereotyped fragmentation of genres or certain sounds strengthens some sound masses while diminishing and, at times, limiting the coexistence of other sounds.

I take into account that academia precedes the job market and that these sound masses become a source of indulgence, as we've seen over the last decade with "seasonal music." This

is due to a limited or non-existent listening capacity and an aesthetic burden that tends to dissolve into superficialities. The same is true for ethics, as it carries the human weight that forms society—in this case, sonic alterity as the barometer of vibrating bodies.

At this point, I strive for a contemporaneity that fosters dialogue, one that can include what crosses us in the present while being able to regulate its presence in the face of hegemonic forces. Globalization has opened a window of discredit in the arts, turning it into a form of entertainment.

The current political presence in the cultural industry is a neoliberal dream, driven by quantitative production with extractive proportions, fueled by the human resource trained in academia. For example, the approach of the Pop department at Codarts WMDC in Rotterdam reveals a trend toward meeting economic goals and market agreements, diminishing and even suppressing other musical cultures. The diversity that built this institution is a result of human presence and skills, which made it possible to create a common space. Once translated into numbers, the verb "to economize" becomes both the means and the end. Consequently, the database that remains in the school is of extreme importance for both the past and the future, just as the shadow of a tree can serve as a classroom.

In our own context, we must also be able to listen and build bridges between scientific fields. Academia should provide an environment for creation and instruction, free from monopolies and directed toward weaving vibrant, artistic bodies.

Silence is part of the creative force, for spontaneity and understanding. Something communicates, sometimes in words, other times in gestures or sounds. I believe there is a sonic density in the school environment that requires careful attention to silence, so that within that space, it is possible to produce soundscapes and create memories. The same applies to musicians and many artists, who often face constant exposure to violent and aggressive sounds.

Amid constant noisy interferences the ability to *Bem-viver*(live well) is called into question, depending on the means each person has at their disposal. Once again, meritocracy becomes the fallacy on the table when assigning roles and positions of prominence. Annulling all differences is a complex task, but the path forward is demanding and challenging. That is why my self-critical reflection emerges throughout my academic musical journey, revealing the ties that present themselves as “knots” or challenges. These challenges are imperative for opening new pathways of learning. In this way, the difficulty becomes an opportunity to reflect on the *Other*.

The *Other* that I am seeks to question the capacity to decolonize myself, to shift into alterity, and to absorb all possible sounds and cultures. I breathe along with percussion, embracing cultural experiences that have helped me develop and expand vibrations throughout my body, using skins, wood, and any platform that aids artistic action.

What are the policies for protection and jurisdictional regulation for sonic alterity? What is the sound of the digital sonic core? Is sonic absence a pulse of dialogues and perplexities? What is the limit of percussion? With enthusiasm, I affirm that percussion approaches infinity. Now, the question is: what kind of listening accompanies this percussion? A touch at a distance. It is in this sense that I view percussion: as it manifests in diverse forms worldwide, it demonstrates the ability of the common to bring to the center the versatility needed to elevate the realm of senses and emotions.

The *Other* is percussive and vibrant; it is the impact on our body that leads us to confront the *Other* and build the possibility of dialogue and communication. When, in the Portuguese educational system, percussion is limited to the standard repertoire of symphonic and classical orchestra instruments, we immediately understand its incompleteness. This occurs not only due to a lack of knowledge and practice with Portuguese instruments but also because of the absence of diasporas.

Zooming out, projecting what a rehearsal room could be with the presence of instruments from cultures such as Brazilian, Mozambican, Angolan, Cape Verdean, among others, transforms the presence of sound into a journey through time and a convergence of sonic worlds. Recognizing the importance of a diverse range of musical instruments, they become tools capable of sparking reflections and creating new musical languages and epistemologies. In a sound laboratory space, memories are multiplied and transformed into a space-time continuum.

The artistic field is heavily influenced by mechanisms and instruments that challenge the possibility of regulating choices and relevance with electronic devices. It is an *Other* world of fascinations that, in turn, stirs new questions.

In search of alternatives, new challenges emerge. When I feel the presence of vibration, I imagine that, across various cultural points of the universe, percussion can orchestrate senses and emotions, empowering a new, wandering form of listening in the world.

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Democratizing Art: Examining T.M. Krishna's Engagement with Marginalized Communities

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Abstract

Art has always been a powerful means for communities to share their stories and address challenges they face. Creative traditions are used to question inequality, break barriers, and bring people together. Art helps reimagine what communities can be and do- that embrace diversity, inclusivity, and shared purpose while inspiring change and fostering understanding. One such endeavour in this direction that this research explores is T.M. Krishna's groundbreaking work with marginalized communities, specifically his engagement with the Jogappas, a transgender folk tradition, and the Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha, a festival that promotes inclusivity.

T.M. Krishna is a renowned Carnatic vocalist, writer, and activist. This research offers a critical lens on T.M. Krishna's philosophy of cultural inclusivity and its broader implications for decolonizing art and promoting social equity embedded in India's cultural practices. The study employs Discourse Analysis to unpack Krishna's rhetoric, media narratives, and performances, highlighting the transformative power of his artistic interventions. His initiatives showcase a dual strategy: collaborative co-creation with communities, such as the Jogappas, and building platforms for traditionally marginalized groups. This approach aims to democratize art forms, broadening access and representation in spaces historically reserved for elites.

Framing the study within the lenses of Intersectionality and Postcolonial Theory, it critically examines the entangled influences of caste, class, and gender in maintaining cultural hierarchies. The focus lies on Krishna's efforts to challenge and disrupt these structures through art. By engaging with marginalized communities as equal collaborators rather than mere subjects of representation, he redefines the relationship between art and social justice. Krishna's work not only enriches the artistic realm but also advances the discourse on social equity, pushing boundaries in both cultural and societal spheres.

Key words: Inclusivity, diversity, collaboration, engagement, hierarchies

Introduction

Art, at its core, should transcend social and hierarchical barriers, becoming a space where all communities have the agency to create, participate, and redefine traditions. However, in the Indian context, historical intersections of caste, class, and colonial legacies have often restricted access to certain forms of artistic expression, particularly in the labelled classical traditions like Carnatic music. These structural inequalities have reinforced exclusivity rather than inclusivity, making it difficult for marginalized voices—Dalit, Adivasi, working-class, and non-Brahmin artists—to gain recognition and representation within mainstream cultural discourse.

To truly democratize the arts, these restrictions must be dismantled, creating opportunities for historically excluded communities to participate as equal contributors, rather than as passive audiences. Carnatic music is a classical tradition of South India, rooted in a highly codified system, characterized by intricate compositional structures, improvisational

depth, and a strong connection to devotional and artistic expressions. The form, in particular, has long been associated with Brahminical traditions, shaping the narratives of who is allowed to learn, perform, and innovate within the art form. This exclusivity has led to cultural gatekeeping, making the space less accessible to those outside dominant caste structures.

At the center of contemporary efforts to challenge these norms is T.M. Krishna, a musician who has been vocal about the need for equity in classical arts. Through his activism and artistic collaborations, Krishna has advocated for the participation of underrepresented artists, reimagining the role of Carnatic music in modern society. He has sought to remove barriers by performing outside traditional *sabha* structures. A *sabha* is a formal concert organization in the Carnatic music tradition, often associated with select patronage and exclusiveness. Krishna has actively challenged these structures by performing outside traditional *sabhas*, collaborating with artists from diverse caste and transgender communities. Through these efforts, he questions rigid social hierarchies that restrict creative expression, advocating for a democratic artistic space.

The driving force

TM Krishna is a Carnatic vocalist, writer, and activist whose work fundamentally challenges the conventions of classical art. His influence extends far beyond music, delving into social and political discourse, where he frequently engages with debates on caste, privilege, and inclusivity in artistic spaces. Through both musical experimentation and intellectual critique, Krishna seeks to dismantle the exclusivity embedded within Carnatic traditions, reimagining them within a broader, more democratic cultural landscape. From questioning the purity of Carnatic music to reconfiguring the Carnatic *katcheri* formatto shunning the renowned December Chennai music seasonKrishna has always challenged the existing norms that have been followed without requisite rationale.

Krishna's critique of Carnatic music frames it as a tradition deeply shaped by caste-based exclusivity and elite patronage. Through numerous essays, articles, and much-debated public discourses, he advocates for a radical shift in how art is created, performed, and experienced, urging a departure from rigid traditions. His literary works examine the structural inequalities embedded within the art form.

In his first book, *A Southern Music: The Karnatik Story*, Krishna interrogates the very framework of Carnatic music, questioning its rigid systems of pedagogy, performance, and reception. He challenges the idea of "purity" in the classical tradition, arguing that music should not be confined to a singular caste, community, or geographic identity. He examines how exclusivity has been perpetuated through institutional barriers, including sabhas (concert organizations), patronage networks, and aesthetic standards, all of which limit participation.

His work on the south Indian percussion instrument Mridangam, *Sebastian & Sons: A brief history of Mrdangam Makers,* is a classic example of his nature of inquiry. While the mridangam is central to the classical stage, its makers, many of whom come from Dalit Christian communities, remain marginalized within the Carnatic music ecosystem. Despite their expertise, these artisans are rarely acknowledged, with credit typically going to the musicians who play the instrument. The book also examines the intersections of caste and privilege in Carnatic music, questioning why the contributions of these makers are dismissed as mere labor rather than artistry.

Reshaping Art by Krishna that critiques the existing artistic practices, the dissemination of Carnatic music, and advocates for a more democratic, socially engaged approach to creativity. His *The Spirit of Enquiry: Notes of Dissent* is a collection of essays that critically explore the relationships between art, politics, secularism, and social inequalities. He challenges dominant narratives surrounding Carnatic music, caste structures, and national

identity, questioning who holds authority over cultural traditions. Through his critique, Krishna underscores the transformative potential of art in shaping public discourse.

His writings encourage readers to reconsider the ownership and accessibility of artistic spaces, advocating for their reclamation as tools for social change. Through interviews and historical analysis, Krishna brings their stories to the forefront, challenging dominant narratives and advocating for a more complete recognition of their role in shaping the music we hear today. He examines how caste, class, and gender influence access to artistic spaces, urging a redefinition of tradition that prioritizes inclusivity and transformation.

Beyond theoretical critique, Krishna actively disrupts Carnatic norms by bringing his music to unconventional spaces and initiating unique projects that challenge the boundaries of classical performance. His renditions of Periyar-inspired songs and Perumal Murugan's literary works that convey present-day social issues stand in stark contrast to the traditional devotional repertoire, reinforcing his artistic rebellion. Each of these interventions sparks critical conversations on accessibility, representation, and status in the arts, questioning who gets to define artistic legitimacy. His efforts have earned him recognition, including the Ramon Magsaysay Award, underscoring his contributions to social change through art.

Through his Sumanasa Foundation, Krishna has created platforms for artists from marginalized backgrounds, fostering culturally vibrant avenues that encourage artistic dialogue beyond caste constraints. Yet, his approach is not without contradictions, raising questions about whether his disruptions unaffectedly dismantle artistic hierarchies or inadvertently reinscribe the authority of the reformer. This paper critically examines these tensions, exploring how Krishna engages with caste and tradition while redefining the role of art in shaping societal discourse.

Case study 1: Engagement with the Jogappas

The first case study is Krishna's work with the Jogappas, a transsexual musical community from the border regions of Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Telangana (TM Krishna, n.d.). The Jogappas are intensely devoted to Goddess Yellamma, usually from backward classes of the caste-based obstacles and express their devotion and their daily rituals, social structures through intense, rhythmic singing, primarily in Marathi and Kannada (The Times of India, 2021). Despite the richness of their musical tradition, the Jogappas remain at the periphery of mainstream cultural spaces due to entrenched caste and gender hierarchies. Krishna's engagement with them is not merely a musical collaboration; it is a deliberate challenge to societal norms and the rigid classifications of art, identity, and belonging. Instead of a predictable fusion, medley, or even a jugalbandi, Krishna's approach allows both musical traditions to retain their distinct identities while existing in dialogue—an artistic negotiation that resists homogenization (First Edition Arts Channel, 2017).

The performances are not merely shows of displays of musical styles, but they also educate viewers and listeners about the art forms, artists, and the social history (Viswesh, 2016). The concerts convey a powerful message of musical equality, seamlessly blending the original compositions of the Jogappas from Nipani and Vijayapura—devotional praises of Goddess Yellamma—with the intricate expressions of Carnatic music (The Better India, n.d.). His approach maintains the aesthetic integrity of both forms while questioning the inequalities in how they are perceived in terms of caste, gender, and the very notions of classical and folk (TM Krishna, n.d.). His performances with the Jogappas have demonstrated that musical excellence is not limited to formalised training but can emerge from deeply rooted oral traditions.

"The Jogappas are apprehensive about performing before an urban audience, but feel reassured when they get applauded." (George, 2019)

This statement brings a lot to the forefront. In addition, the Jogappas who face a range of stigma from the various people they encounter, feel confident in their profession, which is performance. From the temple and rural settings to performing at a mainstream concert space, it is their art that comes to the forefront rather than their status. By bringing the Jogappas' devotional singing into mainstream spaces, Krishna challenges rigid notions of gender and caste within the arts. This partnership disrupts the historical marginalization of transgender communities, offering them visibility and recognition beyond their traditional roles.

The collaboration fosters a dialogue about inclusion, questioning societal discomfort with gender fluidity. It highlights the Jogappas' artistry not as an exoticized spectacle but as a legitimate and deeply rooted musical tradition. By juxtaposing Carnatic music with Jogappa singing, Krishna underscores the artificial hierarchies that often separate classical and folk forms, mirroring the broader societal divisions between privileged and marginalized identities. The Jogappas, through these performances, reclaim their space as artists rather than merely devotees, reinforcing the idea that gender identity and the nature of their art do not dictate legitimacy.

Additionally, this initiative has encouraged broader conversations about the intersection of gender, caste, and cultural heritage. It inspires the audiences to reconsider their biases and engage with transgender identities beyond token visibility. It brings in a familiarity with the various practices hitherto relegated.

Case study 2: Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha

Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha is a unique community festival that celebrates art, non-discrimination, and cultural exchange. Conceived by TM Krishna and environmental activist Nityanand Jayaraman, with its first edition in 2015, the festival aims to break barriers in artistic spaces by bringing diverse performances to unconventional settings, such as fishing villages. The inaugural edition, hosted in Urur and Olcott near Besant Nagar, Chennai, postulated the idea to create an inclusive space where Carnatic music, Bharatanatyam, Parai Attam, Villu Paatu, and other art forms could coexist without rigid classifications.

Over the years, the festival has grown beyond performance to become a catalyst for social dialogue, environmental awareness, and cultural exchange. It has been an entirely crowd-funded model that underscores its grassroots essence, ensuring accessibility while maintaining a strong community-driven ethos. After a hiatus, the 2024 edition returned celebrating the resilience and vibrancy of the fishing community through performances that honored their traditions and struggles. The latest edition, for instance had performances centered on the sea reflect themes of livelihood, survival, and identity—especially for fishing communities who depend on it daily (Adyar Times, 2024).

Performances like TM Krishna's *Poromboke Paadal* that came up as part of the venture, highlight important themes such as land rights, shared spaces, and protecting the environment. *Chennai Poromboke Paadal* is an artistic and environmental campaign reclaiming the word *Poromboke*, which originally referred to shared community resources but now carries a negative connotation. The song challenges traditional notions of high art, proving that classical music can engage with contemporary social issues in a language accessible to all.

Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha, now renamed as the Chennai Kalai Theru Vizha has made a meaningful difference in the local fishing community by strengthening cultural pride, sparking conversations about social issues, and raising awareness about conservation concerns. The festival has brought attention to fishing villages that are struggling with urban expansion and pollution. The festival connects to Chennai's coastal conservation efforts, showing how art can be a powerful tool for activism (Srinivasan & Turner, 2022).

The festival serves as a vibrant representation of Tamil culture, moving beyond the conventional music season and its sabha-centric traditions. Rather than offering a singular

narrative, events like this embrace a more nuanced outlook (Jayaraman, 2018). It went beyond the Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam branding for Chennai, showcasing the rich diversity and authenticity of the region's cultural landscape.

"We came up with the idea of creating a space where people from different walks of life, from different sections of the society and with different cultural backgrounds can come to a fishing village in Chennai, where they can witness various art forms in an equalising space" – TM Krishna (Gowtham, 2018).

The notion of expanding performance spaces and embracing diverse art forms challenges traditional ideas of where and how art is experienced. What makes this approach particularly compelling is the way Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha redefines the village—not as a passive venue but as an active curator, shaping the artistic engagement rather than merely hosting it. This shift ensures that the community is not just a backdrop for elite-driven comprehensiveness but a key participant in reshaping narratives around art and accessibility.

The initial years had their share of struggles with the insider-outsider and status issues and also as to what was represented on stage. It is an ever-evolving festival with big names pitching in and the Vizha itself expanding its horizons (Krishna, 2018). The festival's extension beyond its original site—bringing Carnatic music to buses, Bharatanatyam to railway stations, and rap to public spaces—disrupts rigid cultural expectations. These unconventional performance sites strip away the exclusivity often associated with classical arts, creating spontaneous, unscripted interactions between artists and audiences. Without formal seating arrangements, designated stages, or predetermined audience demographics, the performances become part of everyday life, blurring the boundaries between artist and spectator.

This model not only democratizes creative platforms but also emphasizes how art thrives in fluid, interactive settings rather than rigid institutional frameworks. By embedding performances within the rhythm of daily movement—whether on a train platform or a city bus—it fosters a deeper, more organic engagement with artistic expression, allowing people to experience art beyond curated cultural events and institutionalized festivals.

Contributions, Challenges and Criticisms

Both the case studies here disrupt traditional notions of "high" and "low" art, bringing disenfranchised voices into mainstream artistic spaces. There is an engagement with the community in partnership be it the fishing community or the Jogappas. While the Jogappa collaboration addresses gender and caste-based exclusion, the Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha focuses on geographical marginalization (fishing communities facing urbanization).

While these large-scale events are significant, Krishna's close involvement with other initiatives also actively supports art for all and inclusion of sidelined artists who have been long ignored of sorts, ensuring their voices and traditions find broader recognition. Be it *Kalaikoodam*, a cross-community environment where art is accessible to all, the *Grants Project* (with faith, trust, rejection, embrace and belonging as its key operative words) that offers funding and support to artists from varied backgrounds to work in a safe space, provides artistic freedom and equivalent weightage to all (Sumanasa Foundation, n.d.). The attempts through *Swanubhava,* promote arts appreciation and student engagement in performing traditions. It fosters direct interaction between young learners and established artists, breaking institutional barriers. The festival encourages respect for diverse art forms while cultivating future generations (from all walks of life) of performers and enthusiasts.

Nevertheless, his work is not devoid of disapproval. The criticism surrounding Krishna stems from the intersection of his personal beliefs, artistic choices, public statements, and the initiatives he leads. The debate surrounding his receipt of the prestigious 'Sangita Kalanidhi' award from the Madras Music Academy underscores both the impact of his work and the spectrum of critique and support it has generated. The Sangita Kalanidhi Award is one of the

most prestigious honors in Carnatic music, conferred annually by the Madras Music Academy, an august body. The recipients also receive the MS Subbulakshmi Award, instituted by yet another prestigious newspaper, The Hindu. When Krishna was announced as its recipient in 2024, it was challenged due to his outspoken critiques of caste hierarchies in Carnatic music and his past remarks on MS Subbulakshmi, which some viewed as contentious.
(Meduri, 2025a). The controversy surrounding the award named after MS Subbulakshmi involves a legal challenge, objections from Subbulakshmi's grandson, and backlash from parts of the Carnatic music community. Krishna got labelled as anti-Hindu, linking their opposition to his vocal stance on caste and social reform. This storm underscores deeper tensions within Carnatic music, particularly regarding caste, tradition, and the role of activism in shaping its evolving identity. His advocacy and reformist efforts are deeply intertwined with his individual ideology, making it difficult to separate his personal stance from the broader cultural interventions he is involved with.

Examining his works discussed as case studies, Krishna's collaboration with the Jogappas, a marginalized transgender community, aims to bring their voices into well-known artistic spaces. Drawing from Intersectionality, which examines overlapping systems of oppression, raises the concern whether this actually empowers them or just makes them part of someone else's idea of inclusion (Al-Faham, Davis, & Ernst, 2019). While Krishna's efforts help them gain visibility, it still places him in a position of control. In the narrative, the agency of the Jogappas remains secondary to the intervention of an established artist rather than them being completely independent.

The key argument is whether this collaboration lets the Jogappas empower, shape their own artistic and social futures, or if they still follow existing power structures where they are included in the elitist spaces but not fully in charge. A broader concern is whether this initiative is just a temporary showcase and a shot at visibility or if it will bring lasting social and economic improvements to the Jogappas, making it crucial to assess the long-term impact. Additionally, a deeper study of the Jogappas' traditions and customs is necessary to understand whether their engagement with Carnatic musicians alters the context of their music and its cultural significance.

Similarly, the second case study- Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha challenges caste and class barriers by bringing Carnatic music into a fishing village. Condemnation surrounding the Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha has often centered on how it is framed in media narratives for instance, it's portrayal as an effort to bring exclusive classical music to the masses, reinforcing the idea that Carnatic music is inherently superior and must be introduced to minoritised publics (Jayaraman, 2018). This perspective risks perpetuating hierarchical notions of cultural legitimacy rather than recognizing the intrinsic value of diverse artistic traditions.

While the Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha encourages cultural exchange, it has been criticized for its curatorial choices as to who gets to perform and whose voices are highlighted. These critiques highlight broader tensions in artistic inclusivity and representation, questioning whether such initiatives truly redistribute artistic power or simply repackage inclusivity within existing frameworks. The challenge lies in ensuring that underprivileged communities are not just included but are central to defining and leading the artistic conversation.

Krishna's emphasis on non-Brahmin musical histories aligns with postcolonial critiques of cultural elitism . From a postcolonial lens, with decentralizing authority as a chief prerogative, Krishna's work aims to break Brahminical dominance in Carnatic music, but it is still tied to the very systems it challenges. While his rejection of sabhas and push for all-encompassing disrupt the traditional chain of command, his advantaged position itself raises questions about who truly leads the movement for change.

Intersectionality prompts critical inquiries into how overlapping systems of power and oppression shape individual and collective experiences. Does Krishna's work redistribute

artistic agency, or does it still operate within existing power structures? Are marginalized artists given autonomy, or are they framed within narratives shaped by elite reformers? How does caste entitlement influence the reception of his activism?

Krishna has openly acknowledged his privilege in many discussions, expressing a deep awareness of how it shapes both his role and the reception of his activism. This self-awareness gives him the ability to critically navigate power structures, but it also highlights the paradox of reform—whether his presence unintentionally reaffirms existing frameworks rather than dismantling them. While his interventions have undeniably created space for marginalized artists, the extent to which these efforts redistribute artistic agency remains a subject of debate. Without meaningful redistribution of artistic and institutional power, the movement toward inclusivity risks becoming an extension of existing paradigms rather than a fundamental departure from them.

It is important to recognize that Krishna does not reject conventional works. Rather, he engages with a traditional Carnatic music composition on Ganesha as passionately as he does with contemporary works addressing social issues, such as Perumal Murugan's piece on manual scavenging. His approach does not exclude or diminish any form of art or community but instead seeks to elevate them all to a shared, equitable platform through his unique vision. One of the most compelling aspects of his approach is that he never asserts his ideas as infallible nor presents his ideologies as absolute truths. He is intrinsically a questioner, a seeker who is working in his unique way.

Krishna's work extends beyond music into broader political resistance. His critique of Hindutva nationalism, caste-based orthodoxy, and elitist cultural institutions situates him within a tradition of dissenting artists. His engagement with Periyarist thought reflects his ideological alignment with anti-caste movements, reinforcing the intersection between artistic practice and social justice.

His engagement with the subaltern and his critique of established class systems have led to accusations that he instrumentalizes art for activism rather than preserving its traditional purity, which itself is a debatable notion. However, his approach challenges the belief that classical arts exist in isolation from political and social structures. By openly addressing caste, advantageous position, and accessibility, Krishna positions Carnatic music as a medium for reflection and reform rather than mere aesthetic pursuit. A compelling example of this is a composition he performed during the highly debated award controversy at the Madras Music Academy. Through this piece, he seemingly responded to his critics by invoking the theme of freedom of speech by Perumal Murugan, the very issue at the heart of the dispute. His rendition was criticized as "performative wokeism," with some arguing that he strategically used the song to influence public sentiment in his favor, framing his approach as an amplified exercise in identity politics (Meduri, 2025b).

In due course, the tension lies in whether his interventions expand the scope of Carnatic music or whether they shift focus from the musical traditions to ideological advocacy. His self-awareness and explicit engagement with these debates reflect his commitment to questioning existing frameworks while navigating the delicate balance between tradition and transformation.

Unfinished debates

TM Krishna's work is a critical intervention in the democratization of art within the Indian milieu. His efforts challenge the elitism of Carnatic music, a tradition historically monopolized by upper-caste practitioners, and open spaces for underrepresented groups to participate in shaping cultural narratives. His advocacy aligns with the broader need to decentralize artistic knowledge, ensuring that classical forms are accessible not just to privileged groups but to all people, including those who have been historically excluded.

At the core of Krishna's interventions is the belief that art must evolve beyond rigid traditions to reflect contemporary social realities. His critiques do not seek to erase classical traditions but rather recontextualize them within a broader, more inclusive framework. By questioning rooted hierarchies and promoting alternative histories, he probes for a transformation in how music is taught, performed, and experienced—one that values participation over gatekeeping and equity over elitism.

Krishna's initiatives, including his collaborations with fisherfolk musicians and Dalit artists, reimagine classical traditions by integrating subaltern musical knowledge. This disrupts the engrained belief that artistic purity is preserved through exclusivity. Instead, his approach reflects the intersectional realities of Indian society, where caste, class, and geography shape artistic access. By challenging Brahminical control over Carnatic music, Krishna proposes a postcolonial deconstruction of artistic hierarchy, reclaiming space for those silenced or sidelined.

Moreover, Krishna's work extends beyond performance—his writings, speeches, and activism foreground the politics of access in creative spaces. His engagement with Periyarist thought and critiques of Hindutva nationalism further situate him within a tradition of cultural resistance. His work offers an alternative blueprint for an inclusive artistic future, where the democratization of art is not just symbolic but structurally embedded within performance, pedagogy, and institutional frameworks.

Krishna's influence on Indian classical music is undeniable. However, the paradox of his activism remains: can a figure entrenched in the very system he critiques ever truly dismantle it? His journey is one of constant negotiation between radical disruption and embedded entitlement, between cultural democratization and artistic hierarchy. His impact, though contentious, forces critical reflection on the role of art in shaping a more equitable society. The unresolved tensions within his work make him one of the most compelling—and polarizing—figures in contemporary Indian classical music. Krishna's approach is undeniably radical within the classical music world, but the long-term impact of his interventions depends on whether they lead to structural shifts rather than symbolic inclusion. Ultimately, Krishna's efforts remind us that art should be public, participatory, and collectively shaped, rather than dictated by historical privilege. A future where artistic spaces are open to all, not just the elite, can lead to a more vibrant, dynamic, and truly inclusive cultural landscape.

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Reverse Artistic Engineering of Lanna Heritage: A Site-Specific Contemporary Performance Inspired by Nirat Hariphunchai

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Abstract

This research project, "Nirat Hariphunchai: The Creation of Contemporary Lanna Performing Arts", applies the concept of Reverse Artistic Engineering to reinterpret and revitalize classical literature into a contemporary cultural performance. The study begins by deconstructing the ancient Lanna poem Nirat Hariphunchai-an emotional journey embedded with Buddhist philosophy-into its fundamental narrative, emotional, and symbolic components. Through a systematic analysis of literary content, the research breaks down key artistic elements such as script, movement, costume, music, set design, and lighting. These components are then reassembled using mixed media techniques, with a strong emphasis on light, shadow, and projection mapping. The performance is designed as a site-specific experience, utilizing real historical locations such as temples and restored Lanna architecture to deepen emotional resonance and cultural authenticity. By transforming traditional narratives into immersive, multimedia performance, this work creates a new imaginative space for the audience. The outcome demonstrates that reverse engineering of cultural texts can effectively bridge historical heritage with modern expression. Furthermore, the project fosters cultural sustainability, creative tourism, and place-based development by merging artistic innovation with community engagement.

Keywords: Reverse Artistic Engineering, Nirat Hariphunchai, Site-Specific Performance, Contemporary Lanna Arts, Mixed Media Performance, Cultural Sustainability

Introduction

Purpose of the Study

This research aims to develop and demonstrate an innovative methodology—Reverse Artistic Engineering—for transforming classical Lanna literature into contemporary site-specific performances that maintain cultural authenticity while engaging modern audiences. The study addresses the critical challenge of cultural heritage sustainability in an era of rapid globalization and technological change, where traditional performing arts risk becoming disconnected from living culture. The primary purposes of this research are:

- To establish a systematic methodology for deconstructing and reconstructing cultural texts that preserves essential cultural DNA while enabling contemporary artistic expression
- To create a replicable model for cultural revitalization that can be applied to other traditional texts and performance traditions facing similar preservation challenges
- To demonstrate the potential of mixed media and digital technologies in enhancing rather than replacing traditional cultural expression

This research specifically focuses on Nirat Hariphunchai as a case study due to its significance in Lanna literature and its embedded layers of meaning—emotional, spiritual, geographical, and cultural—that offer rich material for contemporary reinterpretation. By successfully transforming this classical text into a living performance, the study aims to provide proof of concept for a broader program of cultural revitalization.

Context and Significance

The preservation and revitalization of intangible cultural heritage presents a critical challenge in the contemporary globalized world. Traditional performing arts, particularly those rooted in classical literature, face the risk of becoming museum pieces—preserved but disconnected from living culture. This research proposes an innovative methodology called "Reverse Artistic Engineering" to transform the classical Lanna literary work Nirat Hariphunchai into a contemporary site-specific performance that maintains cultural authenticity while embracing modern artistic expression.In the context of Northern Thailand, the urgency of this work is particularly acute. The Lanna Kingdom, which flourished from the 13th to 18th centuries, developed a distinct cultural identity that, while sharing elements with central Thai culture, maintained unique characteristics in language, arts, architecture, and literary traditions. However, modernization and cultural homogenization have threatened these distinctive features. Young people in Chiang Mai and other northern provinces increasingly consume globalized media content while having limited exposure to their own cultural heritage. This generational disconnect poses a fundamental threat to cultural continuity.

Nirat Hariphunchai, composed in the early 19th century, represents one of the most significant works in Northern Thai literature. As a nirat—a genre of Thai poetry expressing longing and separation—it combines personal emotion with Buddhist philosophy and geographical description (Winai Pongsripian, 2013). The text follows a journey from Chiang Mai to Lamphun, weaving together themes of spiritual pilgrimage, romantic longing, and cultural identity that remain relevant to contemporary audiences. The text itself is attributed to Khru Kham Noi, a scholar-poet from Chiang Mai who undertook the journey to Hariphunchai (ancient Lamphun) in the early 1800s. His work represents not merely a personal travelogue but a cultural document that encodes Lanna Buddhist cosmology, social relationships, and aesthetic sensibilities. The poem's 584 stanzas employ the traditional klon suphap verse form, demonstrating mastery of classical prosody while incorporating distinctly northern vocabulary and cultural references.

The concept of Reverse Artistic Engineering, as applied in this research, involves a systematic deconstruction of traditional cultural texts to identify their core components—narrative structures, emotional trajectories, symbolic systems, and aesthetic principles—followed by their reconstruction using contemporary artistic media and technologies. This approach differs from simple adaptation or modernization by maintaining a rigorous analytical framework that preserves the essential cultural DNA while allowing for innovative expression. Site-specific performance, as defined by Pearson (2010), creates work that exists in reciprocal relationship with its location, where the site is not merely a backdrop but an active component of the artistic experience. By situating the performance within actual historical locations mentioned in Nirat Hariphunchai—temples, ancient city walls, and restored Lanna architecture—this project creates layers of meaning that resonate between past and present, text and space, tradition and innovation.The significance of this research extends beyond artistic innovation to address broader issues of cultural policy and development. Thailand's National Culture Act (2010) emphasizes the need for creative approaches to cultural preservation that generate economic value while maintaining authenticity. This project directly responds to these policy objectives by demonstrating how traditional culture can be activated as a resource for sustainable development without compromising its integrity.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Reverse Engineering in Cultural Contexts: The concept of reverse engineering, traditionally applied in technological and industrial contexts, has gained traction in cultural studies as a methodology for understanding and reconstructing cultural

artifacts. Latour's (1999) actor-network theory provides a foundation for understanding how cultural objects can be decomposed into networks of relationships and reassembled in new configurations. In the context of performing arts, Schechner's (2013) performance studies framework offers tools for analyzing how traditional performances encode cultural knowledge through multiple channels-kinesthetic, visual, auditory, and spatial. The theoretical foundation for applying reverse engineering to cultural contexts draws from multiple disciplines. From cognitive anthropology, Hutchins' (1995) distributed cognition theory suggests that cultural knowledge is embedded not just in texts but in the entire ecosystem of practices, objects, and relationships surrounding them. This perspective is crucial for understanding how a literary work like Nirat Hariphunchai functions not as an isolated text but as a node in a network of cultural meanings and practices. From the field of design thinking, Cross's (2011) work on "designerly ways of knowing" provides a framework for understanding how creative practitioners can extract implicit knowledge from existing artifacts and reconfigure it for new contexts. This approach emphasizes the importance of both analytical and synthetic thinking—breaking down to understand, building up to create. The application of reverse engineering to cultural heritage aligns with UNESCO's (2003) Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which emphasizes the need for living transmission rather than static preservation. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) argues, intangible heritage requires not just documentation but creative engagement that allows traditions to evolve while maintaining their core identity.

Nirat Literature and Lanna Cultural Identity: The nirat genre occupies a unique position in Thai literature, combining personal emotion with geographical description and spiritual reflection. Manas Chitakasem (1995) identifies three key characteristics of nirat poetry: the expression of longing (usually romantic), detailed description of journey routes, and the integration of Buddhist philosophy. Nirat Hariphunchai exemplifies these characteristics while incorporating specifically Lanna cultural elements, including references to local legends, architectural features, and linguistic variations. The literary structure of nirat follows specific conventions that encode cultural values. The journey motif serves multiple functions: literal documentation of geographical routes, metaphorical representation of spiritual progress, and emotional mapping of separation and longing. In Nirat Hariphunchai, the poet's movement from Chiang Mai to Lamphun traces not just physical geography but sacred geography—each temple visited marks a stage in spiritual development. Linguistically, the text demonstrates the multilingual nature of Lanna literary culture. While primarily composed in Northern Thai (kam mueang), it incorporates Pali-Sanskrit religious terminology, demonstrating the deep integration of Buddhist scholarship in Lanna society. The code-switching between registers—from colloquial descriptions of rural scenes to elevated religious discourse—creates a textured linguistic landscape that reflects the complexity of Lanna cultural identity. Recent scholarship on Lanna literature has emphasized its distinct identity within the broader Thai cultural sphere. Sommai Premchit and Wijeyewardene (1986) argue that Lanna texts encode a unique worldview shaped by the region's history as an independent kingdom, its position as a crossroads of cultural exchange, and its particular interpretation of Theravada Buddhism. This cultural specificity presents both challenges and opportunities for contemporary adaptation. The Buddhist philosophical framework embedded in Nirat Hariphunchai reflects specifically Lanna interpretations of dharma. The text's treatment of dukkha (suffering) through the lens of romantic separation demonstrates how universal Buddhist concepts were localized within Lanna cultural contexts. The poet's journey becomes a meditation on impermanence, with each location serving as a contemplation point for different aspects of Buddhist teaching.

Contemporary Performance and Mixed Media: The integration of digital technologies into performance has created new possibilities for storytelling and audience engagement.

Dixon's (2007) comprehensive study of digital performance identifies projection mapping as a particularly powerful tool for creating immersive environments that blur boundaries between physical and virtual space. In the Southeast Asian context, Cohen (2014) documents how traditional performances have incorporated new technologies while maintaining cultural authenticity, suggesting models for respectful innovation. The evolution of mixed media performance in Thailand has followed a unique trajectory. Unlike Western contexts where digital performance often emerged from experimental theater traditions, Thai mixed media performance has roots in temple festivals and royal ceremonies that always combined multiple art forms. The wai khru ceremonies, for instance, traditionally incorporate dance, music, ritual objects, and spatial choreography in ways that prefigure contemporary multimedia performance. Recent Thai artists have pioneered approaches that honor this multimedia heritage while embracing new technologies. Pichet Klunchun's deconstruction of classical khon dance using video projection and contemporary choreography provides a model for respectful innovation. Similarly, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's installations combining film, sound, and architectural intervention demonstrate how Thai artists can create contemporary work that remains deeply rooted in local sensibilities. Site-specific performance in heritage contexts requires particular sensitivity to place and history. Kaye's (2000) analysis of site-specific art emphasizes how such works create dialogue between artistic intervention and existing spatial meanings. In Thailand, recent projects such as the "Ayutthaya World Heritage Light and Sound Show" demonstrate the potential for technology-enhanced performances to create new forms of cultural engagement while respecting historical significance (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2019).

Methodology

Research Design

This research employs a practice-based methodology combining textual analysis, artistic experimentation, and audience reception studies. The project unfolds in four phases:

- Deconstruction Phase: Systematic analysis of Nirat Hariphunchai to identify core components
- Design Phase: Development of contemporary performance elements through collaborative workshops
- Implementation Phase: Creation and staging of site-specific performances
- Evaluation Phase: Assessment of cultural impact and audience reception

The practice-based research approach, as defined by Candy (2006), positions creative practice as a form of research that generates new knowledge through the process of making. This methodology is particularly appropriate for investigating how traditional cultural forms can be transformed while maintaining their essential qualities. The research design incorporates both "research through practice" (investigating through the act of creating) and "research for practice" (developing tools and methods for future practitioners).

Textual Analysis and Deconstruction

The deconstruction of Nirat Hariphunchai employed multiple analytical frameworks:

- *Narrative Analysis:* Following Propp's (1968) morphological approach, the text was broken down into narrative functions and sequences. Key journey stages were identified: departure from Chiang Mai, encounters at various temples, arrival at Hariphunchai (Lamphun), and spiritual transformation. The narrative analysis revealed a complex structure beyond simple linear progression. The text employs what might be termed "spiral narrative"—returning to themes and locations with deepening significance. This spiral structure informed the performance's approach to repetition and variation.

- *Emotional Mapping:* Using affect theory as developed by Massumi (2002), the emotional trajectory of the text was charted, identifying moments of longing, joy, melancholy, and transcendence. These emotional nodes became anchor points for performance development. The emotional mapping process involved creating a detailed "affect score" for the entire texts. This granular analysis allowed for precise calibration of performance dynamics to mirror the emotional architecture.
- *Symbolic Systems:* Semiotic analysis revealed recurring symbolic motifs: the journey as spiritual path, architectural elements as cultural memory, and natural landscapes as emotional mirrors.
- *Linguistic Features:* The text's use of Lanna dialect, Sanskrit-Pali religious terminology, and poetic devices was catalogued for integration into performance soundscapes.

Collaborative Development Process

The development phase emphasized collaboration between traditional knowledge holders and contemporary artists. This approach, informed by participatory action research principles (Reason & Bradbury, 2008), ensured that innovation emerged from dialogue rather than imposition.

- *Traditional Arts Master Consultations:* A council of 12 master artists—including musicians, dancers, and literary scholars—was established to guide the project. Meeting monthly, this council reviewed all creative developments to ensure cultural authenticity. Their role was not simply approval but active contribution, sharing techniques and interpretations that might otherwise remain undocumented.
- *Intergenerational Workshops:* Recognizing the importance of knowledge transmission, workshops paired young artists with masters in intensive week-long residencies. These sessions focused not just on technique but on understanding the cultural philosophy underlying traditional forms. Young digital artists learned traditional pin pia music, while masters experimented with electronic music software, creating mutual understanding.

Performance Design Process

The design phase involved collaborative workshops with artists from multiple disciplines:

- Movement Development: Choreographers trained in both traditional Lanna dance and contemporary movement worked with the research team to develop a movement vocabulary that translated textual emotions into embodied expression. Traditional gestures were deconstructed and reconstructed with contemporary dynamics while maintaining their symbolic significance. The movement development process began with detailed analysis of traditional Lanna dance forms. These gestures were then subjected to various transformation processes: temporal (changing speed and rhythm), spatial (altering pathways and levels), and dynamic (shifting effort qualities). The resulting vocabulary maintained recognizable connections to tradition while offering new expressive possibilities.
- *Sound Design:* Composers analyzed traditional Lanna musical structures, particularly the pentatonic scales and rhythmic patterns of the pin pia ensemble. These elements were processed through digital audio workstations to create soundscapes that maintained cultural resonance while exploring new sonic territories.
- *Visual Design:* The visual design team developed a layered approach combining traditional costume elements with projection mapping. Historical research into 19th-century Lanna clothing provided baseline aesthetics, which were abstracted and reimagined using contemporary materials and lighting effects.
- *Technology Integration:* Technical directors specializing in projection mapping and interactive media developed systems for responsive environments. Using TouchDesigner

and other real-time processing platforms, they created visual systems that could respond to performer movement and environmental conditions.

Technical Development

The technical development process required extensive experimentation to achieve seamless integration between traditional performance elements and digital technologies.

Projection Mapping Systems: The team developed custom software using TouchDesigner that could adapt projections to different architectural surfaces. Rather than imposing predetermined visuals, the system analyzed the geometric and textural properties of each performance site, generating visuals that emerged from and enhanced existing architectural features. This approach respected the sacred nature of temple spaces while creating transformative visual experiences.

3.6 Site Selection and Preparation

Sites were selected based on their appearance in the original text and their current accessibility:

- Wat Chedi Luang, Chiang Mai: The starting point of the narrative journey
- Wat Phra That Hariphunchai, Lamphun: The destination and spiritual climax
- Various riverside locations: Representing transitional spaces in the journey

Each site required extensive preparation including:

- Historical research and consultation with temple authorities
- Technical surveys for projection surfaces and power access
- Community engagement to ensure local support and participation
- Development of site-specific safety protocols

Results and Analysis

Performance Structure and Elements

The final performance emerged as a 75-minute journey incorporating multiple artistic elements:

Table 1: The Comparison Between the Narrative Structure of the Nirat Hariphunchai and the (Rocky) Path of Love and Desire

Narrative Structure	Nirat Hariphunchai	The (Rocky) Path of Love and Desire
Beginning	Beginning with worship at sacred sites starting from Wat Phra Singh, before heading to Hariphunchai Stupa while lamenting for a beloved woman.	The story starts with messages in a letter expressing the protagonist's sorrow due to separation.
Middle	Narrating the journey by describing encountered sites, feelings of longing, and loneliness.	The protagonist faces changes, including moving to a big city, confronting love conflicts, relationships, and life aspirations.

Climax	Reaching Hariphunchai Stupa, a symbol of faith, where the poet attains inner peace and inspiration, accepting life's truths.	The protagonist confronts inner turmoil, makes critical decisions, and resolves love conflicts or personal expectations.
Ending	Returning to Chiang Mai with a peaceful heart, embracing faith while still slightly longing for the beloved, concluding with the purpose of writing the poem.	The protagonist discovers life's meaning, accepting roots or embarking on a new life with self-awareness and mature relationships.

Source: Researcher

Performance Documentation and Analysis

Beyond the basic structure, detailed analysis of performance documentation revealed several emergent properties that had not been fully anticipated in the design phase:

Audience Choreography: The site-specific nature of the performance created what might be termed "audience choreography." As spectators moved through temple spaces following performers, their collective movement became part of the visual composition. Drone footage revealed patterns of flow and gathering that resembled traditional Buddhist circumambulation practices, though this was not explicitly directed.

Temporal Layering: The performance created complex temporal experiences. Audiences reported experiencing "time slippage" where past and present seemed to coexist. This was particularly pronounced during sequences where projection mapping overlaid historical imagery onto contemporary spaces while performers enacted both ancient and modern gestural vocabularies simultaneously.

Technical Innovations

Several technical innovations emerged from the project:

- Responsive Projection Mapping: Using computer vision systems, projections could track performer movement and adjust accordingly, creating a dynamic visual environment that blurred boundaries between performer and scenography.
- Spatial Audio Design: Ambisonic sound systems created three-dimensional soundscapes that moved through space, guiding audience attention and creating immersive emotional environments.

Audience Reception

Audience reception was assessed through multiple methods:

Quantitative Data: Post-performance surveys (n=247) revealed:

- 89% reported feeling emotionally moved by the performance
- 92% felt the performance successfully honored Lanna cultural heritage
- 78% expressed interest in reading the original text after viewing the performance
- 95% would recommend the performance to others

Demographic Analysis: Further analysis of survey data revealed interesting demographic patterns:

- Age groups showed different appreciation patterns: 18-25 year-olds particularly valued technological innovation (94%), while over-60s most appreciated cultural authenticity (97%)
- International visitors (n=73) reported high levels of engagement despite language barriers, with 88% stating they understood the emotional narrative
- Local Lanna speakers (n=89) showed the highest emotional response rates (96%), suggesting successful cultural resonance

Qualitative Findings: In-depth interviews (n=42) and focus groups (6 groups, 8-10 participants each) revealed several key themes:

- Cultural Resonance: Local audience members particularly appreciated how traditional elements were preserved within contemporary expression. One participant noted: "It felt like seeing our history through new eyes, but still recognizing it as ours."
- Emotional Impact: The journey structure created a cumulative emotional effect. International visitors reported feeling connected to universal themes despite cultural specificity.
- Technological Integration: Rather than overwhelming traditional elements, technology was perceived as enhancing cultural expression. The projection mapping, in particular, was praised for creating "magical" transformations of familiar spaces.
- Community Pride: Local stakeholders expressed pride in seeing their heritage presented in innovative ways that could attract cultural tourism while maintaining authenticity.
- Intergenerational Bridge: Multiple participants mentioned experiencing the performance with family members of different generations. One young participant reported: "My grandmother cried during the traditional music parts, and I finally understood why these old songs matter to her. But she also loved the projections—she said it was like her memories coming to life.
- Spiritual Experience: Despite—or perhaps because of—the contemporary presentation, many audience members reported profound spiritual experiences. Temple-goers who attended performances noted that the artistic intervention renewed their appreciation for familiar sacred spaces.

Cultural Impact Assessment

The project's cultural impact was evaluated through several indicators:

- *Artist Development:* Participating artists reported significant professional development, particularly in cross-disciplinary collaboration. Several have initiated new projects applying similar methodologies to other traditional texts.
- *Tourism Development:* The Tourism Authority of Thailand reported a 15% increase in cultural tourism to participating sites during the performance period, with many visitors specifically citing the performances as their primary motivation.
- *Community Engagement:* Local communities around performance sites reported increased interest in their own cultural heritage, with several temples initiating new programs to share traditional knowledge with younger generations.

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

This project demonstrates the viability of Reverse Artistic Engineering as a methodology for cultural revitalization. By maintaining analytical rigor while embracing creative innovation, the approach offers a middle path between museumification and cultural appropriation. The success of this methodology suggests applications beyond performing arts to other forms of intangible heritage. The project's outcomes suggest several theoretical contributions to the field of cultural sustainability. First, it demonstrates that technological mediation need not diminish cultural authenticity—rather, when thoughtfully applied, it can reveal new dimensions of traditional meaning. This challenges simplistic oppositions between tradition and innovation that often hamper cultural development initiatives. Second, the project provides evidence for what might be termed "performative preservation"—the idea that cultural heritage is best maintained not through static documentation but through creative re-enactment that allows for evolution. This aligns with emerging theories in heritage studies that emphasize process over product, becoming over being. Finally, the integration of site-specific principles with digital technologies creates what might be termed "augmented heritage spaces"-physical locations enhanced but not replaced by virtual elements. This approach respects the power of place while acknowledging contemporary modes of perception shaped by digital media.

Challenges and Limitations

Several challenges emerged during the project:

- *Technical Complexity:* The integration of multiple technologies required extensive coordination and technical expertise, potentially limiting replicability in resource-constrained contexts. The technical challenges extended beyond mere equipment and expertise. Creating stable systems that could function reliably in outdoor heritage environments required extensive testing and backup systems. Humidity, temperature variations, and unexpected wildlife necessitated robust technical solutions and flexible performance protocols.
- *Weather Dependence:* Outdoor performances faced cancellations due to rain, highlighting the vulnerability of site-specific work to environmental conditions.
- *Balancing Accessibility and Authenticity:* Creating performances that were meaningful to both local communities and cultural tourists required careful calibration of cultural references and linguistic choices.
- *Sustainability Concerns:* The project's reliance on grant funding raises questions about long-term sustainability. Development of economically viable models remains a priority for future iterations.
- *Cultural Sensitivity Navigation:* Despite extensive community consultation, some tensions emerged around the use of sacred spaces for performance. While temple authorities had granted permission, some community members expressed concern about the appropriateness of artistic intervention in religious contexts. This required ongoing dialogue and adjustment, including the development of specific protocols for performance behavior in sacred spaces.

Future Directions

The project opens several avenues for future research and practice:

- Expansion to Other Texts: The methodology could be applied to other works in the Lanna literary canon, creating a repertoire of contemporary performances based on traditional sources.

- Technology Development: Creation of open-source tools specifically designed for cultural heritage performance could democratize access to these techniques.
- Educational Applications: Development of curriculum materials could integrate this approach into arts education at various levels.
- International Collaboration: Exchange programs with other regions facing similar heritage preservation challenges could foster global dialogue on cultural sustainability.

Conclusion

The "Reverse Artistic Engineering of Lanna Heritage" project demonstrates that traditional cultural texts can be successfully transformed into contemporary performances without losing their essential cultural identity. By systematically deconstructing Nirat Hariphunchai and reconstructing it through mixed media and site-specific strategies, the project created new forms of cultural expression that resonate with contemporary audiences while honoring historical heritage.The methodology developed through this research offers a replicable framework for similar projects globally. As cultures worldwide grapple with preserving intangible heritage in rapidly changing contexts, approaches that balance analytical rigor with creative innovation become increasingly vital. The project's success in fostering community engagement, cultural tourism, and artistic development suggests that such approaches can contribute to sustainable cultural development.

Perhaps most significantly, the project demonstrates that tradition and innovation need not be opposing forces. Through careful analysis and respectful creativity, ancient wisdom can find new voice, speaking across centuries to touch contemporary hearts and minds. As one elderly audience member observed after experiencing the performance: "I saw the story my grandmother told me, but I saw it as my granddaughter might dream it." This bridging of generations through artistic innovation represents the ultimate goal of cultural sustainability-not mere preservation, but living transmission that allows heritage to breathe, grow, and inspire across time.

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Ecologies of Participation – a practice-based research collaboration across architecture, arts, and technology

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Abstract

The Ecologies of Participation (EoP) collaborative began in 2024 with a common interest in participatory practices across fine arts, cultural studies, and architecture. Over the past year, we have held panel talks and methods workshops, inviting local and international arts practitioners and scholars to share their works and exchange ideas. The research question stems from disciplinary understandings about "participation" to seek common ground in interdisciplinary collaboration. This paper presents the research-creation process and the outcome of a prototype that involves multiple participatory methods, including field recording, urban mapping, generative AI, ethnographic artistic creation and VR world-building. Taking the vibrant Prince Edward Flower Market in Hong Kong as a study site, the prototype produces multiple alternative imaginaries of the area at risk of losing its character due to the anticipated government-led urban renewal plans. It demonstrates an ecological approach to understanding the agency of diverse actors, where both human and technology play a role as participant-creators. Recognising art as a social process of exchange, the initial findings suggest participatory practices as a collective form of knowledge production, and through technology to expand our imaginations of the city and everyday environment.

Keywords: Participatory Practices, Socially Engaged Art, Sound Art, Urban Space, Technology-enabled participation, Ecologies

Introduction

Since the late 20th century, the idea of participation has gained increasing attention in various creative disciplines, including arts (Bishop, 2012), media and technology (Rutten, 2018), as well as in architecture and community design (Arnstein, 1969). From different departure points, these ideas converge with an approach that downplays the artist's or the architect's authorship in creative work and involves participants to interpret the content individually (Barthes, 1968) and co-create to produce collective output. The participatory arts and design practice emerges in the context of democratic inquiry during the post-war Western societies, with two key concepts of the "social" turn in the arts by Claire Bishop (2006) and the "creative user" in architecture by Johnathan Hill (2003). As such, participatory practices are coupled with a social concern that shifts from the one-way creator-audience relationship into a multilateral active participation that engages the public as diverse individuals. Furthermore, technology nowadays has enhanced our ability to communicate and collaborate across distances, enabling new means for instant and interactive participation. In a post-digital society, technology itself has become a participant in practice who also contributes to creative processes (Ascott & Shanken, 2003). Participatory arts practice transcends the performer-audience dichotomy, and the artist presumes the role of a facilitator who creates a framework for

participant input, where people (participants) become the medium of the work (Bishop, 2012). It also demonstrates the shifting artistic process from the amateur "community art" into the more encompassing idea of socially engaged art (Richter, 2015), asking the question of who to work with and how to conduct critical engagement through artistic medium (Helguera, 2011). Building upon the common interest in the notion of "participation" across disciplines, these are some key topics that the *Ecologies of Participation (EoP)* initiative set out to investigate, aiming to foster a collaborative network of artists, designers, and scholars with a core question in mind: What is the role of arts and technology in urban social transformation?

Participation: From a Disciplinary to an Ecological Understanding

The year-long EoP program started with a series of panel discussions on three topics that drew upon the disciplinary focus of the initiators at the Chinese University of Hong Kong – Yim Sui Fong on sound art, Melody Yiu on urban mapping, and Ashley Wong on technology-enabled art.

Sound art refers to artistic practices that take sound both as a medium and the subject, presenting an anti-ocular turn from the visual dominance in Western society (Janus, 2011). The first panel discussed the ways in which sound and music create space and communities, with sound artist scholars presenting their research and artwork. Ryo Ikeshiro shared the project, *Sound Envelope HK-LDN*, conceived during the pandemic in 2021, which initiated a dialogue between residents in Hong Kong and London through sharing field recordings, encouraging participants to pay attention to our environment and aspects of daily life. Regarding sound as a vessel that brings people together and can act as a form of resistance (LaBelle, 2018), Brandon LaBelle's work, *Freedom Room* (2021), is the creation of a music club with local youth in an abandoned warehouse in Struer, Denmark. It takes music production as an enabling path of agency, imagination, intensity, and a sense of world-making potential. These examples utilise sound as a medium to engage with different participants, as a form of socially engaged art that responds to critical issues. Together with the study presented by Dayang Yraola on the vibrant soundscape in urban Philippines and the emergence of its sound art scene that engages with the community, this panel highlights how sound art opens new possibilities that transcends the barrier of visual interpretation, which can be viewed as an active creative and political process for what is heard or not heard.

The discussion of participation in architecture began in the late 20th century as a challenge to the dominating architect-author in nominal design processes (De Carlo, 1972). Drawing from her experience in community design, sociologist Sherry Arnstein conceived the "ladder of participation" to describe different ways in which citizens are involved in the design process, in 8 steps from non-participation, to tokenism, reaching the highest level as citizen control (1969). Since then, diverse forms of participatory spatial practices have been developed, including collective creation and mapping, which were discussed in the second panel. In the research-creation project, *Borderline* (2019), artist-researcher Jessica Thompson created a digital tool for users to identify and map familiar sounds, making the invisible boundaries of social and economic mobilities visible. The participants collect and share their recordings in an online platform, building a community archive of collective knowledge about the urban environment. The work of architect-educator Patrick Hwang also hinges on the production of collective knowledge about urban space, as he conducts a collaborative exercise to create a ten-meter-long scroll drawing where participants have to negotiate in the process of drawing over intersecting areas. These examples of participatory work resonate with the analysis by art scholar Minna Valjakka on the contingencies and challenges of collaborative site-responsive public art practices, highlighting the fluid nature of participation in urban space and the importance of attending to local cultural context and power dynamics.

Technology acts as a prosthesis to extend our understanding of the world, enabling us to communicate and collaborate across distances. Nowadays, we are already fully integrated with the cybernetic informational and technological systems (Bratton, 2025), where our realities are shaped through data analytics responding to our input, and we are constantly co-creating with technology. However, rather than a relationship of extracting information from our daily activities for capital gain, how can technologies contribute to new understandings of ourselves and society? Furthermore, with emerging AI technologies, how do they augment or enhance our collective imagination to bring about new visions of the future? These topics are explored in the third panel on technology-enabled participation. Artist Zaiba Jabbar shared her project, *Wild Wired* (2023), a site-specific mobile game created with resident communities in East London in response to the redevelopment of a local park. Through AI-powered speculative narrative generation, the project amplifies marginalised voices to imagine an alternative and more sustainable future. The participatory framework in these virtual world-building projects allows stakeholders to contribute a new collective imagination, while opening the platform for anyone to browse and interact with. This is also the approach of digital artist Debbie Ding, who shared the project, *Wasteland* (2025), presented as an open-ended commons where participants can explore the world and socialise with other users virtually. She emphasises the important role of decentralised user-driven platforms as a space for experimental and embodied digital participation. Overall, in the process of using technology, we discover our role and that of technology, where the "art" happens in interaction between humans and machines as a co-creative process (Candy, 2002).

Through these panel topics developed from our respective yet intersecting disciplines, it addresses the multifaceted meaning of participation and leads to a recognition of the ecological nature of participation. Such practices demonstrate the dynamics of multiple human and non-human actors, and the social and material processes that are generative and transformative in practice over time (Viora, 2025). We began to map out intersecting ideas that form an interdependent and open-ended relational network, where collaboration works as an ecology that different creator-participants (including technology) affect each other, placing the human participants, technologies, researchers, and artists on equal grounds. This perspective regards relationships and identities as unfixed but always in flux, where we could evolve collectively through art, technology, and spatial practice. Therefore, the work produced by the EoP network is not a single-author product but a collaborative response, as a prototype to test different mediums of participation. The connected and technology-mediated environment allows us to explore the possibilities in art to generate new knowledge through practice-as-research (PaR) (Nelson, 2013), asking how the process-oriented approach challenges traditional research paradigms. The goal is the collective output and learnings from the research-creation process, where embodied practices are not separate from their environments but respond to them in a recursive process. The result is not a definitive answer but rather presented as a "work-in-progress" and open-ended question to explore how it might inform future practice of participation.

The Prototype Project: Intersecting Mediums of Participation

One of the key findings in the three panel discussions is how participatory practice is shifting perceptions that contribute to social transformation. Building upon this diversified understanding of participation, a multi-phase prototype project is planned to experiment with different participatory mediums. We have chosen the Flower Market in Prince Edward, Hong Kong, as the site of intervention, which is currently undergoing an urban regeneration study. The project's preparatory phase involves public workshop sessions corresponding to the panel topics, inviting artists, students, and researchers to learn hands-on participatory tools and to build up a collective repository of site impressions. The workshop first introduces the field

recording tool with a listening exercise to prompt participants to explore anti-ocular means of understanding the environment. The non-visual experience is extended to the second on-site workshop with a sensory mapping exercise to observe the familiar urban district from different perspectives derived from the exercise by Rob Walker (2019). The impressions collected by the dozens of participants on site are then turned into prompts for generative AI processing, translating non-textual information – fragments of sound, smell, and images – as data input into the AI platform, and through multiple iterations to produce collective visions and imaginations of the Flower Market.

The availability of mobile devices has made it possible to document a vast number of images, sound, and video, while generative AI has increased the capacity of image production exponentially. The question then lies in the process and criteria of selection, as well as how decision-making is delegated. Without distinct ownership or authorship, the creative process revolves around communication and negotiation among the participants, which sheds insights into a better understanding of a common vision. Another question we encounter is regarding the image production with generative AI, and to reflect on the platform's engineering for its limitations in terms of input format that leads to expected or unexpected results. The current tools are mainly text-to-image creation or image modification, which are essentially text-based, and the creative process turned out to be a language exercise. The initial results were somewhat expected, such as fictional objects based on iterations of flower images and variations of urban development or marketplace scenery. The amateur (non-coding literate) creation saw its limitation and will require more testing and consideration for how this generative exercise can become an open participatory creation platform.

Building upon the workshop results, two artists are invited to further experiment with the idea of participation through an artistic response to the flower market site. Without a preset or presumed output, it is an opportunity to test different technology-enabled participation means and to inform the building of an inclusive framework for collective knowledge creation, framed as a recursive process oscillating between physical and virtual space. Using the framework of her project, *Foreseen Agency* (2024), local illustrator Pat Wong engaged with a flower market vendor through sketching, interviews, and photogrammetry to document the spatial experience in the flower market. The data is then passed to digital artist Debbie Ding in Singapore to build a VR game environment that recreates the sensory pleasure of browsing a physical shop. The virtual environment replicates the shop's distinctive layout and plant arrangement, as visitors are greeted by an AI-generated shopkeeper modelled after the flower vendor Mrs Tsang, who shares horticultural knowledge as users examine specimens in detail through interactive 3D models. The objective is not only to preserve the heritage at risk, but to create a new speculative narrative that includes the knowledge and perspective of the local community. The VR game world is presented during the EoP Public Forum, with a physical setup that includes an installation of the sketch, photos, and artwork created by Pat. Forum participants experience the interactive VR-world and examine the artefacts, including the reproduction of a plotted flower 3D-scanned during fieldwork. The artwork is displayed alongside additional contributions to extend the collective knowledge creation on the issue of the Flower Market urban regeneration scheme. A wall of social-media posts presents ongoing research by the local think tank Liber Research about the site's development trajectory, together with an installation of object archaeology on the flower market by the design-research collaborative, Atelier In.



Figure 16: The Public Forum display of the prototype project. (left to right) The VR experience station (Debbie Ding), fieldwork installation (Pat Wong), market-object study installation (Atelier In), and social-media wall of Flower Market research (Liber Research)

Following the exhibition display during the Public Forum, local artist KY Wong hosted a guided walk at the flower market, where she shared her personal knowledge and narratives about the site, further enriching the collective imaginaries about the Flower Market that the project set out to explore. Responding to the situation and urban issue with participatory art, this project was not intended as scientific research for policy advocacy, but an attempt to create a collective place-based vision that encompasses multifaceted input and interpretation. As a recursive and continuing learning process, the prototype would be further developed into the next phase as a GIS-based platform to map out the collected multi-media material, including workshop data of field recordings, photos, AI-generated images, and the VR world, into a geotagged spatial map for public showcase in Dec 2025. The next question for the prototype project would be how to scale up in form and impact, learning from the various possibilities and potential discovered during the project development. Specific questions include how to integrate sight and sound elements in urban mapping, and how these materials enrich the process of generative AI creation?

Reflection: Participant Creation and Technology Mediation

Returning to the initial research question about the role of arts (and the artist) in urban and social transformation, the project reiterates the co-learning aspect of participatory practice. It is a process-oriented form of community building, where the participant is not confined to a set role of the informant or creator, but contributes to a collective input that does not rely on a single distinct authorship. It unsettles the prescriptive idea of a fixed community that is bounded and "inoperable", as suggested by French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy (Kwon, 2002; Richter, 2015). The dynamic of constant iteration, negotiation, and confrontation can be viewed as a "rehearsal" in social transformation as the recursive process continues to evolve. Starting from a disciplinary conception of participation, our understanding of participatory practice in arts and architecture gradually expands into a more encompassing idea of multiplicity and meaningful participation. It evolves from the early model of participatory art that invites the audience to complete a certain task set by the artist (Bishop, 2012), or the participatory design process that takes the participant's input as a driver to a given objective result (De Carlo, 1972). The EoP participants contribute their creative input to define the project, resulting in a repository of narratives, impressions, knowledge, and artistic interpretation. The endeavour of the first year of the *Ecologies of Participation* activities experimented with different forms of participatory practices, through which we reflect upon the form of creative production with

multiple participants, and how technology-enabled participation mediates digital and physical environments.

The Participants as Diverse Individuals

One of the frequent inquiries we encounter is the relationship between the local participants' input and the artist's interpretation. In the prototype project, the diversity of our "participants" is not confined to the dichotomy of either an audience-participant or an artist, as in many cases they play both the roles of an engaged local with knowledge of the site and situation, as well as the creative individual who contributes with artistic response. Conceived as an open framework that collects personal knowledge with creative input, the inclusion of participant-contributors with diverse backgrounds allows us to look at the issue with multiple lenses and refreshing perspectives. It transcends the progressive steps of participation with an ultimate goal of citizen empowerment in political participation (Arnstein, 1969), but is more akin to Bishop's view that the prescriptive categorisation of participation types or degrees does not account for the complexity in artistic creation (2012). For example, the engagement between the flower market vendor and artists is a reflective means to make visible their concerns and experiences (Maggie et al., 2019), which cannot be evaluated by its direct impact or degree of involvement. In this sense, art is a social process of exchange and dialogue that aims not at a unified answer but to amplify the multiple voices of a diverse public, from which the art form visualises and communicates to evoke further questions and discussions.

Recognising the complexity of participatory arts practice allows us to unpack the nuance of participation through multi-layered and iterative contributions by different individuals, demonstrated in the experience of the urban mapping workshop. The group of public non-local participants who took interest in the Flower Market issue walked through the site together, following a simple exercise to search for sensory clues but with no explicit fieldwork assignment or objective. Their sharing of audio, visual, and textual documentation provides an alternative view of the place as a contrast to the locals or researchers familiar with the area. These "fresh" impressions become a set of collective data, which is brought into the AI platform to generate new insights about the flower market. In this case, technology also "participates" in the creative process through working with human participants who provide source data and prompts to generate the output. The project initiators act as facilitators to conceive a framework and provide clues, but do not determine the results. The learning from this participant creation process acknowledges the participants' diverse backgrounds and varying capacities. The students, artists, researchers, visitors, and the AI-assistant each produce different fragments of visual, textual, audio, or generative imagery that contribute to a collective output with different sensitivity and observation according to their appeal. The initial collection might seem disoriented and sometimes contradictory, yet the essence of such an effort lies in the communication and iteration when reviewing the variety of material together. Discoveries were made when one participant responded to the impression captured by another person through secondary iteration with new prompts, where such a scaffolding process and incremental input gradually built up a series of imaginaries for the Flower Market.

Mediation Between the Physical and Virtual Environment

Another aspect we learn from experimenting with new technology in the participatory creation process is the reciprocal relation between physical and virtual environments. Socially engaged art is grounded in people and space, especially those involving urban issues. Recalling the cases shared in the panel talks, the workshop experience, and the development of the prototype project, digital tools have become a prosthetic that enhances our capacity to engage with people and to explore new possibilities. Meanwhile, to make the project socially relevant and responsive to tangible site issues, the VR world-building exercise would require field

documentation and ethnographic input collected onsite. This process can be illustrated as a reciprocal cycle that begins from an urban issue rooted in the physical environment, with data collected through fieldwork engagement to feed into the generative AI and VR world-building exercises. The virtual space experience is also important to set up as part of a public physical display as an opportunity to form a feedback loop. When we communicate with the visitor engaged in the interactive setup, some of them share their own experience and stories about the Flower Market, which makes them extended participants who contribute a new layer of data to the next iteration of the prototype.

The creative cycle is not complete as such, but it will continue to loop and expand in the next stage in the following year. The current prototype establishes a framework that mediates between the physical and virtual environment, which has the capacity to include new methods of physical fieldwork and display, as well as digital interpretation by involving new creator-participants in the project. The iterative cycle allows the project to grow in multiple dimensions, which is designed not to end with a conclusive result but to lead to more refined questions through the creative exercise. As a reflective process, we are aware of the challenge in dealing with such divergent input and how to maintain a focus. While we deliberately minimise the constraints or rules in the process, the feedback mechanism became the thread to tie together different components as a relational network. The overall EoP initiative is conceived as an inclusive and open-ended network, guided by a common concern but with an essentially loose structure. It can be visualised as a web of relations and people that might play a bigger or smaller role at different times, which are nodes within the flexible web that inform or inspire each other as it continues to develop.

The prototype project reacts to the problem of urban development and the risk of homogenising urban places, with an approach to create multiple imaginaries that look into an alternative future. Unlike the positivist utility of participation to justify an end goal, as commonly found in authority-initiated public participation exercises, we advocate for experimentation to expand the notion of participation in how it can engage and build relationships with stakeholders. It reiterates the role of art as a catalyst for new possibilities instead of a direct solution to urban issues. The new knowledge created regarding both the methods and the content could become inspiration for alternative action plans, harnessing the potential of what artistic practice does best – to build a common experience that connects people and envision alternative futures. The project is then working as a platform to construct a stronger foundation to foresee long-term changes, and to create spaces for imagination, which is also a response to the limitations in formal education and the utilitarian approach to urban and social issues. Ultimately, it aims to nurture a form of creative citizenship.

Discussion: What next? The Questions of Participation

As a form of practice-based research, the EoP collaborative began from an inquiry on participatory practices with an underlying question: “What is the value of art and technology, and how do they contribute to urban social transformation?” Throughout different activities and the prototype project, we examine this question from different points of view in relation to participatory mediums and methods. It enriched our understanding of participatory practices to refine the research question into two context-specific implications for further discussion and investigation.

Participation in the Asian context and non-participation

While most studies of participatory practices are rooted in the post-war Western liberal democracy context, the question of participation in Asia would require a different lens to examine due to their fundamentally different social, cultural, and political background. Over the past year, we worked with international artists and scholars to learn about cases of

participatory practices in Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan, and China. Their sharing reflects the cultural differences in understanding personal relationships and their implications in participatory practices. For example, Dayang Yarola discussed the sound practice of Manila in the context of its vibrant urban soundscape, where the ambiguous boundary between public and private space encourages participation in a festive and convivial manner (Yraola, 2021). Minna Valjakka shared her ethnographic account on the arts practices of female park-dwellers in Tokyo, where the city has well-defined urban spaces and a culturally distinct concept of personal boundary, reflected in the participatory practice at a more personal level of interaction (Valjakka, 2022). These are merely some very brief and initial observations, and the spatial environment is only one aspect of the broader influences on the model of participation. It opens up further questions such as: How do different social, cultural, and political contexts affect the dynamics and operations of participatory practices? What are the specific conditions and urban social issues that participatory arts respond to?

The idea of participation is tied to the cultural ideology of individualism and the political connotation of the collective, which is not always regarded as welcoming in the Asian context, especially in semi-democratic or non-democratic societies. The cases shared during the Public Forum by curator-researcher Nie Xiaoyi on the work of Ding Hua Mutual Aid Society in Guangzhou presented another aspect of participatory practice, where the political notion of participation or collective action in China might be deemed formidable by the authority. Presented as the concept of self/instigation, it demonstrates how community relationship is built through shared everyday practice, which is also a form of participatory practices without directly addressing it as a means of citizen empowerment. This is exemplified by the work of artist Fung Junhua of the Energy Waving Collective, who took the Chinese practice of Tai-Chi in the public park as a form of participatory arts, which ended up with police intervention that the group documented as part of the work. The analogy of the Tai-Chi moves, “pushing hands”, is used to describe a response to accepting forces while diverting the energy to another direction without confronting the source. This thinking resonates with Chantal Mouffe’s radical democratic imaginary, where the participatory mechanism has a capacity to transform the rigid and antagonistic subject position into democratic interaction with others (Mouffe & Martin, 2013).

The example of politically sensitive participatory practices also leads to the question regarding non-participation. As we recognise that participation is not always a positive and welcoming idea, the option of not participating should also be considered when we think about participatory practices. Such a case was recalled by one of the EoP initiators, local artist Yim Suifong, during her participatory field recording sessions intended to involve local residents of the Chun Long Village, who expressed disinterest in participation for artistic creation purposes. It is an example of what Bishop described as the different premises of artistic and social critique in participatory practices, where they are not necessarily interchangeable but remain in a state of constant tension (Bishop, 2012, p. 278). It returns to the methodological questions of who the participants are and how to build a trusting relationship when working with the public/community. The experience of Pat Wong during her fieldwork at the Flower Market prototype project offers a glimpse of ways to build rapport, which she uses live sketching as a means to attract interest and gain trust of the flower vendor, and a way to initiate the conversation that invites the participant to further engage by sharing knowledge and contributing to the project.

Neoliberal society and technology-enabled participation

Technologies allowed new opportunities in participatory practices and brought local issues into the realm of global relevance. However, the situation of technology-enabled participation in neoliberal society also poses new risks and challenges while accelerating the

impact of participation beyond the organic propagation through interpersonal exchange. As we enjoy the benefit of affordability and accessibility in conceiving new technology-enabled participatory practices, which is anticipated to be amplified manifold with AI technology in the immediate future, what are we giving in to propel technological advancement? In a similar way that effective participation requires time and empathy to build relationships for collaboration, can we gain/give equal trust in accepting technology as an equal player in participatory arts practices?

These questions extend beyond the technical aspect of working with technologies in the case of the generative-AI workshop and VR world-building exercise, but entail a deeper critical discourse on the conceptual position regarding our relationship with technology. Nowadays, everyone is compelled to participate in technological platforms with the "fear of missing out", which is, in fact, feeding our input into systems inevitably driven by capitalistic pursuits. Since the emergence of social media, we voluntarily share our location, motion, and preferences that are being turned into big data to predict consumer behaviours. The current application of generative AI not only extracts existing knowledge available on the internet, but our interaction and deliberate training of AI models constantly provide new resources to enhance its capacity. How we utilise new technology in participatory practice, especially in cases of working with other human subjects, is becoming a question that requires critical understanding and awareness.

Raising the question of trust in technologies is not to propose an oppositional stance of rejecting the technological interface in preference for human interaction, but to consider it a new mode of urban life that one must adapt to and react to rather than simply "accept" as a precondition. Our ongoing investigation about the ecologies of participation is also a means to bring awareness to the neoliberal implications by practising participation in arts and design, and unpacking the relational network that virtual space and AI are also nodes for creative action. As with the pre-technology participatory art that took an active stance against passive spectatorial consumption (Bishop, 2012, p.275), contemporary cultural practitioners can continue to challenge the neoliberal implications of technology-enabled participation, with a critical awareness towards both the benefits it brings and the potential risks, such as personal data security and surveillance. Technologists and contemporary philosophers are at the forefront of such discourse, which informs us with notions such as "noodiversity" that challenge the homogenisation of technology and thinking with neoliberalism (Stiegler & and Ross, 2020).

The EoP collaborative is a seed to investigate the role of arts and technology in urban transformation through participatory practices, from which we learn about the nuances of participation and participatory practices from a disciplinary concern into an interdisciplinary exploration. At an interim stage, this essay is intended to bring up new questions as we review the first year's activities and prototype development. With the formation of an artist-creator network that constitutes a form of community, we endeavour to continue developing the prototype into a second iteration that investigates both the methods of participation and the topic of how to build collective imaginaries towards urban social transformations.

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Fanglao, Generation and Prefiguration: Building community and demonstrating futures through dance in Vientiane, Laos

Roy Huijsmans

Abstract

Fanglao is a Vientiane, Lao PDR, based dance company run by and for young people in and connected to Laos. In this paper I draw on participant observation conducted in a number of Fanglao organized activities in 2019-2020 (dance festival, rehearsals, outreach activities, etc) and one-on-one interviews with key protagonists. Fanglao is one of the exponents of an emerging creative arts scene that has been developing in Laos over the past two decades or so, much in relation to the broader political and economic changes that have taken place in Laos. In this paper I reflect on the importance of Fanglao in contributing to building a creative and social community in the field of modern and urban dance. This is realized through the establishment of their own dance studio (venue), the various activities they host (both online and in person) and the cross-fertilisation with other forms of creative expression (i.e. visual arts) and actors in the broader creative arts scene. Conceptually, I highlight the notion of 'prefiguration', the act of realizing in the present a resemblance of a possible future, and how this matters from a generation perspective in a context in which most (aspiring) dancers are confronted with parental worries that excessive time spent dancing and with Fanglao might jeopardise their futures.

Roy Huijsmans is a social scientist working on issues concerning children and youth in mainland Southeast Asia (mostly Laos) and Europe (mostly Netherlands). His research is ethnographic and has focused on young people in migration, young people and the performing arts, (rural) schooling and aspiration, the interplay between migration and the platform economy, and the future of farming. Together with Kasia Grabska he has edited a Special Issue collection in Music and Arts in Action (2022) on 'Trangressing and reworking social boundaries through dance and music'.

'We faced many struggles, we didn't have a studio to practice, we didn't have a teacher to teach us, we just tried to work out ourselves what is right and wrong, we didn't have sponsors. We started from zero, we only had our seniors like Kaka who always organized the event or contest so we can try and practice with friends after school. This was very important because it made us become more close even though we were from different families and raised in a different way, and we became a small community that loves dancing. That made us decide to continue, as dancing is something that connected us together' (Mimee, 21 January 2020)

Mimee is one of the key persons involved in the Vientiane, Laos, based dance company Fanglao. She has been dancing seriously since around 2013 when she was about 17 years of age. Reflecting on her journey into dance she emphasized the importance of becoming a small community connected through dance. Importantly, this community is a youth-led and youth-organised space. The 'seniors' Mimee refers to are only a few years older than her.

The interview with Mimee took place about a month after the 10th edition of the Fang Mae Khong, an international dance festival hosted by Fanglao in Vientiane, Laos. Seeing the parking ground filled up, the entrance to dance studio lined with large banners carrying beautiful visuals and details of the festival programme, a videographer capturing footage of the event and a local restaurant having set up a foodstall selling snacks and beverages one gets the impression that there is a vibrant contemporary and urban dance scene in Vientiane which also

attracts other artistic and creative contributions and actors, ranging from audio-visual artists to culinary artists.

In this paper, I draw on observations of the various creative activities organized by and at Fanglao complemented with individual interviews with key actors. The observations took place in 2019-2020. The interviews were conducted in early 2020 by a Lao research assistant whom herself has been taking dance classes too at Fanglao.Additionally, the author first interviewed key protagonist behind Fanglao in 2015 and has been following their activities since.

The data presented in this paper show how Fanglao has succeeded in building a community of young people through dance and the importance of this for individuals in their efforts of becoming and being a dancer. Fanglao seeks to make real the idea that dance can be a livelihood and creates moments of involvement of (aspiring) Lao dancers to global artistic community. This can be considered a prefigurative practice. At the same time, for very few of the young people associated with Fanglao this involvement can be (near) exclusionary. They are simultaneously building their lives and careers in further ways.

Situating Fanglao

Fanglao was established in 2013, but to understand its position in the transnational Lao dance scene we need to go further back in time. Much linked to the socio-economic transitions unfolding in Laos throughout the 1990s and global developments that happened in parallel (especially the rise of the internet), the early 2000s marked the emergence of a new creative arts scene across urban Laos as is documented in Steve Arounsack's (Arounsack, 2018) 'Getting Lao'd': The rise of modern Lao music and films'.

The opening up of borders facilitated the import of musical equipment, VCDs and eased the travel of people, including artists, in and out of Laos. The rise of satellite television and subsequently the internet provided a new environment for Lao youth to connect with global forms of youth culture, including urban dance and popular music. The importance of all this is reflected in how Peun first got into dance:

'After I saw b-boying on (Thai) television, I practiced by myself. I started from headstand and head spin…I tried myself at home, until one day I met my brother's friend he told me 'oh we have something like this in our village, do you want to see', then I went to see. Peers were important because at that time learning from TV and internet was restricted 'I didn't know how to use youtube or the internet, each day I just spent my after-school time practicing dancing with friends'

Peun's story reflects that of other young men too. In contrast, among the young women dancers the school, in the form of extra-curricular dance activities and performances, played often an important role too which was then amplified through digital encounters with dance through television and the internet. The example of Peun also shows how new forms of media and individual practice in private places may be important starting points for getting involved in dance, these initial private and mediated encounters were at later points then solidified through actual social practice with peers.

Next to the virtual travel of styles and ideas the opening up of borders also facilitated the physical movement of (aspiring) artists – including from the Lao diaspora. For example, Tommy is a key actor in the Vientiane b-boying scene. He is born in France to Lao parents and moved back to Laos with his family at age 8. 'I started to like dancing since I was very young…since I was 3-4 years old. My father liked music, he had his audios and amplifier and he opens the music quite loud…We had tapes cassettes… of Thai songs, and I also listened to music in mainstream like Michael Jackson, that made me want to be like him. At that time I like dancing, singing and mimicking what I saw'… that changed after they had moved to Laos. Then he started 'Thai boxing' because his father had encouraged him to do so. In his young teenage years he also got into gaming and rarely danced. His interest in dance returned when

he was about 13-14 yrs old. Then, his younger sister started to dance through school in a class run by a French teacher. 'It was free but I didn't join the class as I was shy…and just watched'. His sister taught him dance at home, and by practicing at home and once he had developed more confidence in his dance he joined dance in school and also connected with people outside of school through dance.

These individual stories about entering dance and the emergence of informal peer groups also translated into more organized dance structures being set up. The association Lao Bang Fai is the case in point. Several of the key protagonist of Fanglao were previously Lao Bang Fai members or involved otherwise. The French-Laotian dancer and choreographer, Ole Khamchanla, played a key role of connection.

Ole Khamchanla is the founder and director of the France based dance company 'Kham'. He's Lao born, but left Laos with his sister and mother (father stayed behind). He's been living in France (Lyon) since 1980 and was raised there. In an interview with Daisuke Muto (2016), Ole explained that he got into dance because of Michael Jackson 'I imitated him obsessively. But, I came to want to learn more, and the most easily accessible was hiphop culture and street dance. I think I was 14 years old; there was someone who street danced in my neighborhood, and, since it was free, I started to study with him. It was Old School: breaking, locking, and popping…At first, we would gather around one teacher, but soon after we started to pursue and develop our techniques ourselves. There were French, Laotian, and also Arabic and African people; we had many foreigners in the neighborhood. Wherever we found a flat surface—whether it be at a community center, the back of a store, or a station—we would practice.'

Ole has been visiting Laos since 2006. Initially, primarily to study Lao traditional dance and subsequently also to work with Lao dancers through workshops facilitated by, for example, the Institut Francais in Vientiane, Laos. Around 2007, Ole spent a one-month artist-in-residence period at the Institut Français. As part of this activity he organised a number of break dance and contemporary dance classes. In an interview Ole recalled "The participants were mainly break dancers but it was for them to improve their techniques and also to expose them to ways of combining different genres; mixing hip-hop culture and Laotian traditional dance to create contemporary pieces, for example.' Several dancers who participated were Lao Bang Fai member then and now have key roles with Fang Lao.

Although the boundaries between Lao Bang Fai, Fang Lao and other dance groups are fluid at the level of individual dancers, structurally there are important differences. Lao Bang Fai is an association whereas Fang Lao is a private company. According to one of the founders of Lao Bang Fai, the status of 'association' means that Lao Bang Fai 'is recognised by the Lao government and works in partnership with the Lao government.' Similar to other associations in Laos, it has a centralised structure with sub-divisions at more local levels. One of the reason of registering as a company and not an association was for Fang Lao to keep some distance from government and to maintain a lean and flexible organisational structure. According to Ole, the organisational structure of a private company makes it easier to realise Fang Lao's objective of contributing to the development of the dance scene in Laos, and especially contemporary dance.

Prefigurative practice

Jeffrey and Dyson define 'prefigurative politics' as 'embodying in the present one's vision of the future' (Jeffrey and Dyson, 2016: 78). Recent manifestations of the idea of prefigurative politics they locate in relation to social movements, especially anarchist movements, yet they make a case that the concept also helps illuminating the everyday practices of youth 'social activists' in India whose actions they describe as both politically as well as ethically motivated (Jeffrey and Dyson, 2016: 86).

As already alluded to by Mimee in the opening quote, in Laos there isn't an established urban or contemporary dance scene. While there state dance troupes and there is traditional dance, for other forms of dance there is hardly an infrastructure in Laos let alone adult role models. Therefore, for young people who get exposed to these forms of creative expression and role models through digital sources or through events taking place in Laos, it is unclear how one can become a dancer and what this would entail. Moreover, parents may be supportive of their children taking an interest in dance as a hobby but typically become less supportive if they see this hobby becomes a serious interest and may start, in the eyes of parents, competing with other activities (such as studies). Additionally, girls and young women face the additional challenge that they are often not allowed to travel independently to dance classes or events if these take place in evening hours.

The notion of 'prefiguration' I use in this paper at the level of practice. In the absence of an established urban and contemporary dance scene, various dimensions of Fang Lao can be seen as amounting to making real in the present dance as a future possibility, among other things through:

- Creating earning opportunities through dance
- Internationalism
- Realising their own dance studio

According to Ole in an interview in 2016, 'The idea that you can actually make a living as a dancer is still something very new there. So, by demonstrating that it is possible to earn a living in this field, I am hoping the field will continue to develop. For example, being a professional dancer and choreographer myself, in France, I can make a living by working steadfastly. However, in Laos, you can only make a living as a dancer or choreographer for traditional dance or music as a member of the official art troupe. As a street dancer or contemporary dancer, you have no choice but to stay freelance.' These words were echoed by Noutnapha, one of the founders of Fang Lao: 'I want to demonstrate to dancers in Laos how to pursue dance, not as a hobby, but as a profession. As Olé mentioned earlier, it is very possible to earn a living as a professional dancer, so I would like to continue on that path.'

The generational resistance young (aspiring) dancers might meet in their efforts of becoming a dancers are explained by Lucky. He left university after just one year in order to fully dedicate himself to dance. Talking about this he said:

> Of course, they [his parents] were angry. Because at that time, dancing definitely could not be a stable career, no company want a dancer…I was afraid because they scold on me. They were not happy that I didn't do as they plan. I let them scold and wait until they calm and started to talk with them. I told them that I may graduate at the university, I may make money or waste money… I tried to give them some reasons. So, we had a deal that if I could not make dancing as a job with in 5 years I had to go back to school. (Lucky, 25 January 2020)

Fang Lao has offered salaried jobs to a very small number of dancers. Additionally, Fang Lao dancers (and external dancers) can work on a freelance basis as dance teachers for dance classes hosted at Fang Lao or at other premises (i.e. at schools). If young (aspiring) dancers can prove that dance can become a livelihood basis they will experience less resistance from their parents for investing time in dance. At present, Fanglao has four dancers as full time staff: Nout, Kaka, Moto and Mimee. These four get a monthly salary and for each production and additional activity they receive a bonus. Ole explains that paying them a monthly salary is important. This way they can show to their parents that they can live from dancing. Ole says that this really is very important, the salary constitutes evidence that these youth are right and that things are possible through dance that their parents wouldn't believe in.

Although earning money through dance was probably the strongest argument to convince parents that dance might hold a future, international recognition was key too. Several young dancers remarked that their parents didn't really understand their dance. However, when

their children were invited to perform abroad and the cost of the trip were covered by foreign sponsors parents may still not fully understand their children's passion for dance but would realise that there must be something worthwhile there. It is in part for this reason that Fang Lao has exposed its talented members to international dance trips. Equally important, it is by spending time out of Laos that young Lao dancers get exposed to new artistic influences and other dancers which is all key for their artistic development. It is for similar arguments that the annual Fang Mae Khong international dance festival is so important. It brings over international dancers who perform and host workshops for those interested. Over the course of the festival, Fang Lao's venue transforms in a vibrant creative hub around modern dance – something very hard to find elsewhere in Laos at any other point in the year. Again, also this festival makes real in the present a possible future dance may hold.

Having its own venue (Fanglao blackbox) is another key element in the prefigurative practice that the work of Fang Lao amounts to. The structure is built on land owned by the parents of a Fanglao dancer and fanglao has a ten year lease on the land, free of charge. The construction was largely financed through crowd funding. The studio has space for an audience of about 100 people and at the time of research in 2020 it was still under development. The idea was to build residential space too for artists to stay over.

Fanglao blackbox is not only key in the vision of artistic development, but it also helps navigate the Lao political landscape. Previously, the annual international dance festival hosted by Fanglao was a public event which required complex negotiations with Lao authorities especially because it involved foreign dancers. Now that they have their own private premises, Fanglao has for permission only to deal with village level authorities which makes organising things much easier (probably also helped by the political relations of the landowners).

Ultimately, having their own studio creates a place where young dancers can hang out on the basis of a shared passion for dance, whilst also constituting a social and artistic meeting ground with international dancers.

Frictions

On one of the first evenings (23 Nov) of the 2019 Fang Mae Khong international dance festival there is a reasonable audience yet few Laotians in the audience. This is surprising because all Fanglao students and dancers had free entry to all the performances. The reason for these absences differed. Younger dancers depend on their parents for transport or might simply not be allowed to attend evening hour events. For older dancers, other commitments might be the obstacle. Some dancers had to attend other dance activities (teach classes, participate in a battle) or had school or work commitments. Hence, facilitating prefigurative practice itself do not ensure these practices will actually take place.

Additionally, I was surprised to hear from Ole that some dancers left their salaried work for Fanglao: 'For example, Lucky has left Fanglao because he wanted to travel more which means he was less available for Fanglao. Now he works for Fanglao as a freelance teacher so he hasn't really left.' When talking about this with Lucky himself he explained:

' when I work with Fanglao I had a salary and worked full-time. The disadvantage was that I didn't have much time for myself, the responsibilities increased, sometimes I had to do work not related to dancing. In some event I had to work at the backstage, didn't even get to dance' (Lucky)

While Ole insisted that the work responsibilities of salaried staff for Fang Lao are always flexible and tailor made in order not to get into the way of the dancers' artistic development, individual dancers (such as Lucky here) may still see this differently.

The prefigurative practice of creating earning possibilities through dance for (aspiring) Lao dancers may stand in friction with notions they encounter when participating in dance communities oversees. For example, Lao dancers can often not be too picky about the commercial dance activities they get involved in whereas Lao dancers hear from international

dancers that the artistic and creative dimension should always be leading. Similarly, Lao dancers often teach dance classes in a genre different from their own (i.e. contemporary dancer teaching K-pop or hiphop). And when they find students interested in the same genre they might find out that their students are more interested in learning certain technical tricks rather than the actual genre and its political history.

Finally, as for any youth-based community there is always generational renewal. Younger members join, older members might leave because life takes them to new destinations and phases. For example, Nunu explained she had discontinued her participation in a major dance performance (Phu Ying) because she was preparing migrating abroad. When talking in 2019, she said she planned moving to Australia/Melbourne because she has relatives there and she will work with relatives. She said she has never been to Australia before but her husband has. He has just gone previously and is now back in Laos. They have a child together, a 12 months old boy. I then ask whether any of the other dancers are married. She says 'no', because 'when they marry they mostly stop dancing because they then have to work and look after children'. She is an exception because her husband also dances, he is a b-boy dancer. He knows people in Australia who also dance and Nunu also thinks that she might get into dancing in Australia too but will first work with relatives.

Conclusion

In the context of Laos, the dance company Fang Lao is unique. It introduces contemporary dance to the Lao artistic landscape whilst also facilitating various forms of urban dance. The Fang Lao studio and its various activities I have argued can be understood as a prefigurative practice. It makes real in the presence the idea that dance can be a viable creative future. This is achieved through having a physical place, through the internationalism Fanglao facilitates and the earning possibilities it realises. While there are certainly prefigurative politics underpinning these initiatives, in this paper I have emphasised the practices because this also allows bringing in the various frictions inherent in the practices facilitated by Fanglao.

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Bangsaen Plearn: Making Bangsaen City Lively Through Its Community Art

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Abstract

"Bangsaen Plearn" is a festival that celebrates music, performing arts, exhibitions, and creative activities, all inspired by this vibrant tourist city's unique local wisdom and knowledge. The festival showcases the research findings from the project "Creative Bangsaen: Making the City Lively Through Its Community Art." The project's objectives are as follows: 1) To explore how Creative Placemaking and Cultural Ecology frameworks can guide participatory processes that foster community well-being and inclusive cultural spaces in Bangsaen. 2)To examine how collaborative learning in music and performing arts promotes social cohesion, intergenerational dialogue, and sustainable urban development in Bangsaen. This creative research employs qualitative and practice-based methods, focusing on three coastal communities in Bangsaen: Wonnapha, Bangsaen Beach, and Khao Sam uk. The data collection includes an analysis of academic documents, interviews, and field studies conducted with key community stakeholders. From February 14 to March 2, 2025, the research findings were presented through performances in community spaces in Bangsaen and at the Eastern Center of Art and Culture at Burapha University. This research produces four key creative outcomes: 1) Performances by researchers; 2) Performances by resident artists; 3) Aesthetic community activities for elementary school students; 4) Creative initiatives that connect various community spaces based on local data collection. These outcomes include a site-specific theater walk at Wonnapa, the Wandee@Bangsaen concert at Bangsaen Beach, and exhibitions featuring performances in Khao Sammuk, which showcase contemporary dance, shadow puppetry, and traditional Thai Nang Yai performances.

Keywords: Artistic Research, Creative Placemaking, Community Art, Performing Arts Festival

Introduction

Burapha University, a prominent institution in Eastern Thailand, enrolls around 23,000 students. Many of these students move to Bangsaen and the surrounding areas upon admission. After graduation, a significant number choose to stay, starting small businesses and pursuing sustainable livelihoods. As a result, the influx of university students has noticeably increased the youth population in Bangsaen.

According to Saensuk Municipality data, as of 30 September 2020, Bangsaen's According to data from Saensuk Municipality, as of September 30, 2020, Bangsaen had a registered population of 46,628, comprised of 21,830 males and 24,798 females. This population resides in 12,123 households and 37,308 housing units across approximately 20.27 square kilometers. The municipality consists of 25 communities, which contribute to Bangsaen's character as a small city with considerable potential for development. Driven by creative entrepreneurs and the consumption demands of students and young professionals, areas surrounding Burapha University have become thriving hubs for small-scale businesses, including cafés, restaurants, dormitories, hotels, and entertainment venues. Additionally, the coexistence of students, local residents, and tourists has fostered diverse lifestyles and interests, leading to the emergence of creative urban activities such as visual arts, photography, music, and performance.

This research project is a collaborative initiative between the Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University and the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts at Burapha University. It commenced with data collection and in-depth interviews with community leaders in and around Bangsaen. This process was supplemented by joint field surveys conducted in neighborhoods within the Saensuk Subdistrict. The research team also interviewed Mr. Narongchai Khunpluem, the Mayor of Saensuk Municipality, to examine local administrative policies that have influenced Bangsaen's development and its potential future directions. On May 29, 2022, an academic symposium titled "Creative Bangsaen: Enlivening the City through Art" was held. Thai and international experts were invited to share their insights on fostering "creative places" within urban environments. The program included a keynote lecture, "Creative Placemaking: Community Involvement and Responses," delivered by Associate Professor Dr. Chang Tou Chuang from the National University of Singapore.

An academic panel presented three case studies of innovative urban initiatives led by arts administrators: Ms. Nawarat Waewploryngam, a community leader from Nang Loeng; Ms. Piangdao Chariyaphan, the arts manager of the Sam Yan Lar-Lan-Jai Festival; and Ms. Atchima Na Phatthalung, the Director of the Bangkok International Theatre Festival for Children and Youth. During the symposium, participants engaged in breakout sessions with local community networks to explore strategies for transforming the university-adjacent district into a lifelong learning hub.

The research problem addressed in this study arose from an investigation into the local living conditions and cultural ecology of Bangsaen, conducted in collaboration with community stakeholders. This preliminary fieldwork revealed key cultural and social tensions in the area, including conflicts between long-term residents and recent migrants, clashes between traditional cultural practices and new influences from both local changes and urban centers like Bangkok, and generational divides as interests and values increasingly diverge due to rapid societal transformation. While Bangsaen is a well-known tourist destination that attracts a large number of visitors each year for its coastal recreation and cultural festivals, the city faces spatial limitations that restrict further urban expansion. In response to these challenges, current development policies prioritize balanced and sustainable growth, emphasizing the need to improve the living conditions of local residents rather than focusing solely on tourism-driven development.

This study is based on the theoretical frameworks of Cultural Ecology and Creative Placemaking, both of which highlight the significance of community participation. These frameworks serve as the foundation for transforming residential neighborhoods or urban districts into "places" that promote well-being and foster collaborative engagement. Such engagement brings together individuals from diverse social classes, age groups, and cultural backgrounds to co-create environments that are enjoyable, comfortable, meaningful, and sources of collective pride. The process emphasizes dialogue and mutual listening, guided by the principle of equality, to create spaces for expression, co-creation, and shared understanding. Through these participatory processes, a platform emerges for dynamic thinking, critical reflection, and analytical exchange-positioning arts and culture as living, evolving phenomena shaped by collective experience.

Consequently, this study involves immersive engagement with the Bangsaen community, enabling researchers from Burapha University and local residents to participate in collaborative learning through music and performing arts. The ultimate goal is to enhance the quality of life in alignment with evolving social and cultural contexts and to contribute to the sustainable development of Bangsaen.

Research Objectives

1. To explore how Creative Placemaking and Cultural Ecology frameworks can guide participatory processes that foster community well-being and inclusive cultural spaces in Bangsaen.

2. To examine how collaborative learning in music and performing arts promotes social cohesion, intergenerational dialogue, and sustainable urban development in Bangsaen.

Research Design and Methods

This research adopts the conceptual framework of **Creative Placemaking** to create environments that are both grounded in local context and reflective of a broader cultural ecology. Within this framework, community members are actively engaged throughout the planning, design, and implementation processes. Arts and culture serve as central instruments in fostering participatory and inclusive development. The approach emphasizes the interrelationship of three fundamental components: **1) Human activities within spatial contexts**: This includes lifestyle patterns, business models, and the dynamics of mobility and exchange among local populations. **2) The physical environment**: This encompasses built structures, landscapes, streetscapes, and pedestrian pathways that shape everyday spatial practices. And **3) Collective perceptions and emotional associations with place**: These range from feelings of insecurity to experiences of comfort and belonging.

Markusen and Gadwa (2010, pp. 1-6) argue that creative placemaking significantly advances goals related to livability, diversity, and economic development. Such initiatives promote public safety, strengthen community identity, improve environmental quality, provide affordable housing and workspace for creative professionals, and enhance transportation options. They also foster collaboration across civic, non-profit, and private sectors. Furthermore, creative placemaking stimulates employment, supports local creative economies, and attracts new businesses. Successful initiatives typically involve entrepreneurial leadership, a commitment to place-based identity, mobilization of public support, engagement from the private sector, participation of arts and cultural leaders, and cross-sector partnerships across multiple governance levels.

Complementing this perspective, the Global Leaders Institute (2025) describes creative placemaking as an integrative, collaborative approach to community revitalization that emphasizes inclusive participation and the co-creation of solutions reflecting local needs and identities. Key principles include community engagement, cultural expression, adaptive reuse of space, stimulation of local economies, enhancement of social cohesion, capacity building, cross-sector collaboration, and continuous evaluation.

This conceptual framework positions arts and culture as essential resources for community development and highlights the need for institutional investment and support. It contrasts with market-driven approaches that view culture as mere commodified products, instead recognizing cultural assets as foundational to sustainable transformation and social cohesion within communities.

Research and Creative Inquiry

The main research question of this study is: **What artistic processes can be used to engage communities in co-creating creative spaces in Bangsaen? The aim is to foster shared ideas, collaboration, and collective action, ultimately allowing participants to experience joy, a sense of belonging, and pride in their unique local identity as expressed through contemporary art practices**.

The study employs qualitative research methodologies alongside practice-based research in performance. Fieldwork was conducted in the Bangsaen area, focusing on three specific communities: Wonnapa, Bangsaen Beach, and Khao Sammuk. These locations were

chosen to gather data from a diverse range of stakeholders, including community leaders, residents, local entrepreneurs, educational institutions, and student and staff volunteers from Burapha University. The aim was to collaboratively develop creative activities and artistic works that promote participatory engagement and foster community involvement. Several qualitative methods were utilized in the research, including purposive interviews, focus group discussions, community field surveys, participant observation, performance workshops, and the co-design of a community-based arts festival presented to the public. Research participants and sample groups were categorized as follows:

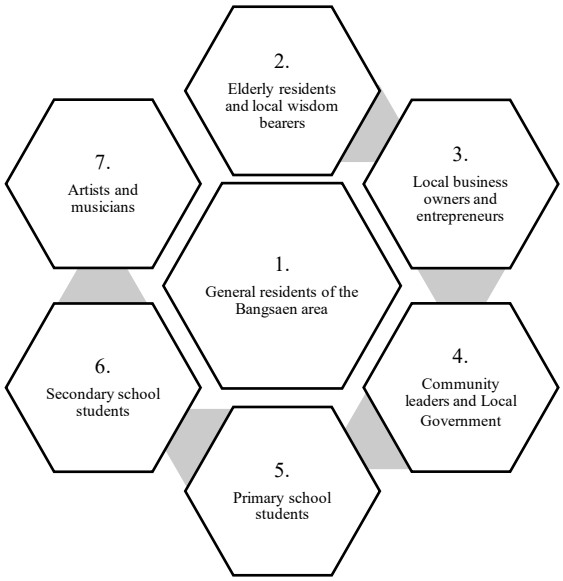


Figure 1: Research participants and sample groups
Source: Nadhanant Uaesilapa

This comprehensive study includes seven distinct participant groups that represent various demographics and stakeholder categories within the Bangsaen community. The sample design ensures a broad representation across different age groups, professional backgrounds, and community roles, allowing for diverse perspectives and experiences to be captured. The research design was structured into four main phases, outlined as follows:

Table 1: Summary of Research Design and Implementation Phases

Phase	Title	Description	Key Activities / Focus Areas
Phase 1	Literature Review and Project Planning	Conducted a thorough literature review and gathered local insights to guide the project's direction.	- Reviewed academic and local texts on creative placemaking, cultural ecology, and sustainable development. - Conducted interviews with community members to understand their history, heritage, and quality of life. - Developed a project plan based on the findings.
Phase 2	Field Surveys, Data Collection, and Community Network Building	Designed and implemented field surveys while establishing networks for community collaboration.	- Conducted surveys and field visits. - Identified local challenges and cultural assets. - Established a creative community network.

			- Initiated a co-design process with local residents.
Phase 3	Designing the Arts Project and Creating Multiform Artistic Outputs	Developed arts-based activities in line with research themes to enhance the quality of life.	- Focused on four key themes: 1) Maritime knowledge and identity 2) Bridging generational gaps 3) Promoting cultural assets 4) Building stronger networks - Collaborated with local artists and elders.
Phase 4	Project Implementation and Public Presentation	Executed co-created arts initiatives and showcased outcomes in a public forum.	- Designed site-specific artworks and performances. - Engaged community participants in the co-creation process. - Presented results at the "Bangsaen Plearn Festival." - Strengthened community identity through public arts initiatives.

Source: Nadhanant Uaesilapa

Findings

Culture and Way of Life in Bangsaen Communities

This research focuses on three key communities in the Bangsaen area: the Wonnapa Community, Bangsaen Beach Community, and Khao Sammuk Community. Before conducting creative development work based on the cultural capital of these communities, the research team carried out a historical and contextual study.

The administrative authority for this area is the Saensuk Municipality, which was renamed from Saensuk Sub-district Municipality on November 26, 1988, under the leadership of Somchai Kunpluem. The municipal area expanded from 2.5 to 20.268 square kilometers. Its strategic vision is to create a livable city with well-preserved natural resources and internationally recognized tourist attractions to drive local economic prosperity. Saensuk Municipality is now widely recognized for its effective urban and community development, particularly in transforming impoverished areas into thriving tourism-oriented communities that generate year-round income for local residents.

Historically, Bangsaen has been a popular beach destination for both Thai and international tourists. In the early 20th century, during the reign of King Rama V, the area was relatively unknown, with only a few households situated near Khao Sammuk. This community, once resembling an island with lush forests and abundant wildlife, began to develop when Field Marshal P. Pibulsongkram constructed a weekend residence there between 1943 and 1945. Infrastructure and government guesthouses were established, linking Bangsaen and Khao Sammuk. Later, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat built more government facilities at Laem Taen in the 1960s. These developments contributed to the region's transformation into a leisure and administrative zone.

In this research, the term "Bangsaen Community" refers to the communities located along the continuous coastal stretch under the jurisdiction of Saensuk Municipality. Bangsaen Beach lies centrally between the southern Wonnapa Community and the northern Khao Sammuk Community. Historically, the Wonnapa area was known as Ban Phoeng Lang, while the Bangsaen side was known as Ban Phoeng Bon. These were traditional fishing communities, with a local Chinese heritage reflected in the presence of Chinese shrines and folk beliefs. Livelihoods centered on coastal fisheries, including small-scale fishing and seafood processing. During Field Marshal P. Pibulsongkram's era, significant land

development promoted Bangsaen as a seaside resort area, initiating a shift in land use and community structure, particularly in Wonnapa.

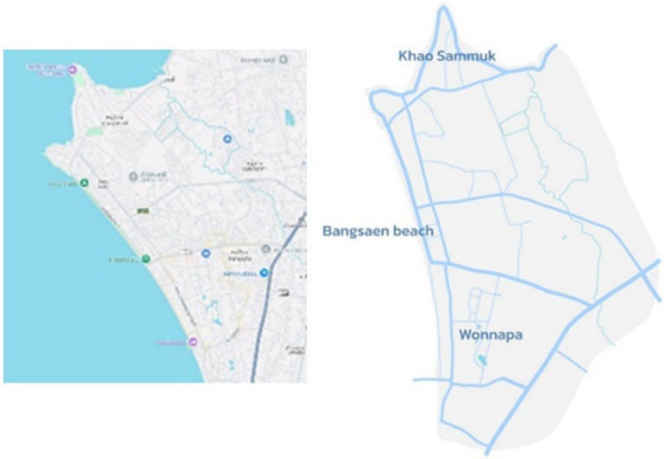


Figure 2: Bangsaen Community Area
Source: Suthasinee Boonkor

A major turning point occurred in 1947 when a wealthy resident of Bangkok, Khun Nai Won Napasap, purchased a large tract of land in Ban Phoeng Lang with the intention of building a vacation retreat. This external influence sparked significant changes in local land use and community life. The once-cherished belief that "the sea in front of our home is our source of life" began to fade as coastal development transformed the physical landscape. Declining marine resources and a reduction in nearshore fishing led to the gradual disappearance of traditional fisheries.



Photo 1: Suwannaloylong Shrine in Wonnapa
Source: Mayuree Wisutthacharn



Photo 2: Performance in the community
Source: Namol Kritsanakarn

However, as noted in research by Paiboon Sophonsuwaphap (2016), Wonnapa continued to retain elements of its traditional coastal lifestyle. Residents remained active in fishing, seafood-related occupations, and rituals associated with the sea, boats, and coastal deities. Traditional knowledge regarding seafood preparation and fishing practices persisted, along with the presence of community markets offering marine products and local produce.

The Khao Sammuk community, located at the northern end of Bangsaen, is situated along a small mountain that overlooks the coast. Known for its scenic views, the area is significant both culturally and ecologically due to the unique convergence of mountain and sea. Khao Sammuk features prominently in local lore and spirituality, with various legends and shrines associated with the mountain.

While Bangsaen is part of a vibrant tourism and fisheries economy, research shows that it also has rich tangible and intangible cultural assets. These elements highlight Bangsaen's potential as a culturally rich community. The residents possess experience in collaborating with various sectors, including public, private, and academic institutions. However, there is a noticeable lack of continuity in cultural initiatives and sustainability of networks.

Much of the community's cultural capital has primarily been utilized for tourism and economic purposes, with limited impact on advancing Bangsaen toward becoming a "creative community." Despite the internal diversity — which ranges from long-established families to new residents of different age groups — locals share a common aspiration for Bangsaen to thrive. Community dialogues reveal a collective vision of a small, welcoming seaside town that embraces creativity, fosters diverse artistic expression, and builds inclusive networks. The spontaneous emergence of grassroots cultural activities serves as a promising foundation for the future.

Table 2: Bangsaen Community Study Data

Community Overview	**Wonnapa**	**Bangsaen Beach**	**Kao Sam Muk**
Geographical Characteristics	The Wonnapa Beach Community is located in the southern part of Saensuk Municipality. To the east, it borders Sukhumvit Road and Nong Mon Market, while to the west, it is adjacent to the seashore. The northern boundary extends to the fishing pier near Bangsaen Beach and the area behind Burapha University. Wonnapa Beach stretches approximately 1.5 kilometers in length.	The Bangsaen Community encompasses the Bangsaen Beach area, serving as both an economic hub and a major tourist destination that generates income for the local community. The beach stretches continuously for about 4.5 kilometers.	The Khao Sammuk Coastal Area features a low hill approximately 45 meters high, situated between Ang Sila and Bangsaen Beach in Mueang Chonburi District, Chonburi Province. At the base of this hill lies the sacred Chao Mae Khao Sammuk Shrine, which is also depicted in the provincial seal of Chonburi. The hill is well-known for its large population of monkeys.

Community Overview	Wonnapa	Bangsaen Beach	Kao Sam Muk
Ways of Life and Livelihoods	Local fishermen engage in the trade of fresh and processed seafood, including shrimp paste, fish sauce, dried fish, and dried shrimp. They also produce traditional local confections used in community rituals and ceremonies.	The Bangsaen Community is involved in various forms of commerce, particularly through small-scale businesses and local entrepreneurship, which play a vital role in supporting the local economy and sustaining livelihoods.	In Kao Sam Muk, the community comprises local fishers who primarily engage in oyster farming and trade. Additionally, numerous seafood restaurants are located along the coastal area behind Khao Sammuk, serving both residents and visitors fresh local catches.
Cultural Capital of the Community	The Suwan Loy Long Shrine serves as a sacred site for local rituals and community gatherings. Nearby, traditional fishing boats are visible, symbolizing the community's deep connection to the sea and dependence on marine livelihoods.	The Bangsaen Wan Lai Festival is another cultural highlight.	The Thai Sammuk Shrine and the Chinese Sam Muk Shrine represent two distinct cultural heritages coexisting in the Sammuk area, reflecting the syncretism of local Thai and Chinese religious traditions.
Community Identity	The fishing community sells fresh seafood and processed seafood products. Many fishermen have established home-based restaurants to increase their income and attract tourism.	The coastal area is a popular tourist destination, and community residents operate businesses selling food and goods along the beachfront. The surrounding areas mainly consist of accommodations, food vendors, and beverage outlets.	The fishing community also engages in oyster farming and the sale of oysters as a key aspect of their livelihood.

Source: Nadhanant Uaesilapa

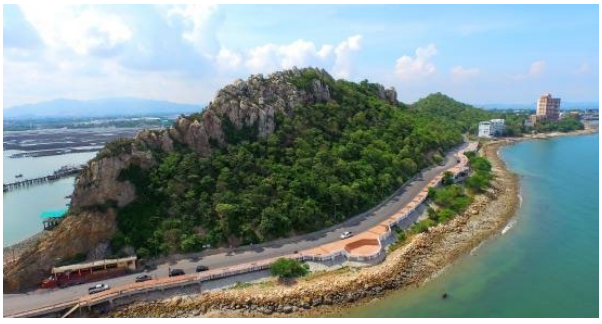


Photo 3: Khao Sammuk
Source: https://www.tripadvisor.com



Photo 4: Jao Mae Khao Sammuk
Source: Visaka Sae-Ui

Bangsaen is an emerging urban area that is increasingly popular among younger generations as both a place to live and a hub for entrepreneurship. Strong economic growth is expected, supported by favorable policies and business interests. However, important questions about the city's future direction remain. In light of these ongoing changes, this research highlights the importance of qualitative development and the nurturing of a cultural ecosystem, rather than merely focusing on economic or infrastructural growth. The study suggests that Bangsaen has significant potential to evolve into a creative community, characterized by a strong cultural identity and active involvement from its diverse population.

Concept and Design of the Artistic Process for Creative Placemaking

After studying and documenting the cultural capital of the Bangsaen community, the research team adopted a Practice-Led Research methodology. Before entering the artistic creation phase, the team was divided into two groups:

1. Curatorial Research Group
2. Performance Practice Research Group

The Performance Practice Research Group was tasked with conducting fieldwork, engaging with local residents, and creating community-based art in three specific communities within the Bangsaen area:

- The Wonnapha Community
- The Bangsaen Beach Community
- The Khao Sammuk Community

Each subgroup was responsible for site-specific investigations, which included field observations, interviews, and data collection. The goal was to analyze the local context and use the findings to guide artistic creation in accordance with the project's conceptual framework. The overall design of the research process is outlined below:

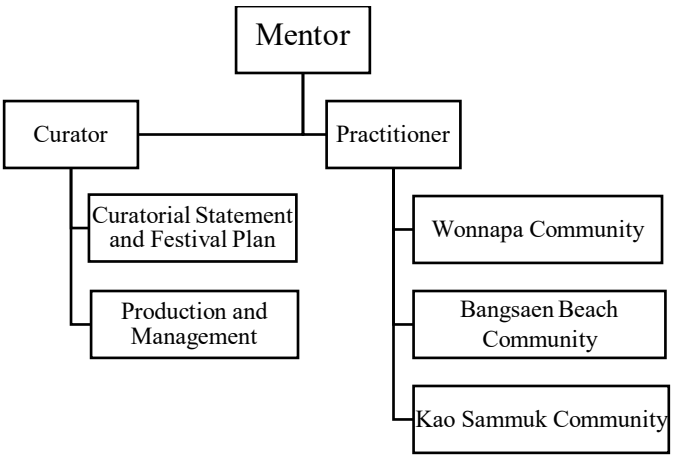


Figure 3: Researcher plan for the study
Source: Nadhanant Uaesilapa

This research established an activity model aimed at addressing the research questions by using a Performing Arts Festival as a platform to collaboratively engage with the community in creating a creative space. The festival showcased contemporary art that reflects the culture and way of life of the Bangsaen communities, with the goal of promoting both the existence and continuity of their cultural capital and community life. This approach served as the foundation for the creation of contemporary artworks directly inspired by the communities, with each community presenting a main performance. The Curatorial Research Group directed the overall management of the festival according to a conceptual framework for festival organization, with specific creative concepts developed for each community as detailed below:

1. Life, Identity, and Spirit of Wonnapa

The researchers aimed to utilize data gathered from a community study to create narratives about Wonnapa through community learning, theatrical performances, and exhibitions. One of the key activities was a Photo Voice project, which showcased the area's potential, explored the roots of the community's spirit, identified its core values, and examined the feelings of local residents toward Wonnapa. This integrated learning process-combining community studies, transformative learning theatre, and art-fostered a strong sense of attachment and pride among community members and volunteer student participants from the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts at Burapha University. It encouraged them to perceive Wonnapa holistically and instilled confidence in both the community's way of life and their individual lifestyles. The creation of the exhibition "One Hundred Faces, One Hundred Stories: The Spirit of Wonnapa" served to investigate the community's past and revealed that Wonnapa is a vibrant coastal community with livelihoods closely tied to the sea. The community maintains kinship networks and places great importance on rituals associated with the Suwannaloylong Shrine. These cultural activities function as family reunions, where residents collectively pray for prosperity in their livelihoods, commerce, and to honor their ancestors. The performance titled "Life, Identity, and Spirit of Wonnapa" was designed to reunite community members and draw the attention of locals back to their neighborhood. Furthermore, this artistic representation served as a tool for preserving the community's fishing grounds. During the research, three significant spaces for the people of Wonnapa were identified: the fish-drying yard, the shrimp paste-drying yard, and a communal area. These spaces serve as gathering points, sources of livelihood, and shared environments for the coastal community of Wonnapa.

2. Wandee@Bangsaen Concert

Data gathered from field surveys and focused group interviews with local musicians revealed a deep connection between the residents of Bangsaen and the tourists who visit. Bangsaen Beach, the closest large sandy beach to Bangkok, has been a popular coastal resort destination since 1943 (B.E. 2486). It has earned the nickname "Bangsaen, the Land of Happiness." This rich history and cultural significance inspired the organization of the concert titled **Wandee@Bangsaen**. This event was not just a typical music concert; it was a collaboratively designed activity that involved the Bangsaen community, using music as a medium for communication. The concert showcased musical expressions from the local community as well as guest artists who inspire the area. This included the creation of original compositions that reflect Bangsaen's identity. The program featured a diverse range of musical ensembles, such as youth string orchestras, veteran local musicians from Bangsaen, brass bands, big bands, and choral groups. These ensembles symbolized both diversity and unity, consisting of musicians across a broad age spectrum-from young amateurs to seasoned professionals. The gathering of community members not only highlighted musical talent but also demonstrated the collective spirit and cooperation inherent in Bangsaen's community ethos. Together with the people of Bangsaen, the researchers helped produce the original composition *"Wandee Dee Tee Bangsaen"* ("A Wonderful Day at Bangsaen"), which reflects the beauty and significance of the area, emphasizing a profound connection to nature, culture, and the collective memory of the community. The lyrics and music resonate with Bangsaen's identity, expressing emotions, sentiments, and valuable imagery that embody the pride of its residents. The concert involved participation from Bangsaen youth and musicians from Chonburi, including the Wat Jaeng Charoen Don School Brass Band, the Chonburi Youth Wind Orchestra, veteran musicians from Bangsaen, The Begin Band, and the choral group from the Maha Thai Pattaya School for the Blind. This event served as both an inspiration and encouragement for the people of Bangsaen, fostering cultural pride and community cohesion through music.

3. Journey Through Time @ Sammuk

The study gathered information from community leaders and local event organizers through individual and group interviews, aiming to encourage participation among community members while immersing them in the daily life of the community. Fieldwork included exploratory walks, conversations, and shared meals within the community. This immersive approach revealed that local residents are acutely aware of the value of their community's assets, recognizing the importance of their cultural and historical heritage. There is a strong desire to preserve and sustain these legacies for future generations. Community activities invited locals to collaboratively explore and trace the significance of their relationship with their environment-particularly the sea, fishing livelihoods, traditional ways of life, and beliefs-from the past to the present. This exploration culminated in an interactive exhibition titled **"Stories Across Time: From Past to Future,"** held at the Sammuk Viewpoint and accompanied by a community theater performance. Before the play, community members were invited to participate in karaoke sessions to foster collective engagement. Reflecting on the creative approaches employed by researchers across different communities, it is evident that there was a profound interest in the everyday lives of local people. The research aimed to connect and reinforce the value of existing cultural heritage, fostering community pride and awareness of its intrinsic worth. This approach was intended to equip the community with the ability to navigate and respond effectively to ongoing changes, ensuring that future transformations do not diminish or undermine their valuable cultural traditions.The creative methodologies and presentations developed in each area served as both rationale and inspiration for the implementation of a performing arts festival. This festival was designed to

actively engage the Bangsaen communities, promoting a sense of belonging and pride in their distinctive local identity as expressed through contemporary art practices.

The collective data and related documentation from the study were synthesized during a curator workshop, which aimed to develop the festival's conceptual framework. This process ultimately led to the creation of the Bangsaen Plearn Festival.

Table 3: Conceptual Framework for Creating the Bangsaen Plearn Festival from the Curator Workshop

Item	Description
Curatorial Statement (Festival Statement)	The Bangsaen Plearn Festival is a performing arts festival designed to encourage community members to engage in learning and connection. It bridges traditional and contemporary cultures through creative works that reflect local ways of life. The festival is shaped by collaborative processes of co-thinking, co-creation, and joint implementation, expressing the unique identity of the area through contemporary art.
Characteristics of the Festival	The Bangsaen Plearn Festival is an event and performance initiative that fosters joy and strengthens connections among people and places in Bangsaen through the medium of art.
Festival Concept	Connect - Creative - Encourage
Purpose	To serve as a coordinating hub that connects people, communities, and spaces in Bangsaen, aiming to foster participation through creative activities.
Vision	To promote community development through the arts, creating a "Creative Bangsaen."
Mission	To establish artistic spaces that promote well-being within the Bangsaen community; to foster community networks in the Bangsaen area through creative activities; and to cultivate local activists and creative performance-makers from within the community.
Tone of Voice	Determined, humorous, grounded, and accessible.
Activity	Panel Discussions and Dialogues, Performances in the Form of New Creations, Collaborative Creative Performances, Workshops, Competitions or Contests, Exhibitions, Cultural Tours, and Study Visits.
Festival Story	The festival aims to foster a sense of love and joy within the community by utilizing Bangsaen beach as a connective space for shared happiness.

Source: Nadhanant Uaesilapa

The management and organization of activities at the Bangsaen Plearn Festival involved presentations by practice-based researchers, professional artists, and community artists, alongside various activities that aligned with the festival's conceptual framework. The festival took place within the Eastern Center of Arts and Culture at Burapha University, Bangsaen Beach, and various community locations, fostering a connection between the university and the Bangsaen community through its momentum. The activities at the Bangsaen Plearn Festival included the following:

1. Performances by practice-based researchers from three communities, featuring:
- "WONNAPA WAN NA BE?"
- "Journey Through Time @ Sam Muk" exhibition
- "Wandee@Bangsaen" concert.

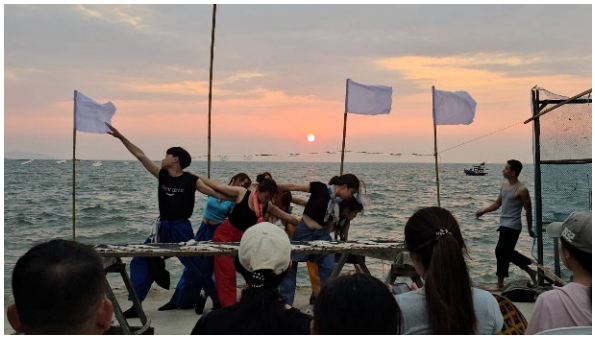


Photo 6: Journey Through Time @ Sam Muk exhibition
Source: Namol Kritsanakarn



Photo 5: The Learning Theatre from the study
Source: Nadhananant Uaesilapa

2. Performances by resident artists at the festival, including:
- "A Tale from the Blue Island"
- "LOOP" by Sutarath Sinnong.



Photo 7: The Shadow puppet setting on Bangsaen beach
Source: Nadhanant Uaesilapa



Photo 8: Loop production and young audiences
Source: Nadhanant Uaesilapa

3. Performances by invited guest artists, including:
- "San Rak" by Pichet Klunchun Dance Company
- "Nang Yai – Sudsakorn Catches Ma Nil Mankgorn" by Wat Ban Don Troupe.



Photo 9: Nang Yai wat Bandon
Source: Nadhanant Uaesilapa



Photo 10: Saen Rak, comtemporary dance
Source: Nadhanant Uaesilapa

4. Performances to create atmosphere at Bangsaen Beach, including:
- Music concerts on the beach
- Korean cover dance performances.



Photo 11: Korean Cover Dance on Beach
Source: Nadhanant Uaesilapa



Photo 12: Bangsaen audiences
Source: Nadhanant Uaesilapa

5. Activities designed to connect spaces and performances during the festival, including:

- An exhibition on the history of Bangsaen through photos
- An audio-visual exhibition on Eastern History
- Guided tours featuring stories from the three communities, titled "Bangsaen Gossip," conducted in a local red songthaew (shared taxi).



Photo 13: Students attend the Eastern History Exhibition
Source: Nadhanant Uaesilapa



Photo 14: History of Bangsaen photos exhibition
Source: Nadhanant Uaesilapa

Conclusion

This study is based on the theoretical frameworks of Cultural Ecology and Creative Placemaking, both of which highlight the significance of community participation. It employs qualitative research methodologies alongside practice-based research, focusing specifically on three communities: Wonnapa, Bangsaen Beach, and Khao Sammuk. The structure of this research is divided into four main phases: (1) literature review and project planning, (2) field surveys, data collection, and community network building, (3) designing the arts project and creating diverse artistic outputs, and (4) project implementation and public presentation.

Bangsaen is an urban area that attracts younger residents, functioning as both a living space and a hub for entrepreneurship. This dynamic contributes to the local economy, even amid uncertainties about the city's future direction. This research highlights the importance of cultural development over purely economic or infrastructural growth.

The design of the festival emphasized Bangsaen's unique cultural heritage, incorporating elements of local folklore, coastal lifestyles, and contemporary artistic practices. By engaging local artists and residents in the creation and presentation of site-specific performances and exhibitions, the festival fostered a sense of belonging and pride among both participants and audiences. These artistic expressions not only celebrated the community but

also served as a form of cultural storytelling, strengthening intergenerational and cross-community ties.

Ultimately, the Bangsaen Plearn Festival exemplifies how creative placemaking can redefine public spaces, enhance urban livability, and build resilient communities. This research involves collaboration between university arts lecturers and the local community to highlight Thai artistic practices that blend tradition with contemporary knowledge. During practice-based performances, researchers carefully framed their thinking, collecting data through interviews and observations while maintaining awareness of personal biases. It is crucial not to impose one's worldview, as this can lead to bias. Instead, researchers should engage in active, nonjudgmental listening to gather meaningful data and critically reflect on their processes. The Bangsaen Plearn Festival serves as a bridge between the university and the local community, fostering trust and encouraging participation. It promotes friendship, collaboration, and lifelong learning while strengthening connections with local institutions and enhancing appreciation for contemporary art. Although the festival has significant potential to elevate Saensuk City's cultural profile, its long-term success relies on the establishment of sustainable, multi-stakeholder collaborative frameworks that ensure meaningful and consistent contributions.

To achieve this goal, there must be strategic alignment across key areas, including cultural policy development, engagement with academic institutions, and community-driven initiatives. This alignment should be backed by solid funding mechanisms and systematic resource allocation strategies. Equally important is the creation of a shared long-term vision among government agencies, educational institutions, private sector partners, and community representatives. By doing so, the festival can evolve into a sustainable cultural platform that consistently supports the city's integrated development agenda across cultural, social, and economic dimensions.

Acknowledgements

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Collective Empowerment and Solidarity Through Dance Among Indonesian Migrant Workers in Taiwan: A Participatory Artistic Research Approach

Anastasia Melati

Abstract

This study explores how Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan use dance not just as recreation, but as a powerful form of collective expression and social connection. In the face of isolation, precarity, and restrictive legal environments, these workers come together to form self-organized dance groups: spaces where friendship, identity, and mutual care are cultivated. Drawing on participatory artistic research, this paper approaches dance not only as cultural performance but as a shared practice of resilience and empowerment. Through ethnographic fieldwork, performance observation, and active collaboration, the research highlights how dance becomes a strategy for building community and affirming dignity. Whether performing during religious celebrations, public cultural events, or advocacy campaigns, these migrant-led initiatives transform dance into a vehicle for visibility, belonging, and voice. Their choreographies speak of lived experiences, aspirations, and solidarity, grounded in the everyday realities of migrant life. The study draws from social design theory, performance studies, and migration studies to argue that dance serves as both a form of research and grassroots activism. It becomes a method through which migrants reclaim agency, build social capital, and imagine alternative futures, on their own terms. By recognizing migrant-led artistic practices as vital, this research invites both scholars and policymakers to pay closer attention to the creative strategies of marginalized communities. In these dance practices, we witness not only art, but acts of care, courage, and collective hope.

Introduction

Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan represent a vibrant yet often overlooked community within the wider landscape of global migration. While they make meaningful contributions to both their home and host countries, they continue to face systemic challenges: including social isolation, unstable job conditions, and legal limitations that restrict their ability to fully participate in society (Constable, 2009; Lan, 2006). In the face of these hardships, many Indonesian migrants have found strength and solidarity through collective cultural practices, especially dance. Far from being just a form of entertainment or nostalgic expression, dance becomes a powerful space for building community, sharing emotional support, and navigating complex identities (Taylor, 2003).

This research explores how dance serves not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a strategic practice of empowerment for Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan. Grounded in a participatory artistic research approach, the study goes beyond detached observation by working closely with migrant dance groups as collaborators (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2015). In doing so, it embraces the idea that performative practices are not merely artistic—they are also methods of inquiry, reflection, and resistance (Jackson, 2011; Kuppers, 2007). Through fieldwork, performance analysis, and active engagement with these communities, this study highlights how dance becomes a vehicle for creative agency, social bonding, and collective resilience.

These dance practices unfold in diverse settings, religious holidays, cultural festivals, and even advocacy events, each time telling stories that transform personal and collective

experiences of migration into public acts of expression. By stepping onto a stage, these workers do more than perform; they challenge dominant narratives that often reduce them to invisible laborers or social burdens. Instead, they claim their dignity, creativity, and cultural identity, asserting their place within Taiwanese society (Bourdieu, 1986; Turner, 1987).

This analysis draws from an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that bridges performance studies, social design theory, and migration studies. Performance studies helps us understand dance as more than art: it is a lived, embodied practice that negotiates meaning, identity, and power (Schechner, 2003). Social design theory, especially the work of Manzini (2015), allows us to see how creative actions like dance can generate social innovation, enabling participants to reshape their environments and relationships. Migration studies, meanwhile, offer insight into how migrants construct belonging and identity under conditions of displacement and constraint (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Together, these perspectives provide a rich foundation for analyzing how migrant dance is deeply political, participatory, and transformative.

Ultimately, this research contributes to ongoing conversations in artistic research and creative community scholarship by showing how performance can be a grassroots method of inquiry and change. Working with migrant communities not as subjects but as co-creators, this study models the potential of participatory artistic research to bridge scholarship and activism. It calls for deeper recognition of migrant-led cultural practices—not only in academic work but also in policies aimed at fostering more inclusive and resilient societies.

The paper begins by reviewing the relevant literature and theoretical underpinnings, followed by a detailed description of the participatory research process. It then presents ethnographic findings and performance case studies that illuminate how dance operates within Indonesian migrant communities. The discussion considers the broader implications of these practices as acts of cultural resistance and social design. Finally, the conclusion reflects on the study's contributions and suggests future directions for research at the intersection of art, migration, and empowerment.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This study draws from a rich body of scholarship to explore how Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan use dance not just as art, but as a means of social connection, identity expression, and community-building. Three key theoretical approaches guide this inquiry: performance studies, social design theory, and migration studies. Together, they help illuminate the ways dance becomes a dynamic practice of empowerment, especially when viewed through the lens of participatory artistic research.

Dance as Social Practice and Collective Empowerment

Dance has long been recognized as more than a performative art—it is a social act that shapes identities, carries cultural meaning, and forges connections between people. In performance studies, dance is seen as a way of communicating that bypasses words, making space for emotions, memories, and resistance to be expressed through the body (Foster, 1995; Schechner, 2003; Thomas, 2014). Scholars like Phelan (1993) and Taylor (2003) highlight its ability to bring forth lived experiences that often remain invisible in mainstream narratives.

For migrant communities, dance often becomes a tool for survival, belonging, and transformation. As Brettell (2003) and Franklin (2014) note, migrant workers frequently face marginalization and isolation; conditions that dance can help counteract by providing communal space for cultural affirmation. Through shared movement and storytelling, migrant dancers assert agency over their bodies and reclaim spaces otherwise denied to them (Reed, 2003; Shay, 2014).

In Taiwan, many Indonesian migrant workers, especially women employed in domestic care, organize dance groups that go far beyond recreation. These groups are not just about leisure; they foster collective strength, visibility, and emotional resilience amid restrictive social and legal frameworks (Lan, 2006; Huang, 2018). Their performances become public affirmations of identity and solidarity, generating social capital in the process (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

Participatory Artistic Research and Dance as Methodology

This research is grounded in participatory artistic methods, where the line between researcher and participant is intentionally blurred. Instead of observing from the outside, I worked alongside dance groups as both collaborator and learner. This approach, often referred to as participatory artistic research, sees art-making as a legitimate and insightful form of inquiry (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2015).

Within this context, dance is not only what is being studied; it is also how knowledge is generated. Haseman (2006) and Kershaw (2011) argue that embodied performance can serve as a method that uncovers complex social realities. When people move together, they are not just performing; they are thinking, feeling, negotiating, and making meaning in real time. For migrant workers whose voices are rarely heard in academic or policy spaces, this methodology offers a way to center their experiences and highlight their agency (Jackson, 2011; Kuppers, 2007).

By dancing with migrant workers rather than simply watching them, this research brings their creative processes and community dynamics into focus, positioning them not as research subjects, but as co-creators of knowledge and change.

Social Design Theory and Collective Creativity

To better understand how dance fosters change on a community level, this study also engages with social design theory. Ezio Manzini (2015) describes social design as a participatory process that helps communities address real-world challenges through creativity and collaboration. Rather than focusing on the final product, social design values the shared journey of making something together.

In this light, the self-organized dance initiatives of Indonesian migrant workers can be seen as a form of social design. Their choreography and public performances are acts of collective problem-solving, responding to exclusion and invisibility by building something inclusive, affirming, and visible (Sanders & Stappers, 2008; Bishop, 2012). These creative acts produce more than cultural expression; they generate new relationships, shared ownership, and a sense of belonging (Escobar, 2018).

Just like social design, participatory artistic research thrives on process, iteration, and dialogue. In both cases, the goal is not only a polished performance, but a deeper sense of connection and empowerment among those involved.

Migration Studies: Identity, Belonging, and Resistance

Migration studies offers essential insight into the lived complexities of moving across borders—physically, culturally, and emotionally. Migrants often construct hybrid identities and sustain transnational ties that defy simple categories like assimilation (Hall, 1990; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). For many, creative practices such as dance become tools for navigating the pressures of displacement and maintaining continuity with their cultural roots (Papastergiadis, 2000).

Agency is a recurring theme in this literature. Migrants do not simply endure their circumstances; they actively respond, resist, and reimagine their place in the world (Mahler & Pessar, 2006; Kibreab, 2004). For Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan, dance is one such

response. It allows them to express their values, histories, and dreams, not just individually, but collectively.
These performances are particularly powerful when viewed through the lens of gender and labor. Migrant women, often confined to invisible caregiving roles, use dance to push back against societal constraints, creating new spaces of visibility and pride (Parreñas, 2001; Foster, 2010).

Integrating Theoretical Perspectives

Bringing these three frameworks together, performance studies, social design theory, and migration studies, allows for a multidimensional understanding of dance in the lives of Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan. Performance studies helps us see dance as embodied meaning-making. Social design theory reminds us that collaborative creativity can be transformative. Migration studies grounds these ideas in the real-life struggles and strategies of people on the move.

Viewed through this integrated lens, dance is no longer a decorative add-on to migrant life; it becomes central to how individuals and communities survive, adapt, and flourish. It is through dance that these workers build solidarity, challenge marginalization, and imagine alternative futures. And in the process, they also become researchers, artists, and designers of their own lived experiences.

Methodology

This study is grounded in a participatory artistic research approach that centers the lived experiences and creative practices of Indonesian female migrant workers in Taiwan. Rather than treating dance merely as an object of study, I approach it as both a method and a space of inquiry: one that is co-created with those whose lives it expresses. In doing so, this research positions migrant workers not as passive subjects but as collaborators and co-authors of knowledge, echoing feminist and decolonial calls to reimagine the researcher-participant relationship (Haraway, 1988; Smith, 1999).
This methodology responds to the need for more relational, embodied, and ethically grounded approaches in migration and performance studies. It draws from contemporary paradigms in arts-based and participatory research, which emphasize co-creation, reciprocity, and reflexivity (Leavy, 2015; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). By engaging directly with migrant workers' dance communities over an extended period, I sought not only to observe but to move alongside them; to listen with my body, to learn through shared rhythm, and to co-perform understanding.

Participatory Artistic Research

Participatory artistic research integrates artistic creation with critical inquiry, recognizing art as both a medium of knowledge and a mode of social intervention. In this study, dance serves not only as a research focus but as a methodology that shapes how research is done—through movement, gesture, repetition, and improvisation.
Rather than standing apart from the community, I participated in rehearsals, joined workshops, attended performances, and contributed to discussions. Dance here is not a “case study” but a living process: a rehearsal space for freedom, a gathering point for collective care, and a vocabulary for expressing what often cannot be said. As Bresler (2006) and Leavy (2015) argue, such approaches destabilize the distance between researcher and subject, creating more ethical, empathetic modes of inquiry that honor artistic integrity and social complexity.

Ethnographic Fieldwork

The backbone of this research is long-term ethnographic engagement. Since 2019, I have spent extended periods with Indonesian migrant worker communities in Taiwan, building

relationships that stretch across mosque gatherings, church festivals, open-air dance rehearsals, and community-led advocacy events. My fieldwork spans both everyday settings and special occasions, capturing the rich texture of migrant life and its seasonal rhythms.

I kept detailed fieldnotes, recorded video footage of performances, and engaged in countless informal conversations, in Indonesian, Javanese, and sometimes with the aid of gestures and laughter when words failed. These encounters were not always planned; some of the most revealing moments occurred on long train rides after performances or over shared meals during Eid celebrations. Such moments offered insight into how these women navigate their identities, dreams, and constraints through dance.

Drawing from classic ethnographic methodologies (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019), I allowed my fieldwork to remain open-ended, guided not just by research questions but by relationships, trust, and the tempo of the community itself.

Performance Analysis

Understanding dance as a form of embodied knowledge requires an analytical lens attuned to movement, space, and affect. I drew from performance studies frameworks (Schechner, 2003; Reed, 2003) to analyze how choreography, spatial arrangements, and audience interaction serve as vehicles for expressing identity, community, and resistance.

For instance, I examined how gestures associated with religious devotion, such as the raising of hands or prostration, were woven into secular dance routines, blurring the lines between ritual and performance. In one performance by a Jakarta-based migrant group, the dancers' synchronized steps mirrored the patterns of factory work, subtly critiquing the mechanization of migrant labor while asserting agency through coordinated beauty.

These analyses were not conducted from a distance. They were enriched by the knowledge shared in interviews, by what I learned through dancing myself, and by post-performance discussions where dancers reflected on their choices. Thus, analysis became an extension of shared experience, not a detached act of interpretation.

Participatory Observation and Collaboration

Throughout this research, I deliberately embraced a role that oscillated between observer and participant, insider and outsider. I danced with the women. I laughed with them when mistakes were made in rehearsals. I cried with them when they shared stories of separation from children, or of unfair treatment at work. This embodied and emotional participation enabled a depth of understanding that conventional observation alone could not offer.

Participatory observation also required constant reflexivity. As a Javanese researcher with academic privilege, I was aware of the hierarchies at play. I continuously reflected on how my presence shaped the field, how trust was built (or not), and how to ensure that my representations honored the dignity and creativity of those involved (Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Banks, 2001).

Specific Methods

The methodological framework was operationalized through a combination of qualitative and artistic methods:

- **Semi-structured interviews** were conducted with members of Indonesian dance groups. These conversations explored their migration trajectories, motivations for dancing, experiences of community, and reflections on empowerment. Interviews were flexible and shaped by participants' comfort and availability, often taking place during rest periods in rehearsals or over snacks after events.

- **Participant observation** took place across various domains of migrant life: from the mosque courtyard during Idul Fitri, to a Taipei public plaza during a solidarity performance, to the backrooms of dormitories where rehearsals happened after long shifts. Fieldnotes captured not just actions and words, but also silences, tensions, rhythms, and the textures of these shared spaces.
- **Video documentation** allowed for slow-motion re-watching of performances, revealing subtle elements like mutual eye contact, synchrony, and spatial dynamics. These audiovisual records became key tools for collaborative analysis with the dancers themselves, allowing them to narrate their intentions and interpretations.
- **Thematic analysis** of all data, transcripts, fieldnotes, video materials, was conducted iteratively. Using codes related to identity, faith, resistance, and affective labor, I constructed a layered understanding of how dance operates as a form of grassroots cultural politics. Themes were not imposed but emerged through ongoing dialogue with participants, ensuring that the analysis reflected collective insight.

Ethical Considerations

Working with migrant communities entails serious ethical responsibility. Many participants faced precarious legal and economic situations. Informed consent was not a one-time formality but an ongoing negotiation. I made sure participants understood the aims of the research, their right to withdraw, and how their stories and images would be used.

Confidentiality was rigorously maintained. Some participants chose pseudonyms; others gave full consent to be named, wanting their work and voices recognized. Wherever possible, I sought to ensure that the research served the community, whether through advocacy partnerships, public presentations of their work, or returning performance footage for their own use.

As Banks (2001) and Smith (1999) remind us, ethical research is not only about protecting participants but about respecting their autonomy, honoring their contributions, and ensuring that knowledge production is mutual and accountable.

In sum, this methodology emerges from a deep commitment to co-creating knowledge with migrant women whose creative resilience, expressed through dance, offers critical insight into the entanglements of labor, identity, and faith. This approach not only generates rich empirical data but also enacts the very values of community, reciprocity, and transformation that the research seeks to understand.

IV. Findings

This study found that for Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan, dance is far more than artistic expression; it is a living, collective practice that fosters community, identity, resilience, and advocacy. Drawing on a participatory artistic research framework, the study revealed the deeply interwoven social and affective dimensions of dance in migrant life. Three key themes emerged: dance as a site of belonging, a form of cultural resistance, and a tool for social capital and advocacy.

1. Dance as a Site of Belonging and Mutual Support

For many Indonesian migrant workers, the experience of migration is marked by isolation, often due to linguistic barriers, cultural displacement, and the structural constraints of Taiwan's labor and immigration systems (Lan, 2008). In this context, participation in dance groups offers an invaluable source of social and emotional support. Dance rehearsals and performances create rare communal spaces where individuals with shared cultural backgrounds and migratory experiences can gather freely. One participant noted, "When I dance with my friends, I feel connected. We are not alone here. We share stories, laughter, and strength, and also the Indonesian spicy food or sambal terasi."

Such informal gatherings serve as more than just artistic outlets; they become spaces for psychological reprieve and intersubjective solidarity (De Genova, 2010). Dance groups often serve as information-sharing hubs where members exchange knowledge about labor rights, access to healthcare, or strategies to cope with exploitative work conditions. In essence, these dance spaces become temporary "homes" in exile, emotional and cultural sanctuaries embedded in diasporic life (Brah, 1996).

Notably, traditional performances during Indonesian Independence Day or Islamic holidays also allow migrants to publicly reaffirm their cultural identity. The act of donning traditional costumes and performing ancestral dance styles becomes a powerful means of maintaining continuity with one's homeland and faith, even while living in a state of displacement.

2. Dance as Embodied Cultural Assertion and Resistance

Beyond community formation, dance emerges as a deeply embodied language through which migrant women assert their complex identities and push back against marginalization. In an environment where migrant laborers are often seen through the reductive lens of utility, dance reclaims the body as a site of dignity and narration (Csordas, 1994). Many performances observed integrated elements of Islamic symbolism, such as gestures inspired by ritual prayer or costumes referencing Qur'anic motifs, thereby allowing participants to express intersecting identities: as Indonesians, as Muslims, and as migrants. This integration also reflects a broader trend in migrant communities using culture to mediate between personal identity and host-society norms (Glick Schiller et al., 1995).

As one dancer explained, "Through dance, I tell my story, my struggles and hopes, without needing words. It shows who I am beyond the work I do." These narratives complicate the dominant portrayal of migrant workers as passive victims and instead foreground their agency and creative subjectivity. In some instances, migrant groups have performed at public events organized by NGOs or during multicultural festivals. These performances, while celebratory, carry an undercurrent of resistance, they challenge dominant societal scripts and call attention to issues of labor injustice, discrimination, and invisibility.

The performative act thus operates as what Butler (1997) calls a "performative counter-speech": a refusal to be silenced, and a way to inscribe alternative meanings into public space.

3. Dance as a Tool for Social Capital Building and Advocacy

Engagement in dance also builds vital forms of social capital. Migrant dancers not only become performers but also organizers, teachers, and community leaders. Through planning rehearsals, coordinating costumes, and managing logistics, participants cultivate valuable skills in leadership, communication, and collective action. One group leader reflected, "Being part of the dance group gave me courage to speak up and connect with others beyond our community."

These roles open new possibilities for migrants to advocate for themselves and others. Public performances at multicultural festivals or collaborations with local NGOs provide access to broader networks and civic engagement opportunities. Such encounters can foster intercultural understanding, challenge xenophobic attitudes, and carve out inclusive social spaces in host societies (Putnam, 2000).

Over time, the trust and solidarity developed through dance have enabled some migrant participants to act as informal advocates, helping others navigate bureaucratic systems or access support in cases of abuse or illness. This evolution highlights dance not just as a social activity but as a form of grassroots organizing and social innovation: a way to mobilize collective power from within the community itself.

In this sense, dance is both medium and message, an embodied practice that reclaims agency, makes visible the invisible, and catalyzes community-based solutions to structural inequalities (Noland, 2009).

Reflexivity and Researcher-Participant Collaboration

This research was deeply rooted in collaborative and reflexive methodology. Rather than positioning the participants as mere subjects, the study embraced a co-creative ethos. The researcher engaged as both observer and collaborator, attending rehearsals, assisting with logistics, and co-reflecting on performance meanings with participants. This mutual engagement nurtured trust and allowed the researcher to access more nuanced, insider perspectives.

Such participatory engagement also challenged conventional researcher-researched hierarchies and aligned with the feminist ethics of care and voice (Tronto, 1993). By centering participants' lived experiences and co-producing meaning, the study avoided imposing external theoretical frameworks and instead let the analytical categories emerge organically.

Participants expressed gratitude that their stories and artistry were treated with respect and authenticity. For them, the research was not merely extractive but affirming: a space to be seen, heard, and valued. This outcome illustrates the ethical power of artistic research not only to generate knowledge but also to cultivate dignity and empowerment within marginalized communities.

Summary

In sum, the findings of this study illuminate the multilayered significance of dance among Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan. Dance serves as a sanctuary of belonging, a mode of embodied resistance, and a platform for building social capital and advocacy. It enables migrants, particularly women, to assert their identities, share knowledge, and foster mutual support. Moreover, it acts as a form of migrant-led innovation, one that transforms artistic practice into a vehicle for social change.

These insights were made possible through an engaged and reflexive research methodology that honored participants' voices and emphasized co-creation. The study affirms the transformative potential of dance in migrant contexts, not simply as performance, but as praxis: a lived, moving response to structural injustice and a pathway to empowerment.

V. Discussion

This study brings to light the vital and often overlooked role of dance in the everyday lives of Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan. More than a form of leisure or artistic display, dance becomes a living, breathing social practice, one that enables workers to connect, resist, and thrive amid the challenges of migration. Through a participatory and embodied lens, the findings illustrate how dance creates space for collective agency, cultural assertion, and emotional survival in an often isolating and precarious environment.

The first theme, dance as a space for belonging and mutual support, reflects a fundamental human need for connection and community. In the absence of formal support systems, self-organized dance groups operate as alternative social institutions; offering solidarity, shared identity, and practical knowledge exchange. This echoes broader migration scholarship that identifies grassroots cultural practices as essential to migrants' wellbeing and social integration (Almeida & Wright, 2016; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Rather than merely reminiscing about home, these gatherings foster a sense of "home-making" in the host country, providing emotional safety and reaffirming cultural continuity (Boccagni, 2017). In these spaces, dance functions as a form of social care: tending to the psychological and communal wounds left by labor exploitation, separation from family, and systemic marginalization.

Secondly, the research affirms that dance functions as a powerful form of embodied cultural assertion and subtle resistance. The expressive body, in this context, speaks volumes beyond what words can capture. Migrant workers choreograph and perform their lived experiences, reclaiming narrative control and resisting objectifying portrayals of migrants as voiceless or merely economic subjects. Performance studies scholars have long emphasized the body's political and cultural agency; highlighting how embodied acts transmit memory, reclaim identity, and subvert dominant narratives (Phelan, 1993; Taylor, 2003; Schechner, 2002). The infusion of religious and cultural symbols in these performances, especially Islamic nuance, allows dancers to navigate and articulate hybrid identities, embracing the intersection of being Indonesian, Muslim, female, and migrant. In this way, dance becomes a form of soft activism, embodying resistance in a manner that is culturally rooted and spiritually resonant (Hughes-Freeland, 2008).

The third theme, dance as a tool for social capital building and advocacy, reveals how artistic practices generate influence far beyond the stage. By participating in rehearsals, organizing events, and engaging with local communities, migrant dancers cultivate leadership, confidence, and a broader public presence. Social capital, as theorized by Bourdieu (1986), refers to the resources accessible through networks of relationships; here, dance serves as a key mechanism for building such networks. These performances become moments of visibility: connecting migrant communities with NGOs, religious institutions, policymakers, and Taiwanese allies. As such, dance operates not only as cultural expression but as a platform for participatory advocacy and intercultural dialogue (Kester, 2011; Belfiore & Bennett, 2007). The creative labor of these dancers thus expands into civic engagement, challenging stereotypes and fostering mutual understanding.

This study also affirms the strength of participatory artistic research methodologies in exploring lived experiences. By engaging in co-creation with participants, the research avoided extractive tendencies common in migration studies and instead centered the voices, values, and aesthetics of the community itself (Leavy, 2018; Barone & Eisner, 2012). This methodological orientation reflects a commitment to ethical collaboration, recognizing migrants not merely as subjects of inquiry but as co-researchers and cultural producers with rich interior lives and insights.

From an interdisciplinary standpoint, the study contributes to ongoing conversations at the intersection of migration studies, performance studies, and social design theory. It offers empirical support for rethinking how we understand migrant agency; not only through legal and economic frameworks but also through the creative, symbolic, and relational domains. The idea that marginalized communities use collective creativity to reimagine their futures resonates with social design principles that emphasize participatory, inclusive innovation from below (Manzini, 2015).

Nonetheless, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The study focuses on one specific migrant community, Indonesian Muslim women in Taiwan, which, while rich in depth, may not reflect the full diversity of migrant artistic practices across geographies or religious-cultural backgrounds. Future research could undertake comparative or transnational studies to explore how different migrant populations mobilize dance and other artistic forms in varied sociopolitical contexts.

In sum, this discussion reaffirms that dance is not a peripheral or ornamental aspect of migrant life; it is central to how many migrants survive, connect, and resist. Through dance, they craft belonging, assert identity, and build networks of care and advocacy. Understanding these embodied practices can guide not only academic inquiry but also policy development and community programming aimed at creating more inclusive, responsive societies.

VI. Conclusion

This study has illuminated the profound and multifaceted significance of dance as a collective, participatory, and deeply affective practice among Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan. Rather than simply serving as a means of cultural expression or entertainment, dance is revealed as an essential strategy of everyday survival, empowerment, and community care. It enables migrant women to creatively respond to the challenges of displacement, precarity, and marginalization by forging spaces of belonging, healing, and self-determination.

Through the formation of self-organized dance groups, these women actively cultivate environments of mutual support, interdependence, and embodied solidarity. These communities, built through shared rhythms and choreographed movements, become vital platforms for negotiating identity and enacting agency. In these acts of co-creation, dance becomes a medium for self-assertion and cultural continuity, where individual stories merge with collective experiences in ways that foster resilience and dignity. Such performances, though often modest in scale, carry powerful messages of hope, resistance, and endurance.

Moreover, this research has shown that the embodied performances of Indonesian migrant workers function not only as aesthetic expressions but also as subtle, yet impactful, forms of social intervention. These acts of dancing together—often in public spaces or on digital platforms—challenge dominant narratives that render migrant laborers invisible or disposable. By taking up space, both physically and symbolically, these women articulate new forms of visibility and participation. In this way, dance becomes a tool of soft resistance, offering a counter-narrative to structural silencing and marginalization.

Importantly, the study underscores how social capital generated through these creative practices extends beyond the stage. Dance fosters leadership, intercultural dialogue, and emotional well-being, while also facilitating connections with local and transnational communities. These outcomes speak to the broader transformative potential of arts-based, participatory research methodologies; approaches that respect and uplift the creative intelligence of migrant communities themselves.

Drawing from theoretical frameworks in social design, performance studies, and migration research, this work invites us to rethink how we understand agency, collectivity, and cultural labor in migratory contexts. It argues for the urgent need to recognize migrant-led artistic practices within both academic discourse and policy discussions; not as supplementary or peripheral, but as essential to building more inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive societies.

Looking forward, both scholarship and policy must continue to support and explore the rich, diverse ways migrant communities engage in creative practices as tools for transformation. These practices are not only deeply meaningful for the individuals involved but also carry important implications for how we conceptualize citizenship, participation, and belonging in an increasingly interconnected world.

Ultimately, this study calls for a broader recognition of collective creativity as a force capable of shaping alternative futures: futures grounded in solidarity, care, and shared humanity. The dancing bodies of Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan remind us that creativity, when rooted in community, is not only an act of expression, but also an act of world-making.

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Live Coding as Critical Media: Asian Assemblages of Algorave

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Abstract

In this paper, we situate the practice of live coding as an articulation of critical media. This critical practice involves the real-time use of programming languages to address a range of creative challenges and communicative strategies through tactical improvisation. Despite its roots in the early 2000s, we observe that live coding remains a marginal creative practice. The literature on alternative media presents various modes of digital critical practice, including hacktivism, culture jamming, and others, yet live coding has received very little attention within this field. As a performance-based musical practice, algorave is a social movement centred on the performance of electronic music that re-centres human agency within an assemblage of sociotechnical relations. This critical practice challenges the logic of automation and generative AI by demanding human creativity and competence towards the creation of soundscapes. The nature of live coding decenters the use of programming away from its common institutionalized associations, particularly with neoliberal, STEM-based careers and education. Instead, live coding functions as a participatory practice to empower, subvert, resist, and transcend sociotechnical constraints. We see live coding providing experimental, experiential and pragmatic possibilities for marginalized and Global South contexts through a radical reframing of creative technologies which originate from the Global North. Our work highlights cases of live coding through algorave across Asian contexts.

Key words: live coding, critical media, algorave, alternative media, global south

Introduction

Live coding can be defined as a real-time, interactive practice involving the immediate authoring, modification, and execution of computer code as the principal methodology for generating dynamic, creative or pedagogical artefacts (Selvaraj et al., 2021; Zmölnig & Eckel, 2007). It is characterized by the use of programming languages to produce in real-time sonic, visual, or conceptual outputs. It is a versatile technique employed across diverse domains for artistic expression, performative demonstration, and educational exploration. We examine live coding as a critical media practice, highlighting its experimental, experiential, and pragmatic possibilities, particularly in the Global South and marginalized contexts. While live coding has its roots in the early 2000s and before, it remains a niche creative practice that has received little attention in the field of alternative media.

We specifically focus on live coding through the lens of algorave practice, spotlighting Asian contexts within the Global South. Algorave is a social movement modeled on raves in which algorithmically generated electronic music recenters human agency within sociotechnical relationships (Armitage & Thornham, 2021), challenging the deterministic logic of automation and generative AI by emphasizing human creativity in soundscape creation. The grassroots nature of live coding detaches programming from its institutionalized and neoliberal agendas, including STEM-based careers and education. Instead, it acts to empower, subvert,

resist, and transcend sociotechnical constraints. Below, we further define key terms before discussing the criticality of live coding and algorave. The penultimate section of our work juxtaposes experiential knowledge of algorave with relevant literature. We conclude with reflective remarks concerning the significance of live coding as an expression of human agency.

Defining Live Coding

The history of live coding as a distinct creative practice can be traced back to a 1985 musical performance and technical talk by Ronald Kuivila (Roads, 1986). By the year 2000, more musicians, visual artists, and choreographers began exploring real-time programming in performance (Zmölnig & Eckel, 2007). This led to the formation of communities such as TOPLAP (Temporary Organisation for the Promotion of Live Algorithm Programming) in 2004, which played a significant role in formalizing the practice and fostering its growth (McLean et al., 2005; Lara Mendoza et al., 2023). The emergence of the algorave scene, where music and visuals are generated from algorithms, often through live coding, further popularized the art form within both academic and underground music circles (Williams, 2023).

In artistic domains like music and performance art, live coding is deeply intertwined with improvisation, performance, and the public visibility of the coding process (McLean et al., 2010; Parkinson and Bell, 2015). The field of computing views live coding through the lens of real-time interaction and a critical perspective on traditional software development (Rein et al., 2018). In computer science pedagogy, the focus shifts to live coding as a teaching methodology aimed at demystifying programming and promoting active learning (Selvaraj et al., 2021). Academic study of live coding as a teaching technique largely began around the turn of the millennium. We now explicate the concept of critical media to then demonstrate how the employment of live coding across domains constitutes this form.

Defining Critical Media

Atton's (2001) work on alternative media identifies them as outcomes that constitute non-standard or disruptive approaches to the economics of production and cultural formations of media use. Other scholars have identified interchangeable terms for alternative media, such as grassroots media, independent media, participatory media, autonomous media, tactical media, and critical media, as examples, with each term prioritising a core feature, function, or context (Pajnik & Downing, 2008; Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010). These practices transform the content, form, distribution, reception, relations, and reproduction of mediated communication and creative practice.

Critical media are counter-hegemonic as they challenge "institutional and professional media power" and offer a way of opposing "conventions and representations of the mainstream" (Atton, 2008, p. 31). Later, Atton (2015) noted that the study of critical media considers "different ways of generating, structuring and presenting" representations through process and outcome. Considering these understandings, Fuchs (2010) offers a useful elucidation of critical media worth echoing:

Critical media product content shows suppressed possibilities of existence, describes antagonisms of reality and potentials for change, questions domination, expresses the standpoints of oppressed and dominated groups and individuals, and argues for the advancement of a co-operative society. Critical media product form aims at advancing imagination, it is dialectical because it involves dynamics, non-identity, rupture, and the unexpected (p. 189).

As such, critical media can be understood in terms of a two-fold conception of form and content that is transgressive, creative, and emancipatory. Critical media are media forms, content, and practices that actively question and challenge dominant power structures, ideologies, and representations prevalent in mainstream media. This field often examines the influence of media on social, cultural, and political realities, with a particular focus on issues of inequality, marginalization, and social justice (Bailey et al., 2008). Scholarship in critical media aims to understand how media content is produced, distributed, and received, revealing underlying and overt biases while advocating for more equitable and counter-hegemonic media landscapes (Pajnik & Downing, 2008).

Live Coding and Algorave as Critical Media

Live coding inherently possesses a critical dimension largely absent in traditional programming due to its focus on process, performance, and the public exposure of code. The critical aspect of live coding has been noted by its practitioners from the viewpoints of both Latin America and feminism, and the references here are not an exhaustive list (Ledesma, 2015; Mendoza et al., 2023; Armitage, 2018; Armitage & Thornham, 2021, Champlin et al., 2023; Chicau & Bell, 2022). This improvisational practice, where code is written and executed spontaneously, leads to dynamic development and often unexpected results. As such, it contrasts starkly with coding as a static practice and structured instrumentality of computer science (Popat & Starkey, 2019). This emphasis on the 'how' of digital creation aligns with critical media's interest in deconstructing media production practices and the ideologies which constitute such (Atton, 2015).

The practice of live coding stands adjacent to similar forms of critical media production, such as hacktivism and culture jamming, which also use digital technologies, including various forms of programming (Bailey et al., 2008). Hacktivism involves the use of computer-based technologies to disestablish structures of power, "enacted through computer code that exposes information, destroys data, or disrupts operations" (George & Leidner, 2019, p. 10). Consider the original definition from the hacker collective The Cult of the Dead Cow in 1994: "... a policy of hacking, phreaking or creating technology to achieve a political or social goal" (Thomas, 2001, p. 1). Similarly, culture jamming concerns a reappropriation of meaning and practice through the remixing of existing forms and content, sometimes through the "tactical use of digital media," which can be "process rather than result-oriented" (Lekakis, 2017, p. 318).

Hacktivism and culture jamming have roots in the critical practices of the Situationists, a European intellectual collective which emerged during the late 1950s (Bailey et al., 2008). The Situationists were characterised by their signature practice of détournement, which concerned how they 'hijacked' and recontextualized the meanings of texts in an attempt to subvert, invert and deconstruct through creative synthesis (Pajnik & Downing, 2008). This was exemplified in the ways Situationists detached still and moving images from their original contexts through which new meanings were juxtaposed with or referenced original meanings (Coyer et al., 2011). We see live coding as a critical practice that is methodically consistent with the intellectual tradition of the Situationists as a détournement of programming languages.

In contrast to both hacktivism and culture jamming, a defining characteristic of live coding is the transparency of its process: the constructed code is typically displayed to the audience, allowing them to witness the creation of the artwork line by line. This practice extends across domains, including music, visuals, dance, poetry, and notably, pedagogy. The focus in live coding shifts the final output to the creative process itself, making the act of coding a public and performative event (Zmölnig & Eckel, 2007; Bell, 2013; Lee, 2019). This differs from programming within industry contexts such as finance and healthcare (Liu et al., 2020).

The practice of algorave functions as a complex détournement of music, which unsettles common notions of instrumentation, composition, arrangement, and musicianship.
Live coding's focus on process and improvisation also contrasts with the polished, finished nature of mainstream digital media, pushing back against the illusion of seamless technology and highlighting the human labor, decisions, and potential errors involved (Ledesma, 2015). This perspective aligns with critical media's goal of deconstructing media production and revealing often-hidden labor and power dynamics. Experiments in collaborative music making over the network, often carried out through live coding, can examine and challenge ideas around political structure (Knotts, 2015).

The focus on real-time interaction and liveness in live coding provides a valuable model for contrast with other real-time digital practices and their effects on audience engagement and power dynamics (Tanimoto, 2013; Parkinson & Bell, 2015; Rein et al., 2018). Furthermore, the implicit critique of traditional software development within the computing aspects of live coding can inform broader critical analyses of software design and its embedded ideologies. The interdisciplinary theoretical foundations of live coding, drawing from performance studies, human-computer interaction, and pedagogy (Rein et al., 2018), provide critical media scholars with diverse lenses to examine the complex relationships between users, code, and digital systems.

The contemporary media landscape is characterized by increasing algorithmic mediation, blurring lines between media production and consumption, the pervasive influence of digital platforms, and concerns regarding media and data ownership. Live coding emerges as a distinctive intervention, offering a critical perspective and alternative practices that directly engage with these dystopian features of the contemporary situation. The act of making the usually hidden process of coding public can be interpreted as a critical intervention, challenging the idea of software as a black box and inviting scrutiny of its underlying mechanisms (Ledesma, 2015).

The ever-increasing online archive of screen recordings of these live coding performances from algoraves or other events as seen on YouTube and elsewhere serve to further disseminate these critical perspectives to not only local audiences but the general international audience online. These characteristics strongly connect live coding to the objectives of critical media. Crucially, it underscores the necessity of a consistently critical approach that unites theory and practice. This viewpoint, unlike approaches that isolate "alternative" or "community" media, sees cultural practice broadly as essential to human life and action, echoing the ideas of Williams (1975) as cited by Hamilton (2015). From these points, we contend that live coding can accurately be categorized as critical media. We further explore this understanding through the musical practice of algorave, as we discuss in the next section.

Live Coding and the Assemblage of Algorave

Rather than being a music genre, algorave is better understood as an 'event' or even a social movement. Sociologically, algorave is best understood as an alternative social movement as it is anti-establishment, shunning hierarchy and identity-blind to its practitioners as part of its inclusive ethos (DeFronzo & Gill, 2020; McLean, 2025). Practitioners present media generated through algorithms, most often through live coding, that fits a rave context. Similar to traditional raves, this can include music genres like techno, house, electro, drum and bass, and ambient (Collins & McLean, 2014). The algorave movement challenges music genre constraints and social structures around the use of programming languages and the production of electronic music, and practitioners have developed a set of progressive guidelines for running one (McLean, 2025). However, the algorithmic tools involved allow performers to produce music that does not belong to standard genres, instead sometimes forming alternative,

unnamed genres in the 'event' of their creation. Even though algorithmic systems also imply at least a certain level of automation, the performance context tends to highlight the human operator of the system. This is often done in part through live coders' practice of sharing their screens with the audience by projecting it (McLean et al., 2005; McLean et al., 2010; Lee, 2019).

Algorave questions the way live music is understood in its in situ execution by musicians and the experience of audiences. The use of various technologies such as digital audio workstations (DAW), laptops, microphones, audio interfaces and programming languages forms a musical assemblage of sociotechnical relations. That intertwines with musicians, audiences, and the contexts which inform and constrain the use of live coding. Théberge (2017) notes that musical assemblages construct how we conceptualise and operationalise the relationality of humans, contexts, instruments and technologies. Similarly, Waters (2021) raises the notion of "performance ecosystems", referring to situated configurations of elements concerning temporal, historical, social, physical, aural, visual and individual interplays (p. 135). This idea is expanded further by Wilson (2024), who sees "compositional and improvisation frameworks" which encompass a range of human, non-human, and more-than-human actors which "participate on their own terms and carry with them the acoustic assemblages in which they are already entangled" (p. 240). Other scholars identify the interface between humans, music and digital technology as posthuman encounters where "the reconfiguring and redistribution of human agency and cognition in conjunction with intelligent machines" is acknowledged in the case of live music production (Dyer & Kanga, 2023, p. 283). As such, the idea of a musical assemblage suggests that skilful manipulation of sound produces more than just the output heard by listeners. Bell (2013) explicates some factors in this assemblage and relates those factors to the aesthetic dimensions of live coding.

Live coding in algorave has programming languages as a core aspect of its performance, notation, and phenomenology (Blackwell & Collins, 2005). This encourages collaboration and enables networked performances where participants can contribute remotely (Kirkbride, 2020). In these settings, programming languages serve not just as tools but as expressive media for sculpting sound, image, and movement. The continuous feedback loop among the coder, the code, and the resulting output, where each influences the others in a dynamic, iterative cycle, plays a crucial role. Algoraves and live coding creatively destabilise the static conceptions of the ways programming languages are typically understood to be used. It is also common in algoraves for audiences to experience varying kinds of visualizations projected alongside the music generation, such as a display of the programming language in a web browser or specialized application, or a second performer operating live visuals alongside the main algorave musician (McLean et al., 2010).

Collins & McLean (2014) remark that the experimental nature of algorave embraces failure, uncertainty and error as a critical part of the practice. Armitage (2018) further comments that algorave offers the opportunity for constructive non-achievement, as "failure has been an expected and at times thrilling outcome of live coding performances". Debugging and responding to unexpected outcomes are considered integral and revealing parts of algorave performance, not flaws. This inherent transparency in the usually opaque process of programming fosters direct and critical engagement with the underlying technological systems that produce digital media. This openness augments the musical assemblage of algorave, giving a certain emphasis to human agency not present in other forms of electronic music. While technologically driven, this musical assemblage is human-centered, positioning human input as central to electronic live music experiences. In contrast to other contemporary algorithmic production techniques like mostly-autonomous neural networks, live coding in algorave is a critical practice that defies the deterministic logic characterizing 21st-century technological discourse.

Live Coding and Algorave in the Global South

Having established live coding through algorave as a critical media, we examine Global South contexts in which it has occurred. In this section, we draw heavily on anecdotal evidence drawn from algorave practitioner experience, corroborating this experiential knowledge with scholarship in related fields. In the Asia-Pacific region, early algorave events include a 2013 event in Sydney, followed by the first Algorave in Tokyo, subsequent events in Tokyo, a Japan tour, and an algorave in Hong Kong as part of ISEA. While Japan and Hong Kong are Global North contexts, algoraves differ there despite those countries having financial structures in common with the rest of the Global North. Algoraves and live coding practices have a longer presence in the Global South within Latin America and India, and more recent developments have taken place in Indonesia and Thailand.

Mendoza et al. (2023) analyzed Latin American live coding practices, contrasting them with Global North developments, proposing that live coding goes beyond technical sound experimentation to critique cultural and technological systems. This positions it as a medial musical practice whose artifacts function as critical media. Mendoza et al. (2023) highlight live coding's engagement with different types of time and various relations with the performer's body, noting differences stemming from fundamentally distinct constitutive logics, not just auditory cultures. Western focus on music tonality, exemplified by Sonic Pi presets, is treated differently in Latin America, (Mendoza et al. 2023). By rejecting Western hegemonies and using indigenous rhythms or culturally resonant sonorities, live coding can serve as a powerful tool for political contestation against extractivist and colonial forces, empowering practitioners to decolonize sonic practices, challenge power structures, and articulate their own cultural narratives. Latin American performers must work around these assumptions to perform authentically. Mendoza et al. (2023) note the algorumba of Colombian live coders, also described as such by Venezuelan live coder Julio D'Escrivan, with rumba deriving from Yoruba culture. This synthesis shows how Global South cultural practices can find voice through live coding, implying its vital critical media practice, sometimes similar to DJs but extending into broader cultural, symbolic, and technological systems.

Khoparzi (2022) describes that the development of algoraves brought together algorithmic music makers and gave them a different context to present work that had previously been eclipsed by Global North practitioners in Indian art galleries. Further, it allowed these cultural practices to reach audiences beyond technology and Western-influenced art crowds. Cardenas (2018) documents the growth of live coding in India from 2014. Later, algoraves and live coding events were held in many cities in India, such as Bangalore and Dehli (Khoparzi, 2022). Live coders around the world describe using the practice to reconsider the assignment of meaning, and in South Asia, that has also involved the incorporation of elements of classical music such as ragas; Delhi hosted the first all-women algorave in the country. The practitioners in these events in India come from diverse backgrounds including sound, design, and film (Mitra, 2021).

Hartono and Sutanto (2023) explore the development of algorave music practices in Indonesia, particularly Yogyakarta, where activities began in 2021. They note that Indonesian art institutions do not provide formal education in electronic music or live coding tools. The group "Paguyuban Algorave" arose as a platform for teaching and sharing live coding, electronic music, and algorave practices. Hartono and Sutanto (2023) examine algorave music in Indonesia, focusing on "Paguyuban Algorave" and how the international algorave movement uniquely amalgamated with local Indonesian culture, resulting in a distinctive musical approach. Hartono and Sutanto (2023) also investigate why this approach gained widespread acceptance compared to other computer-aided music forms and explore algorave's trajectory in Indonesia by considering historical Indonesian antecedents. They also investigate the influence of cultural factors on community interactions, communication, and knowledge

sharing, leading to ways distinct from the Global North, and they mention the complex relationship between culture and gender.

Thailand has also seen growth in live coding practice, with public performances dating at least back to 2012 with Kijjasak Triyanond live coding in the ChucK system (personal correspondence, June 2025). Synap Home Lab has been a center of recent activity, both showcasing local performers and hosting international ones (SYNAP BKK, 2023). Algoraves have also taken place in Thailand (Somno, 2024). Given this background, the potential of live coding and algorave to act as critical media in other Asian Global South contexts is apparent. However, it is necessary to acknowledge potential challenges related to access and infrastructure in the Global South.

Unequal access to reliable technology, including computers and stable internet connectivity, can limit participation in live coding activities for some communities (Ledesma, 2015). Addressing infrastructure gaps and ensuring equitable access are vital for realizing live coding's full potential. Additionally, there is a recognized need for culturally responsive pedagogy and content in live coding education to ensure its relevance and effectiveness in diverse cultural contexts, as simply transplanting teaching methods from the Global North may not be effective or appropriate. Finally, it is essential to be critically aware of and actively work against any potential colonial assumptions unintentionally embedded in live coding practices originating from the Global North. Decolonizing approaches that prioritize local knowledge, perspectives, and creative practices increase the possibility that live coding serves as a tool for empowerment and cultural expression in the Global South.

The potential of live coding as a critical media practice is particularly significant in Asia and the Global South, where issues of access, representation, and cultural sovereignty in the digital age are acutely felt. Live coding offers accessible methods for digital art creation and expression that can empower marginalized communities and challenge the dominance of Western-centric media narratives and technologies. Carpentier et al. (2015) offer insights into how critical or community media democratizes technology by making it accessible and fostering participation. The emphasis within live coding on open-source tools, visible processes, and collaborative learning aligns directly with their community approach. This focus on shared access and active participation enables individuals to move beyond being mere consumers to becoming active creators and critical users. Access begins with the low economic barrier to entry, especially through free and open-source software.

Carpentier et al. (2015) also highlight use of technology for alternative purposes and diverse discourses, which resonates with live coding's potential to challenge mainstream media production norms and provide a platform for marginalized perspectives. This demonstrates that live coding empowers individuals and communities to engage with technology in ways that challenge established power structures and promote media democracy. Live coding can facilitate the creation of culturally relevant digital media that actively challenges dominant Western aesthetics and narratives in the global media landscape. It provides tools and techniques for artists to develop unique sonic and visual expressions reflecting local cultural aesthetics, traditions, and histories, allowing communities in the Global South to assert their identities, share their stories, and contribute to a more diverse and representative global media ecosystem. This critical practice can be seen as a form of digital decolonization, providing means to create content that is not only produced locally but also reflects local perspectives and values, pushing back against homogenizing global media flows (Ledesma, 2015).

Conclusion

Live coding is an evolving and significant form of critical media, uniquely positioned to interrogate and challenge the dynamics of our increasingly digital and algorithmically mediated world. It operates critically through its inherent transparency, capacity for direct intervention, and power to foster participatory engagement. This act of revealing the "how" of digital creation directly aligns with critical media's aim to expose constructed realities and embedded power structures within media forms. Furthermore, live coding provides a dynamic platform for critical commentary, intervention, and increased agency. It fosters agency by demonstrating that code is a malleable medium, empowering individuals as creators and modifiers of digital technology, not just passive consumers. This is crucial in an age where understanding code is increasingly vital for informed societal participation.

The accessibility of open-source tools and supportive live coding communities further facilitates this shift, enabling experimentation and challenging existing technological paradigms. This move from passive consumption to active creation and critique is a central goal of critical media practice. Furthermore, the strong emphasis on open-source tools and the sharing of code and techniques offers a direct critique of the proprietary nature characterizing much traditional software development. The dominance of a few large digital platforms concentrates power over content distribution, user interaction, and data collection, often operating with proprietary software and algorithms. Live coding offers a compelling counterpoint to this centralized model (Ledesma, 2015). The collaborative nature of many live coding communities encourages shared knowledge and decentralized networks of practice, presenting an alternative to the top-down structures of dominant platforms.

The transparency of live coding performances also encourages critical thinking about software and algorithms. Observing live coding can reveal programmer choices that lead to certain outcomes or favor particular perspectives, stimulating discussions about fairness, accountability, and the ethical implications of algorithmic decision-making. It reveals the technological processes that shape our digital experiences as constructed systems with specific logics and potential biases. Audiences and practitioners gain a more concrete understanding of how digital media is produced, moving beyond passive consumption to a more informed and critical engagement. This visual and experiential learning empowers audiences to ask critical questions about commonplace digital technologies.

The significance of live coding as critical media is particularly evident in contexts like the Global South, where it offers accessible avenues for digital art creation and cultural expression. By providing tools and platforms for creating culturally relevant digital media, live coding can empower marginalized communities, challenge Western-centric narratives, and contribute to a more diverse and representative global media ecosystem. Recognizing live coding as a vital form of critical media is essential. Its unique ability to bridge technical practice and creative expression offers a powerful lens for understanding and critiquing the digital world that increasingly shapes our lives. As technology and media landscapes continue to evolve, live coding may play a larger role in shaping the future of digital culture and critical engagement. With the persistence and care of its practitioners, this may happen not only in the Global North, but also within the Asian Global South.

Examining live coding alongside established forms of critical media highlights both commonalities and distinct differences, underscoring its unique position. Compared to documentary film, for instance, both can expose hidden realities and challenge dominant narratives. However, while documentary film achieves this through narrative, visual evidence, and editing, live coding does so through the direct manipulation of code and the revelation of underlying computational processes. Similarly, both live coding and activist art aim to provoke critical reflection and inspire social change. Yet, live coding's primary medium is software and

its performance, offering a unique avenue to engage with technology as a site for political and cultural intervention, distinct from the broader range of mediums employed by activist artists.

Conversely, critical media theories can significantly deepen the understanding of live coding. By focusing on power structures and ideologies, critical media can illuminate inherent biases and design choices within live coding tools and languages. Applying critical frameworks allows researchers to analyze how these tools might favor certain forms of expression or interaction while potentially marginalizing others. Furthermore, critical media's emphasis on audience reception and the social/political contexts of media consumption offers valuable insights into how live coding performances and educational applications are interpreted and engaged with by different communities. Understanding the power dynamics in the creation and consumption of live-coded media can lead to more critically informed design and application of these practices across all domains, promoting greater inclusivity and critical engagement with technology. An exchange between the study of live coding and critical media holds significant promise for advancing our understanding of the intricate relationship between code, culture, and power in the digital age.

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Community Making through Social Media and Artist Website in Chinese Media Art

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Abstract

Since the 1990s, China's rapid digitalization has transformed its technological and cultural spheres, reshaping how artists engage with one another and with society. Younger media artists—such as Cao Fei, Miao Ying, and Lu Yang—differ from earlier figures like Zhang Peili and Yang Fudong in their adept use of digital platforms for both artmaking and exhibiting. This shift has redefined traditional relationships between artists, audiences, and institutions, giving rise to a distinct digital visual culture.

While existing scholarship by Barbara Pollack and Ros Holmes has explored the themes and criticality of younger artists, less attention has been paid to the role of specific platforms—artist websites and social media—in shaping new forms of community. This study addresses that gap by identifying two key models of community making: (a) international digital collaboration via internal traffic channels such as group chats and online forums, which challenge academic and workshop-based traditions; and (b) institutional bypassing via external traffic platforms like social media and artist-run websites, enabling direct audience engagement and influence over circulation and interpretation.

Using artist interviews and visual analysis, this paper examines how these platforms foster critical, participatory networks that operate independently of institutional frameworks. However, it also acknowledges risks of co-optation by commercial or political forces. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving relationship between art and technology in China, and provides insights into how artists in digitally saturated societies create new publics and cultural agency through online community-making.

Keywords: Chinese art, social media, artist website, media art

Purpose and Introduction

Ever since China adopted the Internet in 1994, its market has grown exponentially to include 854 million Internet users and 847 million mobile Internet users (Cyber Administration of China, 2019). Other research is generally close to this approximation as Holmes & Tsionki point out, "China is home to 802 million Internet users, 431 million micro-bloggers, 788 million Internet mobile phone users, and four of the top ten Internet companies in the world" (Holmes & Tsionki, 2019). Along with this development, Zhou, Wang, and Zhang (2022) argue that social media platforms such as WeChat and Douyin have dramatically reshaped everyday communication, consumption, and identity in China (Zhou, Wang & Zhang, 2022). There is over a billion social media users in China, and with WeChat alone surpassing 1.2 billion monthly active users, making China a "digitally saturated society" where online political expression, E-commerce integration, personal branding and digital labor converge to alter how a significant portion of the world's second largest population communicate, consume and participate in public life (Zhou, Wang & Zhang, 2022).

Conceivably, this has brought significant changes to how artists in China deal with their audience and marked a fundamental difference between the new generation and their predecessors. This change is most conspicuous in the field of digital video art due to the nature of the medium-it is digitally produced, transmitted, and consumed. Personal cameras and video recorders, along with digital modeling and editing software, are inherently prepared for integration with the Internet and social media use. Within Chinese digital video art, although it was the early figures such as Yang Fudong and Zhang Peili that heralded this new medium to the Chinese art edifice and somehow canonized it in the museum, it was their students like Lu Yang and Miao Ying that further liberated this medium and made it part of the contemporary visual culture. This key step is achieved through community making, a component often overlooked by previous generations. In a broader sense, community making involves forming **social interstices**—spaces within society where alternative relations and modes of exchange can emerge through art as "a state of encounter" (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 18). In the field of contemporary art, Bishop (2012) argues that community making needs to preserve criticality and difference (Bishop, 2012). In the field of Chinese digital video art, community making involves **networked collaboration, online audience engagement, and institutional bypassing** via social media or artist websites, forming **decentralized and algorithmically mediated publics** (Pollack, 2018; Holmes, 2018). These publics are often the results of digital community making, in parallel to audience making for media art, against the museum-centered mechanism.

In the museum-centered system, Courty and Zhang (2022) estimate that museum attendance in China grew eightfold from 1995 to 2016, suggesting that in 1995, there were approximately 127 million visits nationwide (Courty & Zhang, 2022). Among the visitors, Zhang and Wu (2021) show that museum attendance in China is significantly skewed toward educated, middle-class urban populations (Zhang & WU, 2021), although this group represent still a very small part of the entire Chinese population as approximately only 18.5% of Chinese adults aged 25–64 have attained a tertiary education (bachelor's degree or higher) as of 2023 (OECD Data). Therefore, the introduction of the Internet and social media equips the young artists with an unprecedented capability of tapping the overlooked audience while evading the middle agency of certain institutions like museums and universities which show very narrow education-based or income-based preferences. In turn, the artists also respond to the growing digital visual culture in China by changing their subject matter, way of artmaking, and exhibiting. Instead of publishing their artworks in museums and exhibitions, the artists choose to publish them online through artist websites and virtual galleries. Instead of delegating their art to galleries and agents for representation, the artists choose to manage their own branding through social media like TikTok and Instagram. Instead of communicating with their audience at the after-show/preview private parties or through market research by their agents, the artists directly engage and understand their audience through the Internet. Instead of making their art alone or working only with their in-institution teachers or in-circle colleagues, the artists can now find collaborators through a global digital network without even having met them in person. In this way, digitalization in China essentially redefined the artist-artist, artist-audience, and artist-institution relationships, and produces two new forms of community-making: a. international digital collaboration based on internal-traffic group chats or interest groups online to change the traditional way of artmaking based on academic, professional, or workshop-based collaborations such as master-apprentice projects; b. institutional over-passing and audience-making based on external-traffic social media accounts and artist websites where artists overpass the monopoly of institutions to engage directly with their audiences and influence how they and their works are perceived and circulated. It is an ambitious revamping of the art community while leaving some space for co-optation as well.

Background and Related Work

The younger generation of Chinese media artists, or more specifically, digital video artists like Lu Yang, Cao Fei, and Miao Ying, have attracted plenty of spotlight from the art world in the last decade by maintaining a high profile, either physical or virtual, around quite a few major exhibitions for example, Lu Yang and Miao Ying in the 2015 China Pavillion at the 56th Venice Biennale, and Cao Fei at the 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2015 Venice Biennale, and 2023 Sharjah Biennial. Unlike Zhang Peili, who was the college mentor of both Miao Ying and Cao Fei at the China Academy of Fine Arts, Lu Yang (b. 1984), Cao Fei (b. 1985), and Miao Ying (b. 1978) are the first generation to grow up in China's open-up and digitalizing economy. In a way, these artists mentioned are indeed Post-Internet artists if we refer to the original definition by Marisa Olson (2009) and Gene McHugh (2010) as a term to summarize the impact of net-worked technologies on artistic production and circulation and pay special attention to the unified locus of the exemplary artists that is the virtual and net-worked space where the making, researching, distributing, and exhibiting happens for their art (Olson, 2009; McHugh, 2010; Holmes, 2018). This significant difference between them and their predecessors has drawn some interest from scholars like Barbara Pollack and Ros Holmes, who paid special attention to their subject matter and the emergent Chinese digital visual culture behind their works as both space for circulation and source of inspiration.

For instance, Pollack (2018) notices a new form of creativity in Miao's *Chinternet Plus* against the Chinese digital restrictions while describing Miao's relationship to the Internet as paradoxical, like a bitter-love relationship. She also heeds a sense of "opacity" and "autonomy" among this group of artists while assuming digital identities online and expressing their ideas through multiple heterotopias. She argues that "the Internet has revolutionized this generation of Chinese citizens, not only the artists, drawing them out of isolation and enabling them to cross all sorts of cultural boundaries" (Pollack, 2018, p. 138). By contrast, Holmes (2018) turns his attention to the so-called *Diaosi* culture, the vernacular Chinese digital culture, an important subculture representative of the grassroots communities (Holmes, 2018). By channeling the vital criticality and energy from these communities, Holmes (2018) believes that "Miao's work is therefore indicative of wider issues at the confluence of culture, economy, media, and politics in the conjuncture of 21st-century China" (Holmes, 2018, p. 47). There is almost a taciturn agreement between Holmes and Pollack in believing in the creative and critical potential in this young group of artists who ride on China's rapid and ferocious digitalization to reach their artistic (and career) ideals. However, they both overlook the full picture of why these artists stay in the digital realm, where they not only conceive their art by embracing the technologies and materials there, but also make, circulate, and exhibit the end result. The evasiveness of their criticality, similarly, is not only a result of government restriction as a passive tactic out of expediency, but a result of the new community-making as an active action. While the virtual nature of the Internet provides the artists a sense of safety from opacity and anonymity, the broad base of the Chinese netizen population proffers them a sense of freedom, discovery, diversity, and excitement that was unfound in other places.

However, both Holmes and Pollack failed to combine their insights with a deeper look into specific interfaces, such as artist websites, social media, and how these artists work with the audience and collaborators online. It was these dimensions that could reveal their secrets to community-making and thus change-making by subverting the vertical structures in the conventional art world. Criticality in art is inextricably related to audience-making because it involves the mutual "understanding" between the artists and audiences based on a shared visual culture and language, a shared database of signs and symbols, and how far and fast the artists can get across the idea through technical and artistic means. In many digital dialogues and exchanges, artists recycle the signs and symbols from other netizens and audiences, and they also become part of the co-creation process. Jónsdóttir (2019) demonstrates that when

audiences actively co-create artworks, they are more likely to engage critically with the themes and the wider social context (Jónsdóttir, 2019). Hence, artist websites and social media become new important terrains for artists to share with their audiences and utilize in a critical and strategic way beyond museums and galleries.

Methodology and Approach

The article adopts the case study of three artists, including Lu Yang, Cao Fei, and Miao Ying, and takes a close look at their three artworks respectively: *UterusMan* (Figure 1), *RMB City: A Second Life City Planning by China Tracy (aka: Cao Fei)* (Figure 2), and *Chinernet Plus* (Figure 3), along with their artist websites and social media accounts as the main evidence for new ways of community making. For these examples, this article adopts textual and visual analysis to identify the details such as iconographies, techniques, compositions, tones, or narratives that help express criticality through such community making. For example, certain visual details can lead to certain subcultural signs or symbols, thus helping identify a group of new audience or collaborators that are unfound in the art of previous generations. In this way, criticality can be located and analyzed through audienceship by asking the following questions: Why is such audience/community-making used? What audience/community is found, and what dialogue is opened between the artists and such audience/community?

UterusMan is an animation video work depicting a futuristic "superhero" modelled after a female uterus who appeared sexually ambiguous and underwent a journey to fight its enemies. It is "a fully conceived character with specific superpowers, weapons, and a fancy mount — the pelvis chariot — that mirror the organ's versatility," and "the star of a franchise that encompasses manga, feature film, and a professionally developed video game" (Wang, 2014). Curiously, the character also rides a human-pelvis-shaped chariot in the game and "uses a baby as a mace and shoots 'ovum light-waves' at enemies" (De Toni, 2013), which reminds one of reproduction, anatomy, eugenics. The production team of the work is quite unconventional: "Beijing-based electronic outfit Squareloud created the soundtrack, HHUUAAZZII helped with manga illustrations and asexual Japanese cosplay artist Yuma Hamasaqi was a model for Lu Yang's hero" (De Toni, 2013). It is unclear how Lu Yang connected with these groups and individuals, but such multimedia and multinational collaboration is rarely seen in the works of Lu's teacher Zhang Peili who tended to work alone in a traditional studio space. It is likely that Lu Yang, a veteran netizen found these collaborators through social media or common interest digital spaces like anime forums or group chats. The highlight is the video game development of the work and audience can directly play the game through an arcade game console (Figure 4) at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum. In the gaming mechanism, audience becomes players that feel empowered and unbounded by the physical rules. The retro-style of the game and console also points to an overlooked group of audience that were previously strangers to the gated world of contemporary art. Tencent (2013) reported about 113,000 registered cyber cafés in 2003, which rose to 144,000 by 2010, with concurrent user growth from 16 million to 163 million, and many others were unregistered and operated informally, thus making the number even larger (Tencent, 2013). A 2006 study in Shanghai further confirms: Most customers were 18–23 years old, low-income, male, and used cafés mainly for entertainment and gaming (Räisänen, 2006). It is a provocative choice to make such a sexually ambiguous character toward an audience who were mainly males. In addition, By 2015, China's ACGN (Anime, Comic, Game, Novel) consumer base had reached approximately 260 million, with close to 6 million active creators and over 80 million occasional participants (People's Daily, 2017). For this community, early ACG forums such as Baidu Tieba, Douban, and Xici Hutong hosted millions of users and became incubators for fan culture development (fleeAwayy, 2023;

Wikipedia contributors, n.d.). There is great potential of criticality from these two communities because their social, economic, and aesthetic needs were long suppressed or marginalized, especially in the realm of contemporary Chinese art which revolves around museums and institutions. Chen (2021) argues that Bilibili users in China engage in tactical prosumption, reworking ACGN media in ways that express resistance to social norms and consumerism (Chen, 2021). Lu Yang opens the pathways for this community through gamification and collaboration by doing something similar. As a Japanese-anime-inspired game, *UterusMan* speaks to such repressed and unrepresented communities in a way that is not obsequious but quite critical of their expressions, too by making a game that is not rewarding, a character that is ambiguous, and an artwork that throws gender, body, and identity into question, and makes us ponder if the actions of UterusMan should be regarded heroic or apocalyptic, or how much of its enemy-ridden fantastical odyssey reflect the reality of ACGN communities and beyond. It also redefines the very idea of community and expands on Habermas' idea of such based on public sphere of discourse, communicative action, and ideal speech situation-truth-seeking to be more inclusive, spontaneous, itinerant, heterogenous, and playful (Habermas, 1984, 1987 & 1989). In the hands of Lu Yang, community making does not lie in truth-seeking and rational deliberation anymore, but in fun, entertainment, indirect resistance, and creative synchronization.

Miao Ying's *Chinernet Plus* was believed by Pollack (2018) as a humorous but "safe" way to express Miao Ying's critique of China's Internet censorship. In *Chinternt Plus*, the half-loaded Mao portrait evades digital identification while strongly suggesting Communist iconography. The half-loading failure was intended to be a joke on the censorship, but all the globally-inspired memes and iconographies like those Marvel heroes and Hollywood stars surrounding Mao's image speaks directly to what Miao calls the "Stockholm Syndrome" of using the Chinese Internet, or in other words, Chinternet. This pun is rich in criticality and wryness, expressing a common sentiment shared by Chinese netizens. Notably, *Chinternet Plus* is not only an artwork made separately, but part of an entire website intended for a *Shanzhai* (Chinese nickname for cheap bootleg products) company. Netizens can actually apply for an account and log into this website to make edits and comments, making the half-loading joke more realist and resonant-even in the *Shanzhai* version of a Chinese website, the censorship is still there-making it self-censorship. The co-creation nature of this artwork turns *Chinternet Plus* into a black mirror of Chinese society under digitalization and visualizes the paradoxical feeling of Chinese netizens when dealing with others and with authority. It also implies the digital and commercial hype peaking around the new century in China, which enriched and prospered material life but also allowed, changed, or even strengthened authority's ways of control amongst an explosion of products and ideas heralding the economic boom. This paradox was most acutely experienced and articulated by millennial netizens—predominantly middle-income, partially college-educated, and navigating a politically constrained environment. Among them, the self-identified *Diaosi* (a subculture rooted in online self-mockery and marginalization) emerged as a dynamic force in cultural production and resistance. The "poor image" quality of Miao's *Chinternet Plus* by using low-resolution pictures, outdated software, and vernacular language speaks strongly to grassroots distribution, online subcultures, and alternative histories, resisting the elite control of high-resolution, high-budget media, its urgency, accuracy, and reach, the capitalist and aesthetic norms (Steyerl, 2009). The aesthetics of Miao's work capture the needs and preferences of *Diaosi* community and brings to the forefront many overlooked societal issues faced by them: unemployment, educational inequality, housing overpricing, environment pollution, lack of representation for young, rural or immigrant worker communities.

Similarly, Cao Fei's *RMB City: A Second Life City Planning by China Tracy (aka: Cao Fei)* is a bold move that reveals the complexity of China's urbanization and digitalization.

The fictional city was constructed in the online virtual world Second Life and was opened to the public in 2009 (remained active until 2011) (Net Art Anthology). The highlight of the city was that it took inspiration from many real-life projects in China, for example, the Bird Nest stadium, the Oriental Pearl Tower, CCTV Tower and more, and incorporated them into a chimera island. Unlike Miao's *Chinternet Plus*, Cao staged many "public" events in the city and attracted many audiences to witness their openings and celebrations. Most importantly, Cao and her collaborators invited individuals and institutions to stake their claim in the RMB City by purchasing land and property. She also allowed many creators and collaborators to take their distinct avatars to live different lives in the city (Cao's avatar's China Tracy). In the city, users could even commission the then popular Shanghai-based writer Mian Mian to write love letters to other users in Second Life (Net Art Anthology). Overall, *RMB City* became a co-creation that involved the creative and critical inputs of millions of users including not only ordinary individuals but also art institutions. This experiment utterly dissolves the concrete wall separating artists and audiences, artists and institutions, and audiences and institutions. It is a critique on China's rapid and sometimes aggressive urbanization at the cost of equality and diversity, but it also does so through community participation. Within the community, there can lurk a large overlooked population of users who, in real life, were the actual underpaid builders of China's breathtaking infrastructure or sweatshop workers of China's efficient factories and companies. This artwork gives, although temporarily, a voice to such communities and make their participation not only representational but also political. Audiences that had been total strangers to Cao's exhibitions at gated institutions could be the front-stage witnesses of Cao's events in RMB City or even talk to China Tracy from a first-person perspective. The artist overpassed the monopoly of institutions over the communication between artists and audiences and returns the agency of seeing and understanding art to laypersons.

Finally, it would be a loss if we overlook another medium for artists like Lu Yang, Cao Fei, and Miao Ying-the artist website. Instead of making artist websites something additional or adjacent to their institutional representations, these artists turn their website into another artwork, or another free-access museum without any middle agency. As Ai Weiwei claims, "Twitter is my art," their artist websites provide full access to their works, with no copyright blockage or jargon difficulties. This throws into question the traditional way of museum-going or gallery-visiting or even library-visiting: if their works are readily available online, then what is the need for going to a museum to see them in person (especially when their work is made in and for the digital realm) or visiting a gallery to inquire their agents? This overpassing of institutions empowers both the artists and their audiences to communicate directly and share a common aesthetic and symbolic space where certain ideas are exchanged anonymously and equally. If we turn to social media, this equality is even more conspicuous when audiences can directly "like" or "dislike" Lu Yang's latest work or post a critical comment. Lu, in turn, also continues to play the many characters of his artworks such as Doku, even on social media like Instagram and Twitter, further blurring the line between the real and virtual world. It also invites the audience into the virtuality and playfulness, to respond in a role that has to match the tone and narrative of Lu's gamification but still leaves some imprints on the real world, because unlike Lu's *Doku* (Figure 6), a close-circuit animation video, Instagram and Twitter involves real-world ramifications. By performing artistic characters on social media, Lu Yang further opens up her audienceship from log-in users like those in Miao's *Chinternet Plus* or *Cao's RMB City* to the global, the unknown, and the algorithmic. In this vein, Lu might have acquainted some of her collaborators through social media as well, or others might have reached out to her directly through so. Collaborators like Squareloud, HHUUAAZZII, and Yuma Hamasaqi are quite unlikely to have established connection with the artist through conventional agency regarding the interdisciplinary scope.

It is also a space for Lu Yang to workshop her ideas while she is working on new projects because she can constantly pick up new inspirations from there, as she claims that she does not live in New York City or Shanghai, but on the Internet (Pollack, 2018). Doku (Japanese word for "solitude") is indeed an idea deeply rooted in the ACGN community in East Asia who tend to live alone in the virtual world without having to socialize in the physical world for years. The Japanese word *Otaku* describes such a mentality, which has grown to become a common societal issue in East Asia. It is unclear if Lu speaks to specifically such an issue, but she undoubtedly identifies with the broad multicultural ACGN community. This identification resonates with the new generation of Chinese youth who grow up in the 90s and 2000s, and they are quite familiar with the visual and cultural language of Lu's art, which can be eclectic and interdisciplinary, sometimes in a whimsical way.

We can compare Lu's *Doku* and her artist website with her college mentor Zhang Peili's. Zhang's *Water: Standard Version from the Cihai Dictionary* (Figure 5) (Guggenheim New York). In the video wherein the CCTV anchor simply reads out the different definitions of the word *Water* in Chinese, the audience feel as if he or she were in front of a television. The audience-artist relationship is presumed and fixated as performer-beholder, the unilateral logic of socialist propaganda. The audience does not feel invited into the video to be part of it, and on the contrary, the reading and TV format feels alienating and rejecting. Interdisciplinary collaboration and multicultural influences are also absent from this work. Zhang does not have a personally-run artist website but third-party websites representing his works and the studio is expectedly standardized and schematized like a museum catalog. By contrast, Lu's video creates a sense of immersiveness and bilaterality for the audience, and her website, far from being like a standardized name card, is run like a game room where the green (luyang.asia), dark background, and dynamic media plug-ins where the audience feel as if they were entering another heterotopia just like encountering her animation video works.

Results and Conclusions

Based on the observations above, the article finds that the new generation of Chinese artists represented by digital video artists like Lu Yang, Miao Ying, and Cao Fei, by using digital technology and the Internet for the making and exhibiting of their art, formulates two new ways of community-making and audience-making: digital global collaboration and institutional overpassing through artist websites and social media. By opening these two pathways of dealing with their audience and collaborators, they also imbue their making with criticality and resonance especially to the young and overlooked grassroots and minority groups. However, there is still space for further research. Firstly, digitalization not only opens up critical opportunities by breaking down the audience-artist barrier but also creates a new ground for co-optation and digital monetization. The institutional overpassing can be a façade for masquerading institutional schemes under such freedom, because institutions also play a crucial part in the digital world. Secondly, how effective this new community-making is still arguable and needs to be further corroborated by artist interviews and quantitative research, such as calculating the traffic of certain social media accounts and analyzing the conversations on artist websites. In addition, the nature of such digital community is worth doubting as well, as Turke (2011) also points out the danger of digital technology making humans "connected but alone," exacerbating the atomization of modern society (Turke, 2011). For artists like Lu, Miao, and Cao, the new community making might have brought a freshness of breathing air, but how to further integrate audience and artist, or even the ultimate meaning of integrating audience and artist at all without being co-opted by institutional or authority power remains a question to be contemplated.

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Artistic Research on Patterns of Perception and Action in the Context of an Aging Society.

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Abstract

This paper explores the outcomes of DEMEDARTS (Dementia. Empathy. Education. Arts.), a four-year transdisciplinary artistic research project undertaken in Austria from 2020 to 2024. As Europe experiences a demographic shift toward an aging population, dementia remains widely stigmatized and underrepresented in cultural discourse. DEMEDARTS confronts this invisibility through a hybrid artistic research methodology combining participatory art, co-design, and critical engagement with care communities. The project involved more than 70 co-created artworks—including customized rollators, wearable memory jewelry, and public installations—alongside over 40 multilingual educational toolbooks used across schools and caregiving institutions.

Through collaborations with people living with dementia, caregivers, schoolchildren, and artists, DEMEDARTS repositions dementia as a condition not of deficit, but of relational and creative potential. Drawing on artistic research frameworks, sensory engagement, and co-creation, the project reimagines care as a shared civic and aesthetic responsibility. The research was conducted in care homes, schools, galleries, and public spaces and documented through multimodal methods including photography, video, and participant reflection.

Key findings show that artistic processes promote agency and visibility for people with dementia and contribute to public empathy, educational reform, and policy dialogue. The paper highlights case studies such as *Taylored Memory*, *Cyclist*, and *Pinky*, emphasizing their symbolic and social dimensions. Ultimately, DEMEDARTS demonstrates that artistic research can reconfigure how communities understand vulnerability, aging, and collective.

Keywords: Dementia, Critical Design, Intergenerational, Empathy, Artistic Research

Background and Rationale

Dementia currently affects over 55 million people globally and is projected to nearly double in the next two decades (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). In Austria and across Europe, the rise in dementia cases coincides with a widespread lack of empathetic social infrastructure and inclusive cultural representation. People with dementia often experience isolation, loss of agency, and symbolic invisibility. Standard care models focus on managing symptoms but rarely address the social and emotional landscapes of living with dementia.

DEMEDARTS—an acronym for *Dementia. Empathy. Education. Arts.*—was conceived to challenge prevailing narratives around dementia. Initiated in 2020 and funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), the project was housed at the University of Applied Arts Vienna led by Ruth Mateus-Berr. The project's premise is that artistic research can serve as a tool for empathy, inclusion, and the reimagination of collective life.

Instead of treating dementia as a purely medical issue, DEMEDARTS frames it as a relational, aesthetic, and civic condition. People living with dementia are not viewed as passive subjects of care but as co-creators, cultural agents, and community participants. Their lived experiences are considered a form of situated knowledge, made visible and valuable through artistic co-creation.

The project drew on the ethical principles of care (Tronto, 1993) and relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002), asserting that vulnerability is not a condition to be hidden but a space from which new modes of meaning and community can emerge.

Objectives

The core aims of DEMEDARTS were fivefold:

1. To use artistic research methodologies to co-create meaningful works with and for people with dementia.
2. To develop participatory processes that bridge generational divides through art and design.
3. To challenge the medicalized and stigmatizing representations of dementia in public and institutional settings.
4. To produce educational materials that translate these approaches into schools, caregiving contexts, and policy frameworks.
5. To publicly present the findings and outputs across Europe, thereby reshaping societal narratives about aging and cognitive difference.

These aims were pursued through a mixture of site-specific interventions, studio-based artistic practices, and public engagement formats.

Project Structure and Scope

Over the course of the project, more than 70 artworks were co-created, including:

- Customized rollators such as *Taylored Memory*, made from shredded bureaucratic documents and symbolizing memory loss as both a personal and political process.
- *Cyclist*, a racing-style rollator evoking youthful vitality.
- *Pinky*, a rollator adorned in plush pink faux fur, subverting normative aesthetics of mobility aids.
- A jewelry collection featuring lockets, textile textures, and symbolic brooches.

In parallel, over 40 educational toolbooks were created in multiple languages including German, English, Slovak, Czech, Hungarian, Spanish, Polish, and Romanian. These toolbooks can be used free of charge and downloaded from the website www.demedarts.com.

The project reached more than 13,500 participants through workshops, and more than 2,500 individuals through exhibitions and performances. Its public presence extended from local care homes to international platforms like the Venice Biennale and WHO Dementia Forums.

Artistic Research as a Political and Social Act

The purpose of DEMEDARTS aligns with broader trends in artistic research that mobilize art as a socially engaged and epistemologically rich practice (Borgdorff, 2012; Candy & Edmonds, 2018). The project does not treat art as a vehicle for therapeutic effect or public service communication. Rather, it treats artistic creation as a form of critical inquiry into the structures that render dementia invisible and aging undesirable.

In reconfiguring the tools and aesthetics of care—through redesigned rollators, wearable memories, or participatory performances—DEMEDARTS redistributes agency and authorship. This redistribution is particularly important in dementia contexts, where individuals are often excluded from cultural production.

The purpose of DEMEDARTS, therefore, is not only to make art about dementia, but to create with people living with dementia, foregrounding their perspectives in reimagining what community means in the 21st century.

Approach

The methodological framework of the DEMEDARTS project was shaped by the evolving field of artistic research, which emphasizes knowledge generation through creative practice. DEMEDARTS specifically integrated transdisciplinary collaboration, participatory art, sensory methodologies, and critical design. These methods were not employed sequentially but in overlapping, iterative cycles that allowed for flexibility, reflection, and responsiveness to participant needs and contexts.

This section outlines the methodological principles and techniques that guided the project across its four years, with attention to its artistic, pedagogical, and ethical dimensions.

Artistic Research as Core Methodology

Artistic research in DEMEDARTS was understood as both a process and a result. The creation of artworks—whether rollators, jewelry, or installations—was not an illustration of research findings, but itself the site of inquiry. This aligns with Borgdorff's (2012) concept of research "in and through" the arts, where the process of making is simultaneously a process of knowing.

The project was shaped by key theoretical anchors in the field. For example, Bennett's (2012) model of "practical aesthetics" informed the focus on sensoriality and emotional engagement. Schön's (1983) notion of the "reflective practitioner" was embodied in the project's emphasis on cyclical evaluation, co-creation, and situational responsiveness. DEMEDARTS thus positioned artistic activity as a relational, embodied, and materially grounded practice of inquiry.

Participatory and Co-Creation Methods

Co-creation with people living with dementia, their caregivers, and young people was central to the DEMEDARTS process. Co-creation here meant shared authorship and mutual responsiveness, not simply consultation or observational research. This is particularly significant in dementia contexts, where cognitive or verbal limitations are often (mis)interpreted as incapacity.

Workshops were developed to facilitate non-verbal, sensory, and material communication, using touch, scent, texture, and color. Participants worked with artists to design artifacts that reflected their personal memories and identities, such as jewelry with embedded textiles from childhood, or rollators incorporating symbolic elements.

All co-creation workshops were designed to be:

- Inclusive and adaptable: allowing for differing levels of ability.
- Sensory-focused: including materials like felt, wood, paper, flowers, and scented fabrics.
- Open-ended: without fixed outcomes, allowing each artifact to evolve organically.
- Intergenerational: involving schoolchildren, university students, and elderly participants together.

For example, in a workshop held at a care home in Vienna, a former cyclist collaborated with a design student to create the *Cyclist* rollator, integrating bicycle parts and racing stripes. In another session, the *Pinky* rollator was developed in collaboration with a participant who said she had "missed being noticed"—the soft pink fur covering was a statement of visibility, humor, and aesthetic pleasure.

Such co-created artifacts are epistemic objects, embedding both the cognitive traces and affective atmospheres of the workshops.

Material and Sensory Engagement

Given that dementia often affects linguistic memory and linear cognition, the project leaned heavily on embodied and sensory methods. Materials were chosen for their tactile, olfactory, and symbolic properties. Some artifacts, for example, were often made from:

- Textile fragments from garments with personal history.
- Scents such as lavender, cinnamon, or rose to evoke autobiographical memory.
- Miniature symbols (e.g., ceramics, bells, musical notes) that represented life stories.

In one case, a participant contributed scraps of her 1950s wedding dress to be incorporated into a memory bracelet. In another, a former musician chose a brooch shaped like a tuning fork, a reference to both her past profession and the sonic experience of disorientation in dementia.

These materials were not chosen arbitrarily but collaboratively, with discussion and reflection throughout the design process. The act of touching, smelling, or assembling was itself a cognitive and emotional exercise, facilitating memory access and emotional regulation (van Dijk et al., 2020).

Artistic Object-Making as Critical Practice

The rollator became a central object of inquiry in DEMEDARTS. As a symbol of aging and medicalization, it is typically associated with loss of independence. The project sought to aesthetically reconfigure the rollator as a site of dignity, humor, resistance, and identity.
Works such as:

- *Taylored Memory*: Constructed with shredded administrative paper, it comments on both the cognitive disintegration of memory and the systemic erasure of people with dementia from public narratives.
- *Cyclist*: Customized with handlebars and racing aesthetics, it allowed a participant to embody strength, speed, and past identity.
- *Gardener*: A mobile flower bed that integrated scent and nature, reconnecting a participant to her past as a horticulturist.

These objects did not serve only as tools for mobility but as critical design interventions, opening conversations about what care looks and feels like, and how assistive technology might carry personal and political meaning.
These design choices were informed by the ethos of critical and speculative design (Dunne & Raby, 2013), which encourages designers to ask "what if?" rather than "how to." Rather than solve a problem, these rollators posed questions: What does aging look like in public space? Who gets to design their own mobility? Can an assistive device be a political statement?

Public Installations and Performative Actions

In addition to object-making, DEMEDARTS incorporated site-specific installations and public performances to make the research process visible, participatory, and civic. Some examples from the catalog include:

- Public Rollator Walks: Performed in cities including Vienna and Salzburg, where elderly participants used the artist-designed rollators in parades. These actions reclaimed urban space for aging bodies, challenging perceptions of slowness and fragility.
- Memory Dialogues: In-school performances where students and people with dementia read from collaboratively written texts or presented co-designed artifacts.

These performative moments were both research outputs and engagement strategies. They allowed others—passersby, educators, policymakers—to encounter the project in embodied, multisensory, and affective ways. Documentation (photography, film, testimonials) served both archival and reflective purposes.

Educational Integration and Knowledge Transfer

A major methodological achievement of DEMEDARTS was the development of over 40 educational toolbooks. These were based on workshop methods and adapted for use in primary schools, secondary education, and caregiver training. The Toolbooks were published in nine languages, ensuring broad access.

Each toolbook included:

- Step-by-step artistic exercises.
- Notes for facilitators.
- Adaptability guidelines for cognitive or physical limitations.
- Cultural translation for local adaptation.

Through these toolbooks, the project's methodology was disseminated beyond research contexts and embedded into formal and informal education.

Documentation and Reflexivity

Throughout the project, data was collected using multimodal documentation, including:

- Photo and video archives of workshops and performances.
- Oral reflections from participants and students.
- Visual analysis of completed artworks.

These materials informed internal reflection, public presentations, and scholarly dissemination. Importantly, analysis was always interpretive and situated, recognizing the aesthetic, affective, and relational dimensions of the work (Schön, 1983).

The project embraced ambiguity and multiplicity in its outcomes. Rather than measure success through behavior change or therapeutic gain, it looked at transformation in aesthetic expression, self-representation, and public perception.

Results

The DEMEDARTS project produced a range of outcomes across artistic, social, and educational domains. Each of these outcomes reflects the central goal of using artistic research to reimagine forms of collective life in response to the growing demographic and ethical challenges surrounding dementia. The following section discusses the project's main findings through the lenses of artistic production, participant empowerment, public dissemination, and policy relevance, supported by specific case studies.

Artistic Production: Materializing Memory and Identity

The artistic output of DEMEDARTS includes over 70 distinct works. These span multiple media and formats: rollators, jewelry, installations, performance-based actions, and graphic publications. Each object embodies a material metaphor that reflects personal narratives, emotional states, and collective critique.

Case Study: *Taylored Memory*

Taylored Memory is a customized rollator constructed from shredded bureaucratic documents. This object acts as both symbol and provocation—the shredded paper alludes to cognitive disintegration and memory loss while also referencing systemic erasure and institutional neglect. The participant who co-developed the rollator had a history in clerical work, lending personal resonance to the piece. As an artwork, it draws attention to how memory is not only neurological but also socio-political.

Case Study: *Cyclist*

The *Cyclist* rollator emerged from collaboration with a former competitive cyclist. The design incorporates racing handlebars and wheel designs, transforming the assistive device into a vehicle of pride, strength, and identity. Rather than hide the rollator as a medical

necessity, the *Cyclist* makes it a site of affirmation, allowing the user to reinhabit an identity rooted in movement and vitality.

Case Study: *Pinky*

Pinky, wrapped in plush pink faux fur, serves as a critique of sterile healthcare aesthetics. The participant who inspired the design expressed a desire to be seen, admired, and touched. The rollator's softness and flamboyance challenged expectations and invited joyful public interaction. By subverting traditional expectations around aging and utility, *Pinky* exemplifies how critical design can introduce humor, beauty, and intimacy into assistive technologies.

These objects were not static or private—they were exhibited and activated in performances, installations, and public walks, thereby transitioning from personal aids to civic interventions.

Jewelry and Wearable Memory Objects

Another stream of DEMEDARTS output centered on custom jewelry co-designed with people living with dementia. These works serve as portable memory archives, incorporating textures, scents, and symbolic forms that trigger autobiographical recall.

For instance:

- Lockets contained fragments of poems or song lyrics significant to participants.
- Bracelets embedded with textile patches from childhood garments stimulated tactile recognition.
- Brooches were cast in forms like birds, kitchen utensils, or musical instruments—icons representing personal histories.

One participant, a retired seamstress, contributed silk threads from her wedding dress to create a brooch shaped like a thimble. Another, once a pianist, chose a music note motif and infused her locket with lavender oil, recalling the scent of her childhood piano bench.

These memory objects became conversation starters, encouraging participants to narrate their lives with pride. By wearing these pieces in public or during group meetings, participants curated their identities actively, even when verbal memory waned.

The jewelry's role extended beyond symbolic communication—it reconfigured the social dynamic between caregivers, students, and individuals with dementia. When students asked participants about the meaning behind a particular brooch or bracelet, new relationships formed through aesthetic dialogue rather than clinical hierarchy.

Public Engagement and Performance

The DEMEDARTS project emphasized visibility, interaction, and disruption of public space. Its performative component involved city-wide rollator walks, gallery exhibitions, and installations that engaged diverse audiences.

Public Rollator Walks

One of the most iconic formats was the public rollator walk. These events took place in Vienna, Linz, and other Austrian cities. Participants, often elderly and mobility-impaired, walked together using artist-designed rollators such as *Cyclist*, *Pinky*, and *Taylored Memory*. Accompanied by music and sometimes students, these walks created spectacles of slowness, strength, and solidarity.

They challenged the exclusion of aging bodies from urban visibility. Passersby often stopped, engaged, asked questions—conversations that rarely occur between the elderly and strangers in public settings. For the participants, it was a moment of reclaiming space and attention.

Exhibitions and Installations

DEMEDARTS was exhibited in multiple venues, including the Venice Biennale and Austrian design forums. Installations included:

- Photo essays documenting rollator creation.
- Video loops of jewelry co-design sessions.
- Participant testimonials and poetry displayed alongside objects.

These exhibitions positioned the project not as charity or healthcare outreach, but as legitimate contemporary artistic production. This framing validated participants as cultural producers, not only "subjects" of research.

Educational Tools and School Engagement

A parallel result of the project was its pedagogical dissemination. Over 40 toolbooks were co-authored with educators and adapted for diverse learning environments. These small publications covered:

- Artistic methods like drawing, scent-mapping, and collage.
- Workshop design principles for working with elderly populations.
- Ethical considerations in intergenerational dialogue.

Examples include *Drawing Dementia*, which uses intuitive mark-making to express feelings associated with memory loss, and *Listening to Memory*, which guides sound-based co-creation activities.

These toolbooks were distributed in nine languages and piloted in:

- Austrian primary and secondary schools.
- Art and design universities.
- Caregiver certification programs.

More than 13,500 participants engaged with DEMEDARTS workshops, and over 2,500 attended performances and exhibitions. Post-event surveys indicated increases in:

- Empathy toward individuals with dementia.
- Willingness to engage intergenerationally.
- Interest in combining art and social practice.

Conclusion

The DEMEDARTS project exemplifies the transformative potential of artistic research in addressing the pressing societal, emotional, and political dimensions of aging and dementia. In an era marked by demographic shifts, rising rates of cognitive illness, and increasing social isolation among the elderly, DEMEDARTS proposes a new model for inclusive, community-centered responses. By centering co-creation, critical design, relational aesthetics, and participatory pedagogy, the project illustrates how art can operate as a method of inquiry, a platform for visibility, and a vehicle for social justice.

Over its four-year span, DEMEDARTS generated a body of artistic work that functioned both as research outcomes and as lived interventions. These works—customized rollators, wearable memory jewelry, performative installations, and multilingual educational toolbooks—embody what Borgdorff (2012) describes as "thinking in and through art." They are not simply by-products of a theoretical framework, but epistemological events in themselves, each contributing to the redefinition of how dementia is seen, felt, and acted upon in public space.

A central insight of the project is that dementia is not only a medical condition but also a cultural one. It reshapes relationships, affects identities, and exposes the limitations of societies structured around autonomy and productivity. By engaging people with dementia as co-creators rather than subjects of observation or treatment, DEMEDARTS repositions them as cultural agents, capable of shaping their narratives, aesthetics, and environments.

This reorientation carries profound implications. In contrast to clinical approaches that often treat memory loss as a disappearance of self, DEMEDARTS highlights memory as a distributed, material, and social phenomenon. Through objects like the *Cyclist* rollator or memory-embedded jewelry, the project shows how identity can be externalized and reconstituted through design. These artifacts act as prosthetic memories (van Dijck, 2007), enabling individuals to carry, share, and perform fragments of their stories.

Moreover, these co-created works do not just represent personal history; they also critique broader systems. *Taylored Memory*, for example, made of shredded bureaucratic documents, speaks to the politics of forgetting—not only neurological but also institutional. It comments on how systems of care, recordkeeping, and policy often erase the very people they purport to serve. This dual symbolic function—personal and political—is central to what Dunne and Raby (2013) describe as critical design: using objects not to solve problems but to raise questions and stimulate reflection.

The public activation of these objects further amplifies their impact. By exhibiting the rollators in galleries, parading them through city streets, and featuring them in performances, DEMEDARTS inserted aging bodies and assistive devices into visual and civic culture. These actions disrupted the invisibility that typically surrounds dementia, making it instead a shared concern and a site of creative encounter. Passersby stopped to ask questions, students documented and reflected on their experiences, and policymakers took notice. In this way, art became not just a mirror but a medium of civic transformation.

Importantly, DEMEDARTS did not frame these performances as therapeutic or merely awareness-raising. Instead, they were treated as aesthetic events in their own right, positioned within contemporary art discourse. This framing validated the contributions of participants with dementia not only as recipients of care but as artists, designers, and performers. Such validation is especially powerful in a world where cognitive difference is often equated with incompetence or irrelevance.

The pedagogical dimension of DEMEDARTS deepened its reach. The creation and distribution of over 40 toolbooks in nine languages extended the project's impact beyond workshops and exhibitions. These publications translated the principles of artistic co-creation into practical guides for teachers, caregivers, and facilitators. Importantly, they maintained the ethos of open-ended engagement, encouraging users to adapt the materials to local contexts and individual needs. The multilingual nature of these tools also reflects a commitment to cultural translation and accessibility, critical in addressing the diversity of aging populations across Europe and beyond.

From an educational standpoint, the project fosters what Greene (1995) terms "wide-awakeness": a capacity in learners to see and feel the world anew. When students engage in intergenerational workshops, listen to the stories behind a memory brooch, or co-design a symbolic rollator, they are not only acquiring knowledge—they are cultivating empathy, aesthetic sensitivity, and ethical imagination. These are precisely the capacities most needed in societies grappling with polarization, care deficits, and the loss of civic connection.

The impact of DEMEDARTS was also felt at the level of institutions and policy. By collaborating with Austria's national dementia strategy and being featured in the WHO's Global Dementia Observatory, the project made a compelling case for the integration of artistic research into health and social policy. This represents a major shift. Too often, art is relegated to the margins of policy—used for decoration, communication, or morale-boosting. DEMEDARTS insists that art is not ancillary but central to ethical decision-making and inclusive design.

This positioning is particularly timely as governments and healthcare systems confront the limits of their current approaches. As population aging accelerates and care infrastructures strain, there is growing recognition that technical and biomedical solutions alone are

insufficient. What is needed are practices that address the relational, cultural, and emotional dimensions of care. DEMEDARTS offers such practices, and importantly, shows how they can be scaled and institutionalized through toolkits, exhibitions, and interdisciplinary partnerships. The project also contributes to a broader reimagining of what community means in the 21st century. In many European contexts, community is increasingly fragmented—by generational divides, by digital mediation, and by economic precarity. DEMEDARTS counters this trend by creating spaces where people of different ages, abilities, and disciplines come together in creative purpose. These are not utopian spaces; they are modest, local, and contingent. But they offer a glimpse of what Bourriaud (2002) describes as "relational aesthetics": moments of shared meaning-making that produce new social configurations.

In doing so, DEMEDARTS affirms that care is not just a private responsibility or a medical category—it is a cultural and civic practice. One that must be collectively imagined, aesthetically negotiated, and ethically sustained.

In closing, DEMEDARTS offers a robust, replicable, and deeply human model for how artistic research can respond to urgent societal challenges. It combines methodological innovation with ethical sensitivity, theoretical insight with practical application. It shows that aesthetic practices are not luxuries but necessities, especially when confronting conditions that threaten to reduce life to deficit or decline.

The project's legacy lies not only in its artworks or publications but in the relationships, questions, and capacities it generated. These will continue to shape how communities care, learn, and imagine futures of dignity and inclusion. In a time of global aging, growing health disparities, and widespread loneliness, DEMEDARTS reminds us that art still holds the power to gather us, to teach us, and to keep us human.

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Might and Magnitude

Dr. Siriya Jitpimolmard

Abstract:

The *Might and Magnitude Video Installation* project is an attempt to apply the concept of the sublime in Kant to create an aesthetic experience via artwork. The latter illustrates an artificial storm with lightning and thunder as the subject through a 14 x 5 meters cycloramic screen with a video projection technique. The video continues in a slow zoom into a thunderstorm in an infinite loop, along with thunder sound effects and ambient sound. The project was inspired by a sublime experience when confronting with thunderstorm, thunderclap and thunder flash on top of a skyscraper. Such an experience unveiled a boundless trait of nature and its magnitude, while being veiled by a mighty power of nature, an exhausted feeling of terror as well as an anxiety of annihilation. This sublime occasion entails both a virtual creativity and an aesthetic experience, whereas a feeling of pleasure is apprehended in the work of art, and hence, in the free play of imagination. Throughout the article, the objective is to promptly synthesizes the process as following: clarifying the concept of the sublime; reviewing the procedures of the sublime and the related contemporary art- works; analyzing the sublime experience; applying the procedure as the creation of *Might and Magnitude Video Installation*.

The research result shows a successful application of the aesthetic philosophy to creative artwork. It was able to accomplish clarification of the subjective experience with the framework of Immanuel Kant's Dynamical and Mathematical Sublime system. This led to the systematic analytical sublime experience and created a concept for a creative artwork which aroused the imagination and the subjective feeling in the viewer.

Keywords: Aesthetic Philosophy; Might and Magnitude; The Sublime

Introduction

This creative work arises from a profound existential sentiment encountered through direct engagement with natural phenomena that demonstrate overwhelming power. Such encounters evoke the aesthetic experience of the sublime—an incomparable form of beauty—which reveals the boundless force of nature. This sublime experience stirs within us a sense of awe, terror, and a contemplation of divinity and the fragility of human existence. These sensations, in turn, prompt a desire to transform the existential response into tangible artistic forms that invoke and stimulate sublime imagination in the minds of viewers.

The objective of this research is to synthesize a methodology for the creation of aesthetic objects rooted in the sublime experience. The process is structured into four key stages as follows:

1. Clarifying the set of sublime experiences;
2. Reviewing philosophical aesthetics of the sublime and relevant case studies in contemporary art;
3. Analyzing these experiences through the lens of Kantian aesthetics of the sublime;
4. Developing a conceptual framework for the aesthetic creation of sublime-inspired art objects.

The research process outlined above has culminated in a body of creative work that demonstrates significant achievements in the field of artistic creation. These outcomes contribute meaningfully to both academic discourse in the fields of fine arts and philosophical aesthetics.

The Meaning and Implications of the Sublime

The term *sublime* derives from the Latin root *sublimis*, which means "elevated" or "lofty." It is composed of the preposition *sub*, meaning "under" or "below," and the component *limen*, meaning "threshold," or alternatively *limes*, meaning "boundary" or "limit." Thus, the concept of the sublime is situated in the notion of transcending the limits of human experience and spiritual perception (Morley, 2010). From an etymological standpoint, this suggests a connection between the human mind and the world beyond sensory perception—the *noumenon*. Thomas Weiskel (1976) articulates the aesthetic of the sublime in the following terms:

"What affirms the significance of the sublime is its capacity to compel the human mind to transcend its own limitations through emotion or discourse. That which surpasses the human—whether it be God, the divine, spirits, or nature—is engaged, regardless of the degree of conflict or contradiction involved." (Weiskel, 1976, p. vii)

The indeterminacy inherent in the experience of the sublime is characterized by an internal conflict—a tension that arises as the human mind strives to transcend its own limits. Consequently, communication and representation of such experiences to others are often ambiguous and elusive.

The researcher initially encountered a failure in attempting to communicate the sublime experience. Without the ability to articulate its origin, it became impossible to create an aesthetic object. This challenge led to the development of a structured creative process, outlined as follows:

Research Process

1. **Clarifying the Set of Sublime Experiences**

The first challenge lay in articulating the experience of confronting natural phenomena—those fleeting moments that evoke a profound imaginative leap toward the divine. Attempts to convey these experiences through verbal narration or descriptive writing (e.g., personal essays) proved insufficient. The researcher found it difficult to fully express the depth of the existential sensation involved.

As a result, inspiration was drawn from the third-person narrative approach found in *The Truth in Painting* (1978) by Jacques Derrida. In the introductory section titled *Passe-Partout*, Derrida distances the narrator from the authorial self, thereby emphasizing the importance of stimulating curiosity and internal dialogue within the reader. This method positions the narrator as a **witness**, allowing for a reflective engagement with the experience. The result was a prologue that captures this shift in perspective, exemplified by the following passage:

"*I opened the door to the rooftop—at that moment, it was as if lightning were to strike me.*"

A voice of lament rose up.

"It was like a near-death experience, like those cinematic flashbacks triggered in the brain—but for me, it made me think of the boundless power of nature and a god who seemed utterly indifferent to my existence. My life... it didn't seem to matter any more than that of an ant. Do you understand?"

Is such understanding even possible? One may grasp the general idea when someone describes a personal experience, but truly feeling the same way—that's another matter altogether.

What kind of experience is so overwhelming that it compels one to reflect on divine forces and the fragility of human life? I asked in return, "How did it happen?" She replied that it was an entirely unexpected event. At first, she merely intended to step outside to enjoy the view—but instead found herself face to face with a violent storm.

Winds came rushing from every direction, striking her body with such force that she feared she might be thrown from the rooftop. In that split second, a thunderous roar erupted overhead, followed by a flash of lightning illuminating the sky—reverberating through thick layers of cloud and echoing into the vast emptiness above. Her body trembled, not from fear alone, but from the physical resonance of the shockwave carried through the air.

The atmosphere became saturated with the immense power of nature. Every particle of air seemed to transmit a warning—a threat—of nature's destructive potential. An overwhelming mix of awe and dread flooded her mind, pulling her into an Abstract state of consciousness in which she felt the supremacy of natural forces over all things.

In that moment, the sentient life of a human being seemed no more significant than that of an ant—powerless, insignificant, without control, and without escape.

The only conceivable response in such a moment was to surrender—to accept death, should the gods choose to bestow it. Life, it seemed, might end without ever fulfilling the ultimate destiny it was meant to achieve.

"*In those brief moments, it was sublime.*"

In summary, it was through distancing oneself from the position of a direct experiencer that the possibility of narrating the event became viable. This shift enabled the transformation of the personal into a form that others could comprehend. The researcher hypothesizes that the initial failure to convey the experience stemmed from the overwhelming emotional intensity of the sublime, embedded in memory and accompanied by a sense of self-reproach. Even as someone who upholds science and rationality, the researcher found herself vividly imagining the existence of deities in that moment.

The Philosophy of the Sublime and Case Studies in Contemporary Art

Once the experience could be clearly articulated, it became possible to identify the specific stimuli that triggered it—natural phenomena that overwhelmed perception through sensory and physical channels. This culminated in a moment of heightened existential awareness—a fleeting instant characterized by awe and dread. This intensity propelled the researcher into a state of Abstract cognition, constituting what is recognized in aesthetic philosophy as a sublime experience. The sensory inundation—especially through visual and auditory input—produced an affective response so powerful that it led to a transcendence of the self, aligning with the aesthetic principles of the sublime.

The study of philosophical perspectives related to the aesthetic of the sublime—through books, academic articles, and related documents, including contemporary artworks grounded in similar conceptual frameworks—has revealed that this philosophical lens remains largely unexplored in Thailand. A review of the broader literature was therefore conducted through key texts such as *The Sublime* (2012) and the article *Introduction: The Contemporary Sublime* (2010), both written by Simon Morley. These works offer foundational knowledge on the historical development of the concept of the sublime, beginning in the Greek era with Aristotle and later developed in Roman thought by Longinus.

Longinus's formulation of the sublime is particularly significant in how it emphasizes art's power to reveal emotional truths and to affect the human psyche. In his view, art possesses not only an elevated and noble character but also the capacity to evoke feelings of dread, threat,

or mystery—experiences that challenge human understanding and provoke wonder (Morley, 2010). This view reflects the deep interconnection between humanity and art, where the human is uplifted as the central agent of *techne* (art or craft), inextricably linked with *physis* (nature). The sublime thus becomes something profoundly rooted in the human spirit, representing an elevation of consciousness (*hypsos*—from the Greek root *Hypso-*, meaning "aloft," "height," or "on high"). For Longinus, great literature possesses an *immanent* quality—it is everywhere and eternal—and it is through this quality that the reader experiences transcendence. In the realm of art, *hypsos* may be achieved through imitation or *mimesis* of nature by a skilled artist. However, this idea continues to blur the boundary between art and nature, and between author and reader (Weiskel, 1976). During the Romantic period, the philosophy of the sublime reached its height between the mid-18th and mid-19th centuries. In *The Romantic Sublime*, Thomas Weiskel discusses how ideas concerning the elevation and grandeur of art and its effects on humans began to shift towards an inquiry into aesthetic experiences of the sublime found in nature. These experiences were seen as catalysts for transcendence, engaging human thought, imagination, and discourse. The sublime was thus reimagined from a theologically anchored concept into one rooted in conscious perception and self-awareness.

R.S. Crane (as cited in Weiskel, 1976) noted that while the sublime often includes negative emotions such as anxiety, it is ultimately through the workings of the imagination that these feelings can be transformed into aesthetic appreciation. Longinus's notion of the sublime, with its ambiguous origins, was revisited and clarified within this Romantic framework, especially by key philosophers such as John Locke, Lord Shaftesbury, and David Hume. However, among Romantic thinkers, it was primarily Edmund Burke (1729–1797) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) who significantly shaped the discourse on the sublime.

Burke laid the groundwork by exploring the sublime in nature through empirical observation and sensory experience. Kant, on the other hand, moved the discussion toward transcendental philosophy by grounding the sublime in *a priori* principles. He examined the psychological processes and outcomes triggered by sublime experiences—especially those encounters with the autonomy, complexity, and overwhelming scale of nature, which surpass human control and comprehension (Morley, 2010). Kant's discourse on the sublime, most notably articulated in his *Critique of Judgment*, emphasized how such experiences stimulate the faculties of reason and moral consciousness through a confrontation with the limits of the sensible world.

Kant's Concept of the Sublime in the *Critique of Judgment*

Kritik der Urteilskraft (*Critique of Judgment*), first published in 1790, is the third volume in Immanuel Kant's *series of critique*. Among the various philosophical themes explored in the work, the sublime receives one of the most prominent treatments. Cited extensively in academic discourse, it introduces key ideas such as the **synthetic function** and the **systematization of the sublime** (Makkreel, 1990).

Kant articulates the sublime as follows:

> "[The sublime experience] cannot be contained within the senses, no matter the form in which it is presented. It relates to a reason that cannot be fully expressed and thus compels and stirs the mind inwardly through this very inadequacy, so that it may be grasped through feeling."
> *(Kant, 1987, p. 98)*

In Kant's view, the sublime is not something external or objectively inherent in nature, but rather an internal **state of mind**. Although it may be triggered by natural phenomena or objects in nature, the experience of sublimity is fundamentally **subjective**—it exerts an effect upon the human mind, pushing it to abandon sensibility (the faculty of understanding) and instead allowing the **imagination to transcend the limits of reason.** This movement beyond

logical cognition toward an awareness of a higher moral or metaphysical purpose produces what Kant describes as the **sublime state**—an experience of "incomparable beauty."
Kant categories the sublime into **two distinct types** (*Kant, 1987*), as follows:

1. **The *Mathematical Sublime*** – This refers to experiences of **magnitude** that are so vast they cannot be compared to anything other than themselves. These are perceived not through empirical measurement but through a kind of aesthetic unity, an Abstract totality that overwhelms our capacity for sensory comprehension and leads instead to a conceptual grasp of the infinite.

The *mathematical sublime* concerns a numerical magnitude that defies estimation, rendering it impossible for the human mind to grasp within a single intuition. The content of such magnitude propels the mind into a process of apprehension that compels the imagination to extend toward the infinite. However, in contrast, the process of comprehension, governed by logical understanding, moves in an opposing direction, ultimately leading to the collapse or disintegration of the imagination. This tension evokes a sublime feeling within the mind. This mode of sublimity includes characteristics such as **formlessness, vastness, boundlessness**, and **infinity**—qualities that overwhelm human sensibility.

2. The *Dynamical sublime* pertains to the **might or power** of nature, which, in its overwhelming force, appears to surpass human strength and induces a sense of fear. Yet this fear is not one of actual danger, but rather a stimulus that pushes the subject toward transcendence and recognition of a higher moral purposiveness. Only when nature's force is perceived as not truly overpowering the faculty of reason that the human being can cognize such an experience be deemed sublime. This type of sublimity arises from a transformation within the mind, originating from a self-reflective judgment that leads to the realization that the source of the sublime is internal, not external. As a result, the apparent power of nature is rendered insignificant before the autonomous capacity of human reason.

Upon investigating the historical development of the sublime within aesthetic philosophy, the researcher gains a deeper understanding of the psychological impact of natural phenomena that are incomparable in magnitude. One key factor lies in the **mechanism of the imagination**, which, when coerced or overwhelmed by intense external stimuli, is forced into a mode of reception that can lead to a temporary suspension of sensibility and rational awareness (*sensus communis* or *common sense*). This disruption poses an interpretive challenge that is frequently encountered but difficult to articulate with clarity. Nonetheless, Kant's framework, particularly his deductive principles in *Critique of Judgement* (1987), firmly rejects any conception of the sublime as purely empirical or grounded in sensory experience. Rather, his system affirms that the sublime is a product of the *a priori* structure of reason, thus relocating its source from the external world to the internal operations of the human mind. The organization of stimuli that prominently appear in the sublime experience can be categorized into two principal modes: *might*—a force superior to human strength—and *magnitude*—the vastness of nature. A review of the theoretical framework reveals that both forms of intuitive experience are clearly present in sublime encounters. Accordingly, this study turns toward analyzing the aesthetic transmission of such stimuli through the lens of contemporary art, which shares the same philosophical foundation.

Case Study in Contemporary Art

Although the popularity of Romantic-period aesthetic philosophy, especially the sublime, has declined in contemporary discourse—and is often dismissed as irrelevant to current art practices (Morley, 2010)—its influence remains evident in artworks that express perspectives on nature capable of evoking a dynamic or mathematical sublime. These works often employ

modern technology to enhance sensory engagement. The following four case studies illustrate this connection:

1. ***The Lightning Field*** (1977), conceived by artist Walter De Maria, consists of 400 stainless-steel lightning rods arranged in a grid spanning an area of 1 kilometer by 1 mile in the desert of New Mexico, USA. Viewers are invited to confront storms, lightning, and atmospheric disturbances firsthand (Morley, 2012). This confrontation leads to an encounter with the temporal and experiential dimensions of natural energy—an energy that is both pure and cosmic in scale. It communicates the incomprehensible infinity of nature's force, something beyond comparison. Notably, every visitor reportedly fails in their attempts to verbally articulate the experience (Helfenstein, 2022). The work thus a form of the sublime that is rooted in a beauty that is ultimately ineffable—a beauty that eludes linguistic representation, which incomparability through aesthetic properties that defy equivalence. This quality renders human attempts to communicate or articulate the work inevitably futile.

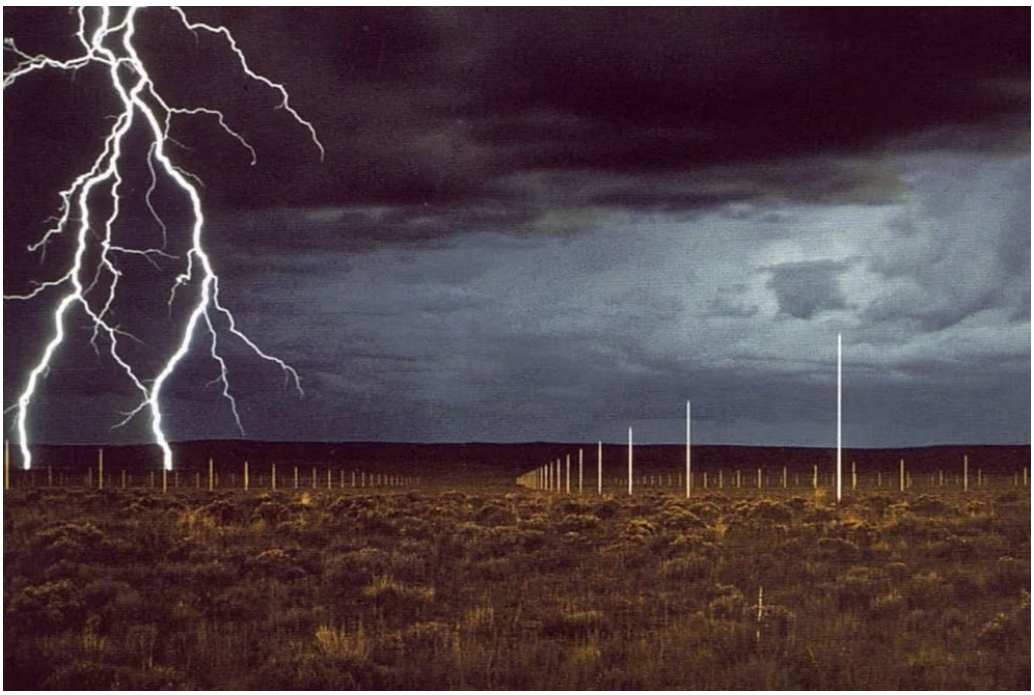


Figure 1: The Lightning Field (1977), Walter De Maria
(Source: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/walter-de-maria-artist-who-forsook-a-career-with-the-velvet-underground-to-create-electric-enigmatic-installations-8764340.html)

2. ***The Weather Project*** (2003), by Olafur Eliasson, is a monumental installation that creates the illusion of solar power—an artificial sun—accompanied by a mirrored ceiling that doubles the spatial perception of the room, combined with synthetic fog to facilitate an encounter with the "sun" (Eliasson, 2022). The overwhelming magnitude of natural power is conveyed through both systems of the sublime. As Cárdenas (2020) notes, the work propels viewers into a process of transcendence, elevating them beyond materiality and art itself.



Figure 2: The Weather Project (2003), Olafur Eliasson
(Source: https://olafureliasson.net/artwork/the-weather-project-2003/)

3. ***The Concave Mirror*** (2002), by Anish Kapoor, is a sculptural installation featuring a large concave mirror. Displayed against all four walls of the exhibition space, the properties of the mirror absorb all reflected elements, rendering them formless. This creates a boundless and infinite dimension—a void that visually and conceptually embodies the **mathematical sublime** in its purest sense.



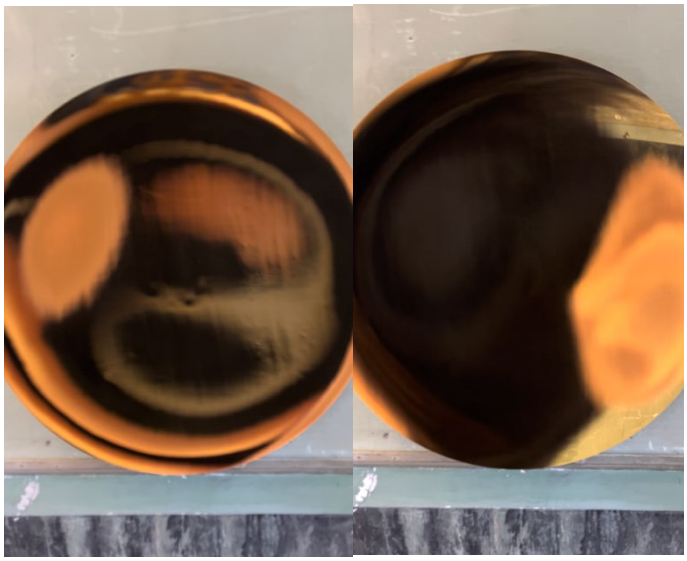


Figure 3: The Concave Mirror (2002), Anish Kapoor
(Source: Siriya Jitpimolmard)

4. ***The Crossing*** **(1996)** by Bill Viola is a video artwork that utilizes the elemental forces of fire and water in a symbolic act of destruction and cleansing. Viola creates an intense physical experience for viewers through two large screens (measuring 4.9 x 8.4 x 17.4 meters) displaying a 10-minute looped video. Each screen presents a figure emerging from darkness, gradually engulfed by flames on one side, while the other side is overwhelmed by a torrent of water. The accompanying soundscape transitions from silence to a powerful crescendo of resonant, dramatic sounds before gradually fading away, marking the end of each video cycle (Morley, 2012).



Figure 4: *The Crossing (1996), Bill Viola*
(Source: https://smarthistory.org/bill-viola-the-crossing/)

A review of aesthetic philosophy has led to a concrete examination of contemporary art practices, making it possible for the researcher to analyze works such as *The Lightning Field* (1977), which demonstrates the potential for generating the sublime and achieving transcendence through artistic means, as well as the possibility of empirical engagement with these principles. Similarly, *The Weather Project* (2003) illustrates how illusion can be employed to simulate natural phenomena, enabling a form of transcendence between the aesthetic object and the human experience. Meanwhile, *The Crossing* (1996) presents a perspective on the destructive power of nature—an overwhelming force accentuated by modern technology—evoking awe, fear, and spiritual disturbance in the viewer. The work further incorporates the notion of infinity as a tool to provoke transcendence and self-overcoming within the human subject.

This stage of the research thus enables a systematic analysis of sublime experiences and provides a foundation for inspiration and conceptual development in artistic creation, particularly under the theme of *power and immensity*.

Analysis of the Sublime Experience through Kant's Aesthetic Philosophy

Drawing upon the philosophical framework and contemporary case studies, the Kantian sublime serves as a lens to analyze aesthetic experience through both the *dynamical* and *mathematical* sublime systems. These experiences, which awaken a profound psychological and emotional response, can be divided into the following three phases:

Phase 1: Confrontation with the Storm

Standing atop a tall building before perceiving visual stimuli, the first sensation one experiences is the *dynamical sublime*—manifested through the overwhelming force of nature. The sensation arises from the violent gusts of wind colliding with the body from all directions, accompanied by a deafening sound that drowns out all other noise. This moment of sheer intensity induces a sense of shock and vulnerability, evoking fear of being blown off the structure—a visceral threat that engulfs the physical senses. The force is so overwhelming that it pushes the mind to momentarily lose composure and rational awareness, resulting in a sublime state of astonishment and dread. However, due to the briefness of the moment, the experience does not fully transcend into the realm of the abstract. Instead, it culminates in the realization that nature does not ultimately overpower the self. This reflection gives rise to a feeling of exhilaration, as if one had conquered gravity—a hallmark of the *dynamical sublime* reinforced by the mathematical precision of the wind's sheer velocity and directional power.

Phase 2: Confrontation with Lightning and Thunderclaps

In this phase, visual perception is confronted with the vast tableau of the sky—entirely engulfed in shades of grey and filled with massive storm clouds looming near the horizon. Simultaneously, a deafening thunderclap bursts above the head, reverberating through the spatial and temporal fabric. Flashes of lightning ripple across the sky, reflecting above and within the dark clouds, echoing across an "infinite void" that seems boundless. These natural phenomena embody both aspects of the *sublime*: they express the overwhelming *power* beyond human control and the *formlessness* that transcends ordinary perception. The *dynamical* and *mathematical sublime* are invoked here—lightning and thunder being magnified through spatial reflection and auditory resonance, creating a sensory overload that underscores the experience of the sublime as "formless magnitude" beyond measure or representation.

Phase 3: The Transcendental State – Sublime as Transcendence of the Dynamical

The sensations of "boundlessness" and the "infinite void" provoke a deep emotional response—one that is shrouded in the presence of death. This confrontation generates a profound sense of awe, fear, and existential dread, which aligns with the concept of the *overwhelming sublime*—a state that *floods* all sensory perception.

This overwhelming feeling, initiated by the immensity of nature's power, propels the individual toward a process of transcendence. In this moment, the mind enters an Abstract state wherein one contemplates surrendering life to "nature and the divine," acknowledging them as the arbiters of a "higher purpose" beyond worldly existence. The value of life is thus recontextualized—becoming as seemingly insignificant as a "tiny particle of life," an acknowledgment of submission to a *power far greater* than the self. Ultimately, acceptance of fate and mortality in this context becomes a form of transcendence—an imaginative projection into a realm that lies beyond the boundaries of human comprehension. This is an aesthetic experience born from the *free play of the imagination*, unconstrained by human logic or reason, and reveals the very essence of the *sublime state*.

Through this phenomenological encounter clarified by Kant's aesthetic philosophy, it becomes evident that nature embodies both "a power superior to man" (*dynamical sublime*) and "magnitude beyond measure" (*mathematical sublime*). Both systems work in tandem to express an *unbounded force*—one that *engulfs* and saturates space-time with the presence of death. This results in an all-encompassing sense of *awe and dread*, leading ultimately to a moment of transcendental aesthetic experience—a sublime state realized solely within the mind in the form of deeply introspective emotional cognition.

4. Conceptualizing the Aesthetic Object: Creative Practice Inspired by the Sublime

The experience of encountering the sublime serves as a vital source of inspiration that drives the creative process. The theme of might and magnitude—manifested through boundlessness, overwhelming awe, and the infinite void—forms the core aesthetic trajectory of the artistic vision. Drawing from Kant's theory of the sublime, the creative process is structured into a system that communicates a deeply subjective emotional state through art. This aesthetic expression materializes through representations of natural phenomena—specifically, the image of a stormy sky. The work simulates the vastness and unending expanse of the heavens, using the lightning bolt as a central aesthetic object of fear. Storm clouds and the explosive sound of thunder serve to amplify the presence of a *superior force*, creating a perceptual experience of formlessness and spatial unboundedness. These elements envelop the viewer through visual, auditory, and physical stimuli that evoke the sublime as engulfment. The arrangement of components is designed to express the violent unpredictability of nature. This is realized through the medium of video installation art, which allows for immersive, multi-sensory engagement. The video format also enables a cyclical, non-linear narrative, reinforcing the concept of *infinity* and intensifying the dynamical sublime. Mathematics becomes a key underlying structure that supports the perception of this power—scaling the viewer's sensory input into a form that is overwhelming and abstract.

The result is an aesthetic encounter that stimulates the viewer's imagination, inviting contemplation of the *incomparable beauty* that defines the sublime—an aesthetic that transcends ordinary experience, immersing the participant in a realm beyond reason and measurable form.

Video Installation Art: *The Might and Magnitude*

1 Artistic Creation Process

The boundlessness of nature—serving as a catalyst for overwhelming awe and sublime intensity—is rendered through a carefully designed immersive environment. The work employs 3D environmental design to simulate the realism of a lightning storm, immersing the viewer in the darkness and depth of outer space. The visual field is saturated with volumetric storm clouds (voxel-based database), extending endlessly toward a vanishing point, symbolizing unpredictability and the infinite unknown.

The artwork incorporates a 3D-interactive elements to the lightning's intensity through a visual system that absorbs and reflects light, generating dynamic fluctuations in perception. Three distinct types of lightning bolts are positioned strategically throughout the installation, contributing to the naturalistic illusion and reinforcing the limitlessness of force—a key element in evoking the sublime as theorized by Kant. This orchestration aims to trigger the viewers' psychological and physiological responses of awe, terror, and reverence. The soundscape is composed using a 5.1 surround sound system, comprising:

1. Front left
2. Front center
3. Front right
4. Rear left
5. Rear right

With the .1 LFE (Low-Frequency Effects) channel reserved for deep bass shockwaves, this system simulates the physical sensation of seismic thunder, immersing the audience in a sonic field of surround pressure and bodily vibration. These auditory dimensions intensify the sublime experience through sensory overload.

Visually, the work is presented through projection mapping onto a cycloramic screen measuring 14 meters in width and 5 meters in height. The curved screen wraps from left to right across the room's periphery, extending beyond the standard field of human vision. This panoramic curvature causes any referenced object to appear diminished in scale, thereby reinforcing the sensation of engulfment. Combined with the enveloping sound and physical sensation, this installation constructs a totalizing aesthetic space in which the audience is absorbed into an overwhelming simulation of nature's power—resulting in a sublime experience across visual, auditory, and bodily dimensions.

Content and Context of Presentation

The video installation artwork, *The Might and Magnitude*, explores the limitlessness of natural forces by leading the viewer into the heart of a dark and turbulent lightning storm. The narrative unfolds through a slow, continuous zoom-in shot, which metaphorically positions the human viewer as the subject of the artwork—one who confronts the raw, sublime spectacle of nature directly and unavoidably.The lower portion of the visual frame is composed of light, translucent fog through which air currents visually pass and disrupt the ground plane, evoking a sense of instability and disorientation. This guides the viewer's gaze upward into a vast field of thunderclouds stretching beyond the horizon. The experience becomes a simulation of navigating through atmospheric density, as lightning storms gradually emerge, revealing their forces through various forms—cloud-to-ground lightning, sheet lightning, thunder, rumbles, and sky flashes. These natural phenomena work in concert to symbolize the overwhelming, superior power of nature—depicted as unbounded and unpredictable. The installation employs lightning sequences not only for their visual intensity but also for their capacity to generate fields of energy through cause-and-effect interactions, creating a dynamic system of energetic entanglements. These explosive exchanges echo through the storm clouds and reverberate across the sonic field, enveloping the viewer in an auditory and visual abyss that conjures profound sensations of terror, awe, and engulfment.

In the final sequence, the viewer journeys toward the eye of the storm, where the clouds spiral into a vortex, cutting off the subject from the wider storm landscape. The progression enters total darkness, only to transition into an infinite visual loop, where the viewer is once again pulled toward the core of the storm. This cyclical movement continues endlessly, symbolizing the eternity and recurrence of sublime confrontation.

The following sequence of stills (00:00:00 – 00:01:24) illustrates the evolving forms of the storm clouds from their initial appearance to the point of recursion, encapsulating the viewer's descent into the storm's sublime core.

5.3 Exhibition of the Installation *The Might and Magnitude*

On January 4, 2024,*The Might and Magnitud Video Installation* manifested a technologically simulated natural phenomenon (apparatus phenomenon) within a darkened exhibition space. The immersive environment began with the resonant rumble of atmospheric disturbance, sending vibrations through the space that evoked a sense of environmental volatility. This was followed by the emergence of storm imagery from within the deep darkness, generating a sensation of endless void and disorientation.The transition between the physical space and the virtual storm environment was rendered seamless, effectively dissolving spatial boundaries and placing viewers in an unprotected, exposed position. This spatial and perceptual merge disrupted feelings of stability and security, aligning the viewer with the aesthetic of the sublime, characterized by awe, fear, and emotional overwhelming.

Distant lightning added to the atmospheric realism, marking nature's presence not just as a visual motif but as a force that transcends containment. The experience positioned the viewer in a dynamic field of confrontation with natural sublimity, evoking a psychological state that is both unsettling and profoundly introspective. An immense spatial space, veiled in darkness and unpredictability, becomes the setting for a sublime anticipation of an impending event. A moment of profound silence descends over the environment, just before the abrupt eruption of thunderous sound. A bolt of lightning, measuring approximately 3 meters in height and 4 meters in length, strikes with force from the left edge of the panoramic screen toward its center. This is immediately followed by flashes of lightning and a resonant sonic jolt that violently disorients the audience's sensory field, inducing a state of apprehension—an acute shock triggered by the velocity and intensity of a commanding natural force.This sensory rupture causes viewers to abandon their temporal awareness, surrendering to the moment before cognition disrupt the expansion of imagination. A continuous sequence of lightning strikes unfolds, forming an interlaced choreography of power—drawing closer while simultaneously expanding laterally. The ensuing subterranean thunder rapidly shifts direction, moving from front to rear, dissolving the spatial hierarchy and invoking a sense of limitless force surpassing the constraints of ordinary perception.

The work articulates a vision of nature's raw, infinite power—untamed and recursive—plunging viewers into a looped experience that lacks both a beginning and an end. This temporal expansion collapses conventional spatial and sensory registers, immersing the audience in a total aesthetic field where sight, sound, and physical sensation converge. As time dilates, the piece provokes an overwhelming sense of awe, dread, and fascination—emerging from the imagination unbound by reason, a visceral encounter with the dynamic, mathematical sublime.

Research Findings and Discussion

1. Research Findings

This case study of the creative work *Might and Magnitude* explores how subjective experiences of the sublime in nature can be transformed into aesthetic objects that stimulate the viewer's imagination. This creative exploration employed aesthetic philosophy, particularly theories of the sublime, to construct a conceptual framework. The findings in accordance with the research objectives are summarized as follows:

1.1 Clarifying Sublime Experience through Natural Phenomena

The research succeeds in articulating a set of sublime experiences—those moments of confronting overwhelming natural phenomena that transcend sensory perception and reach into the realm of spiritual reflection on divine power and the fragility of human existence. These internal contradictions and complexities of the psyche often hinder clear communication but were analyzed here in a way that illuminated their expressive potential within the artistic process.

1.2 Revisiting Aesthetic Philosophy of the Sublime

The study systematically reviewed literature on the philosophy of the sublime, culminating in a focused examination of Immanuel Kant's theory as articulated in *Critique of Judgement* (1987). Kant's distinction between the mathematical and dynamic sublime in nature offered a theoretical lens to understand how humans are stirred by vast forces, leading to the transcendence of imagination and reason. This framework proved applicable in interpreting contemporary art practices and generating conceptual insights for the creation of *Might and Magnitude.*

1.3 Analyzing the Experience through Kantian Sublime Framework

The research demonstrated how Kant's sublime framework allowed for a structured analysis of the natural phenomenon depicted in the artwork—specifically through dynamism and mathematical vastness. These dimensions significantly influenced the aesthetic affect, revealing how imagination functions systematically in response to overwhelming stimuli, grounding the viewer's emotional reaction in philosophical understanding.

1.4 Conceptualizing the Aesthetic Object

Through this methodology, subjective feelings were channeled into a coherent conceptual model rooted in aesthetic philosophy. The creation process generated a tangible framework that clearly defined the desired affective stimulation in viewers, supporting the expression of internal, ineffable emotions through visual and auditory media.

In conclusion, the applied research process demonstrated both creative efficacy and philosophical validity. It revealed a productive synergy between artistic practice, academic inquiry, and aesthetic theory, resulting in a research-based methodology that effectively translates philosophical thought into artistic creation with academic rigor and creative resonance.

Discussion

This research process involved a series of artistic and conceptual experiments that culminated in the successful creation of the work *Might and Magnitude*. The process of formulating the creative concept was particularly critical, as it served as the foundation for developing an aesthetic object through:

- carefully selected content and context,
- visual and sonic strategies, and
- presentation techniques.

These strategies interwove the artist's personal sublime experiences with Kantian theories, particularly through the use of dynamic natural forces and mathematical vastness, thus grounding the work in the Kantian sublime.

The final outcome illustrates how aesthetic philosophy can be used not only to interpret but also to construct art—by bridging philosophical abstraction with the visceral, affective, and sensory aspects of the audience's experience. This approach reveals how philosophical frameworks can deeply inform the design of contemporary installation art to evoke profound psychological and emotional responses.

The articulation of subjective awareness was explored through third-person narrative techniques, inspired by Jacques Derrida's *The Truth in Painting* (1978). In the introductory

essay *Passe-Partout*, Derrida detaches the author's perspective from the narrative to highlight the importance of curiosity and internal dialogue within the mind of the "witness." This distancing creates space for the depiction of intensely emotional experiences, momentarily overwhelming yet buried beneath layers of self-judgment, to emerge through writing. In doing so, these expressions reflect a sublime aesthetic experience, where internal states are rendered visible through narrative form.

The literature review served to frame the origins of the concept of sublimity by tracing the development of aesthetic thought through key historical philosophers. Central to this is Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1987), which articulates sublimity in nature through forces of power and magnitude. For Kant, the sublime is not merely a feeling but a process: a play of imagination liberated from rational constraints, reaching toward something greater than empirical comprehension. Although Kant's discourse does not encompass the full spectrum of empirical or material-based artistic experience, the integration of contemporary art case studies demonstrates the potential of natural sublimity to be conveyed through media—especially when merged with modern technologies to heighten the affective intensity of the sublime. A notable example is Bill Viola's *The Crossing* (1996).

This theoretical foundation enabled a nuanced analysis of sublime experience through Kant's dual frameworks: dynamical and mathematical sublime. It revealed how stimuli elicit finely layered emotional and sensory responses across three distinct phases:

1. Encountering the storm,
2. Confrontation with lightning and seismic sound,
3. A state of transcendence, in which a torrent of sensation overwhelms the mind.

This culminates in the perception of the "boundless power" that engulfs and instills awe and terror, ultimately propelling the artist into the imaginative space of the sublime.

The development of the aesthetic object thus began with the formulation of a conceptual framework for the installation work *Might and Magnitude*. This framework combined thematic content and presentational context, derived from prior analysis, and was manifested through technological simulation of a thunderstorm. The artwork presented nature as an overpowering force—sublimely dynamic and mathematically infinite—translating into a total immersive environment of light, sound, and physical atmosphere. This multisensory immersion heightened the viewer's sense of awe, triggering subjective reflections on the sublime and transcends an art-object to an art-experience. This work effectively transforms aesthetic experience into sublime feeling, allowing the audience to access a state of pleasurable disorientation—a sensation that arises from the freedom of the imagination in contemplating immeasurable beauty. The piece reaffirms how installation art can move beyond representation to evoke and embody Abstract philosophical experiences.

Recommendation

Integrating philosophy with other disciplines fosters depth and influence in artistic creation, regardless of whether the primary goal is artistic production. The application of philosophical frameworks in creative practice should ultimately depend on the imaginative capacity of the reader or creator to transcend those very frameworks. When guided by expertise in a chosen discipline, this approach holds the potential to generate significant intellectual and cultural contributions.

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Performing Archives: Documentary Theatre and Digital Tools in Performing Romanian State Surveillance Archives

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Abstract

Performing Archives investigates how contemporary theatre can activate state surveillance archives through performative strategies that challenge institutional memory and foster civic engagement. Focusing on the CNSAS archive and the performance "Nostalgia Up&Down", the paper examines how theatrical re-enactment, multimedia interventions, and ethical reflection can render the distortions, silences, and contradictions within the Romanian secret police files. The research aims to understand the ways in which memory, testimony, and archival material can be ethically and creatively recontextualized in the post-communist present. Combining archival analysis with technological mediation, the project explores how theatre can function both as a critical apparatus and as a reparative civic gesture. This research demonstrates that documentary theatre, supported by digital tools and produced within a socially and politically engaged theatrical space such as Replika Center, can reactivate forgotten or hidden histories. Through its performative means, theatre becomes a space for inquiry and critical reflection on surveillance archives. The performance "Nostalgia Up&Down" illustrates how archival documents can be brought into the realm of living memory. Technology contributes to this transformation, amplifying the experience of witnessing. The archive is no longer merely a trace of the past, but a point of departure for civic and ethical questions rooted in the present. In this way, theatre emerges as a form of symbolic reparation and a gesture of solidarity with those whose voices were once silenced.

Keywords: performative archives, state surveillance, documentary theatre, digital dramaturgy, collective memory, ethical re-enactment

1. Research Purpose and Questions

Performing Archives reflects on the role of theatre as a medium for activating and interrogating state surveillance archives, particularly those produced during authoritarian regimes. This paper focuses on the Romanian context, where the National Council for the Study of Securitate Archives (Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității) CNSAS archive - repository of the Securitate's extensive documentation - offers both a historical resource and an ethical challenge. The project investigates how theatre can reframe such documents not merely as evidence of the past, but as volatile sites of memory, distortion, and complicity.

The central objective is to explore the potential and limitations of performance in destabilizing official histories and creating space for civic reflection. By recontextualizing surveillance materials through performative strategies – including direct readings, facial tracking technologies, and multimedia overlays – theatre performance "Nostalgia Up&Down" proposes a new dramaturgy of witnessing. The performance confronts the bureaucratic logic of surveillance with the embodied presence of the performer who mediates the relationship

between the document in the archive and the public, inviting spectators into a shared act of remembering, interpreting, and questioning.

This study formulates a set of guiding questions:

1. How can theatre operate as an activating force for dormant archives?
2. In what ways does live performance alter the epistemic authority of the document?
3. What ethical considerations arise when working with archival materials that implicate ordinary citizens?

Moreover, the project interrogates how digital technologies – such as real-time face-tracking and augmented scenography – remap the aesthetics and ethics of documentary performance. These tools are not mere embellishments but dramaturgical agents that mirror the archival distortions enacted by the state. In parallel, the role of the Replika Center as an independent, civically engaged space underscores the institutional context in which such experiments become possible and meaningful.

Ultimately, this investigation seeks to understand how historical traumas – censorship, artistic precarity, forced migration – reverberate in the present, and how theatre can transform archival silence into performative presence and public accountability.

As Louise Boscacci (2015) shows in a literature review focused on the archive in contemporary art, the concept of the ”archival impulse” becomes essential. A large number of artists use archives as a performative tool to intervene in official memory, at times creating a form of ”counter-memory” – something that reconfigures absences, traumas, and systemic surveillance.

In order to explore these research questions within a concrete framework, the investigation anchored itself in a creative space – Replika Center – characterized by a clear mission and a well-defined concept: educational theatre. Replika Center, whose ”institutional ecology” – understood as the way an institution functions, adapts, and co-evolves within a broader social, economic, political, and cultural context (Abrutyn, 2012) – provided a fertile artistic environment for research and performative experimentation with archives.

2. Replika Center and the Institutional Ecology of Archival Performance

The Replika Center is a theatrical space that can be regarded as a pioneer of educational theatre in Romania. Its artistic approach is defined by practices that generate empathy, stimulate critical thinking, and establish spaces for collective learning for both the audience and the creators.

This commitment to educational theatre is reflected in key productions such as ”Familia Offline” (The Offline Family), which addresses the trauma of child-parent separation due to migration; ”Foamea noastră cea de toate zilele” (Our Daily Hunger), an immersive performance, a participatory hybrid between theatre and memorial service dinner, exploring economic precarity; ”Totul e foarte normal” (Everything is Normal), which facilitates intergenerational dialogue about sexuality and identity; ”Limite” (Limits), a sharp one-woman show about the shortcomings of the Romanian educational system, inspired by a true event of harassment and bullying; ”Trei.Três.Tria.”, in which three actresses from three countries reconstruct, with irony and sensitivity, fragments of their personal and political histories; and ”MASKAR (între)” (Maskar. In between.), which confronts anti-Roma prejudice through community storytelling (Replika, 2025). Each performance is grounded in artistic research on the subject it explores and functions as a form of performative pedagogy, transforming theatre into a creative space for negotiating collective experiences, encouraging dialogue and social responsibility (Apostol, 2018).

In a structurally fragile cultural ecosystem, the Replika Center was founded in 2015 in the Tineretului neighborhood of Bucharest, with the aim of integrating educational theatre into community life. Its mission revolves around empathy, participation, and artistic practices that

spark critical thinking. A theatrical space in which the themes explored in performances are continuously debated with the audience, in an effort to find solutions collectively and to engage in mutual education – thus, theatre becomes a form of popular pedagogy that brings communities together (Michailov & Apostol, 2021).

Its continuous activity over ten years demonstrates a model of cultural resilience, despite the lack of core funding, without a constantly employed administrative staff, or modern infrastructure. Independent artistic initiatives prove their long-term civic potential, functioning as a public good and reconfiguring the relationship between art, education, and community.
Replika Center operates in an industrial building – a space that has undergone multiple transformations since 1903, when it housed the first Italo-Romanian Hat Factory – now converted into a theatre venue, where all administration, programming, and maintenance are carried out voluntarily by the artists involved. Its funding comes primarily from project-based grants (e.g., AFCN, Creative Europe, Erasmus+), but covering ongoing operational costs remains a major challenge. Despite financial and infrastructural precarity, Replika supports long-term artistic research and remains committed to marginalized voices and underrepresented audiences, aiming to develop and promote artistic research programs and creative works focused on urgent themes and issues in contemporary society, while valuing an art that stands in solidarity with the world we live in (Replika, 2025).

From the very beginning, the Replika Center has sought to integrate new technologies into the creative process of its theatre productions. In 2017, the performance ”Familia fără zahăr” (Sugar Free Family) – which explores perceptions of family as a fluid construct, where belonging is continuously redefined and relationships shift according to unpredictable variables – unfolds in a virtual setting composed of dynamic projections cast across the entire stage, including the props and the all-white costumes of the performers. The show features a remarkable scene in which an actor interacts with Alexa, Amazon’s voice assistant, in a demanding improvisation exercise due to the unpredictability of the AI application responses and the requirement for flawless English diction. Although the scene is deeply melancholic – illustrating isolation, cultural disconnection, and the loneliness of a character spending Christmas conversing with an AI in Singapore – it simultaneously conveys a sense of hope: family is not defined by rigid norms, but by the genuine desire to be together and to share, even though technology (Popovici, 2017).

Since 2021, the project ”Digital Re-Generation Lab for the Performing Arts” has been developed to foster collaboration between professionals in the performing arts and experts in emerging technologies – such as hardware and software development, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and the Internet of Things (IoT). The aim of the project it was to explore how these technologies can support the digital transformation of performing arts, increase production capacities and digital literacy, and improve access to cultural content for broader audiences, both nationally and internationally. VR enables users to experience immersive simulations of real or imagined environments; AR blends real-time physical surroundings with virtual data; and IoT connects physical devices and objects via the internet to exchange and collect data. Together, these tools open up new creative and participatory possibilities for the future of performance.

This creative dialogue between the performing arts scene and developers from the field of new technologies – aimed at jointly exploring formats for production, communication, and audience engagement in new artistic works – continued in subsequent artistic projects, including the theatre performance ”Nostalgia Up&Down”. Created within a European project, the performance is based on artistic research exploring several themes related to the status of the artist and the role of art, from the final decade of the Socialist Republic of Romania to the present day. It addresses key issues such as censorship in the performing arts, the self-financing policies of the 1980s cultural sector, the merging of cultural institutions during that period,

artist-led protests, illegal migration, and labor abroad in the 1980s, probably the worst period of time when individuals in Romania were confronted with flagrant violation of civil rights and liberties. The performance integrates digital design and new media art to enrich its exploration of these socio-political themes from the 1980s and their contemporary relevance.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Digitalization and Technological Innovation in Contemporary Theatre

Theatre has historically embraced technological innovation as part of its ongoing evolution, adapting new tools to enhance both the creative process and the audience experience. From the natural use of acoustics and mechanical devices in antiquity, to the introduction of electric lighting, recorded sound, and multimedia video projections, theatre has always maintained a continuous process of negotiation with the technological advances of its time. In this sense, all these emerging technologies – including augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence (AI), and interactive media – should not be viewed as a rupture, but rather as a continuation of this historical trajectory.

Recent scholarship emphasizes that digital tools are reshaping the theatrical field across multiple dimensions: scenography, dramaturgy, institutional organization, and modes of audience engagement. Augmented and virtual reality, for example, are no longer mere novelties for experimentation, but are increasingly becoming integral components of many theatrical scenographies, enabling immersive visual landscapes and interactive narrative structures.
The Royal Shakespeare Company's 2016 production of "The Tempest", using real-time motion capture and digital projection to animate the character Ariel, exemplifies this shift. Similarly, productions like "Loveseat" (2019) and the work of companies such as ARShow reveal how AR/VR technologies are extending the boundaries of live performance and opening pathways for remote, hybrid, and ecologically sustainable theatre practices (Xu & Zhang, 2022) (Pike, 2023).

Concurrently, the rise of intermedial theatre – defined by the integration of live performance with media such as film, sound, and digital projections – has deepened the narrative and aesthetic complexity of contemporary works. Performances like "Fraulein Julie" by Katie Mitchell or Rimini Protokoll's "Remote X" series challenge the unity of time and space typical of traditional theatre, engaging the audience in multisensory and layered experiences that reflect the fragmented, hypermediated realities of the digital age (Scheer & O'Gorman, 2021).

The digital turn also extends to participatory and interactive formats, where audience members contribute to the unfolding of the performance through real-time input via digital devices. This trend is visible in productions such as "The Justice Syndicate" or "The Twenty-Sided Tavern", where audience voting systems influence plot outcomes. At the same time, generative AI systems enable performances that respond dynamically to audience input or co-create in collaboration with human performers. However, these developments have sparked critical debate: while they promote engagement and personalization, they also risk reinforcing platform-controlled participation structures and uneven access to creative agency (Schäfer, 2021) (Abuzuraiq & Pasquier, 2024).

Scholars such as Dixon (2015) and Kozel (2008) emphasize that digital performance extends the sensory and epistemic dimensions of theatre, allowing it to address questions of presence, authenticity, and political immediacy in new ways.
Despite these advances on the artistic front, the digital transformation of theatre institutions at the organizational level remains limited. Research by Castelo (2019) indicates that although many theatres use basic digital tools, their application is often fragmented and inefficient, hindered by lack of investment, training, and digital culture. The successful integration of digital technologies into the structural operations of theatres requires a broader shift in

organizational values and competencies, involving not only technical upgrades but also leadership, institutional adaptability, and staff development (Serpa, Sá, & Ferreira, 2022).
Finally, the literature points to several risks associated with digital theatre. These include the aesthetic standardization brought by large-scale generative technologies, the erosion of theatrical presence through overreliance on visual spectacle, and the ecological footprint of resource-intensive digital productions. Scholars caution against the commodification of theatre into predictable, media-driven formats that dilute its core qualities of spontaneity, intimacy, and ephemerality (Carson, 1999) (Pike, 2023) (Bernstein, 2017).
Thus, the integration of digital technologies in theatre must meet its defining features and not undermine them. The digitization of the performing arts should reconfigure artistic practices, institutional models and the relationship with the public. It should be seen as a tool that, when used carefully, can enrich the expressive vocabulary of theater while preserving its human core.
In the theatre production ”Nostalgia Up&Down”, the integration of facial tracking technologies and their real-time overlays onto a scenographic surface marked by a barcode – combined with layered video elements – transforms the stage into an active interface for the reactivation of documents from the communist-era secret police archives and the recontextualization of historical trauma. The relationship between performer and archive becomes dynamic, mediated through complex digital layers that invite spectators into a shared process of co-experiencing and witnessing repressed or silenced histories. In this framework, digital technologies function not merely as aesthetic enhancements, but as dramaturgical agents that enable the performative activation of archival material, contributing to new modes of memory-making and critical reflection within contemporary theatre.

3.2 The Archive as Performance in Contemporary Documentary Theatre

In recent decades, numerous scholars and artists have critically challenged the traditional understanding of the archive as a passive repository of the past – one that is accessed only sporadically for informational purposes. Within the field of performance arts, this reevaluation has taken on both critical and creative dimensions, leading to a reconceptualization of the archive as an active, processual, and affective space. Clarke, Jones, Kaye, and Linsley (2018) propose an expanded perspective on the archive, understanding it not merely as a collection of documents but as a “performative process,” composed of layers of reactivation, recontextualization, and artistic intervention. In this view, the archive does not simply preserve traces of the past; it animates them, generating new meanings and possibilities for aesthetic, political, and social expression.

This perspective is supported by Sara Callahan (2022), who notes that archival practice has become a dominant aesthetic strategy in contemporary art, particularly in contexts marked by symbolic violence, historical erasure, or marginalization. Similarly, Kathy Michelle Carbone (2017) explores the so-called “archival turn,” showing how contemporary artists engage with archives through various artistic and creative formats in order to expose systemic absences, produce counter-narratives, and mobilize memory as a form of action. In this sense, the archive becomes an “affective object,” capable of generating emotional and social responses, especially when performed or reimagined on stage.

The affective and memorial dimension of the archive is also articulated in Annelis Kuhlmann’s (2019) research, which analyzes Memoria, a performance by Odin Teatret, as a performative archive of collective trauma. The production uses the actor’s body as a medium for transmitting a form of memory that cannot be conveyed textually, but must instead be lived and felt. In this context, the archive becomes a fragile and living presence, operating through corporeality, silences, and a direct relational encounter with the audience.
In conclusion, the scholarly literature describes the archive as an unstable yet highly fertile territory where presence and absence, document and body, history and fiction are continuously

negotiated. Performance art, through its capacity to activate, intervene in, and transform the archive, becomes not merely a space of representation, but a critical medium for reconfiguring cultural and social memory.

3.3 Interpreting the Securitate Archive in Post-Communist Romanian Theatre

In recent years, the Securitate archives have become a significant source material in post-communist Romanian theatre, serving as a point of departure for questioning collective memory, historical accountability, and both individual and societal trauma. The reinterpretation of these archives goes beyond the documentation of repressive history – it functions as a deconstruction of institutional mechanisms of surveillance, censorship, and control.

Theatrical projects such as Gianina Cărbunariu's "Tipografic Majuscul" (Uppercase Print) (which explores the Securitate file of a minor who wrote slogans on walls and billboards denouncing the flagrant violation of civil rights and liberties), or Catinca Drăgănescu's "Operațiunea Petarda" (Operation Firecracker) (which recounts an incident in which an unidentified man set fire to the plywood arch in front of the National Exhibition, inscribed with the slogan "Ceaușescu's Era – Romania's Golden Age"), as well as works by other artists engaged in documentary theatre, use Securitate files as performative sources that activate the past through embodiment, voice, and onstage reenactment.

In this context, the archive becomes an unstable space of tension between truth and fiction, testimony and manipulation, and the stage emerges as a critical forum where audiences are invited not merely to observe but to adopt an ethical and historical stance toward the recent past.

This perspective is reinforced by several scholars. Alexandra Felseghi (2021) observes that documentary theatre responds to post-communist trauma through archival materials, arguing that the transition period has become a crucial resource for understanding the present through engagement with the past. Cristina Modreanu (2021) highlights that institutional access to archives in Romania remains limited and precarious, making independent projects vital to processes of historical reconstruction. Caterina Preda (2021) introduces the concept of "aesthetic surveillance" to describe how the Securitate operated not only as a censoring body but also as a de facto cultural agent that indirectly shaped performative practices.

Ioana Marinescu (2023) adopts a poetic and participatory methodology, activating the urban archive of the demolished Uranus neighborhood in Bucharest through site-specific installations and corporeal presence in public space. In a broader East European context, Iulia Popovici and Miruna Runcan (2016) argue that the post-communist archive has become "a stage of contestation between memory and forgetting." Simona Mitroiu and Andreea Mironescu (2024), analyzing "Tipografic Majuscul" (Uppercase Print), emphasizes how CNSAS documents are transformed into performance, exposing the emotional manipulation and aesthetic control imposed by the state. Similarly, Oltița Cîntec (2017) interprets Cărbunariu's documentary theatre as a form of poetic justice, transforming official surveillance into civic testimony. Felseghi (2021) also notes that recent documentary performances such as "Fabrici și plante" (Factories and Plants) or "Miracolul Clujului" (The Miracle of Cluj) rely on meticulous archival research and oral history to reveal structural inequalities and historical continuities.

When approached simultaneously, these three critical perspectives – the digital transformation of theatre, the reimagining of the archive as a performative space, and the specific challenges of engaging with the Romanian Securitate's documentary archive – converge in the artistic research and technological experimentation developed within the theatre performance "Nostalgia Up&Down", as analyzed in the following chapters.

4. Methodology: Artistic Research and Archival Activation

The starting point for this research was the documentation and artistic development process of the theatre performance ”Nostalgia up&Down”. The adopted methodology follows a practice-based research model, where archival investigation, interviews, and performative reconstruction operate as tools for generating knowledge. The project integrates documentary analysis (primarily of CNSAS archives), semi-structured interviews with artists and cultural workers active in the 1980s, and ethical reflection on the representation of memory and truth in a post-communist historical context.

The performance ”Nostalgia Up&Down” was developed by examining hundreds of documents from the “State of Mind of the Population” series, produced by the Securitate. These were analyzed not only as historical sources but as performative materials marked by the ambiguity between subjective testimony and institutionalized truth or as we might called it today: fake news. The research focused on recurring themes from the period: censorship in the performing arts, the policies of self-financing and institutional mergers in the 1980s, forms of artistic protest, illegal migration, and labor abroad. As such, it seeks to articulate a comparative perspective between past and present, highlighting the continuities in socio-political pressures on the cultural sector.

The methodological approach included:

- **Archival Research**: Systematic analysis of CNSAS files, particularly those documenting public sentiment and potentially subversive acts. These were not merely mined for factual content but approached as latent dramaturgies – handwritten notes, bureaucratic redundancies, and emotionally charged phrasing became raw material for scenic interpretation.
- **Qualitative Interviews**: One-on-one interviews with direct witnesses (artists, technicians, cultural administrators) provided oral narratives that complemented and contrasted the official documents. These dialogues generated alternative histories and revealed subtle or symbolic forms of resistance.
- **Performative Reconstruction**: The performance did not simply illustrate archival materials but activated them through dramaturgy, *mise-en-scène*, and public engagement. This performative activation functioned as a co-participation in history, where documents were destabilized and reinterpreted through body, voice, and presence.
- **Ethical Reflection**: At the heart of this methodology lies the question of memory representation: what does it mean to “perform” a document? What responsibilities are involved in using real testimonies? What does it mean to propose a “living archive” in a context where memory is often filtered through nostalgia or mistrust?

The performance ”Nostalgia Up&Down” is conceived as a “simulacrum of public consultation” hosted by three impartial experts, benefiting from an equally impartial expertise, in their capacity as trainers of trainers – who train other trainers, who will in turn train further trainers, all specializing in the training of cultural managers in the field of cultural management. The decision to place three “experts” on stage is a bitter irony – a response to the contemporary obsession with expertise and experts. It appears that nowadays professionalism is no longer sufficient; we require excellence, expertise, and ideally, the appearance of both.

However, this tendency is not exclusively contemporary. Back in the 1980s, the activists of the Romanian Communist Party operated in a manner strikingly similar to today’s so-called experts. At the time, a popular saying captured – remarkably accurately – the hypocrisy, imposture, and artificiality that now sustain the cult of the expert: “On a construction site, five with folders, two with shovels.”

In our performance, the “experts” are individuals with no actual qualifications – other than the fact that they are... *experts*. They are wholly incapable of building anything tangible;

they are mere producers of projections and plans, entirely disconnected from on-the-ground reality and the actual labor of practice.

In his review of Nostalgia Up&Down, Mihai Brezeanu draws a parallel with Eugen Ionesco's Rhinocéros (1959), describing a new-wave "rhinocerization".

"In communism, we used to listen in on and inform on each other, and at worst, ended up in prison. In capitalism, we no longer eavesdrop face-to-face, but instead pour into each other's heads words, phrases, and concepts hollower than soap bubbles. It is not the virtual reality created by bits and electrons that we should fear or protect ourselves from, but rather the well-dressed, zealous assault of those who bring their imposture and opportunism to the service of implementing flashy, bureaucratic decrees" (Brezeanu, 2024).

The contemporary obsession with streamlining every process, with applying business plans to every sector – including the arts – and transforming creativity, culture, and art into sustainable, resilient, and efficient formats, echoes eerily the bureaucratic logic of 1980s communism. The drive to "optimize" cultural institutions, then as now, conceals a form of political and economic censorship – a desperate attempt by politicians to curb the freedom of artists and art itself. The vocabulary has changed, but the goal remains the same: political control over art and culture. In Romania, the 1980s are perceived in the collective memory as the most brutal years, comparable to the first decade after the Second World War. Any skillful politician distances themselves from the 1980s and publicly condemns them. However, contemporary reality reveals that a number of concepts and ideas implemented during that decade still persist in today's public and political discourse. What is the connection between the self-financing policy of the culture of the 80s and today's merger attempts, with an emphasis on the obsession of financial profit and efficiency?

Today we face enormous challenges of "fake news", while AI can be used to shape memories, facts, events and transform reality into a huge range of possibilities, some of the key concepts of Jean Baudrillard (2016), such as "simulation" and "hyperreal" seem to have become old-fashioned and naive-romantic perspectives. Yet we are still searching for the truth, for its roots. Digging into the physical forms of the archives as they were prior to digitization era, can be seen as a pillar, a cornerstone in our search for the real, for the truth. Physical form stands for the truth; physical forms can overpass fake.

We started consulting the Securitate Archives searching for subversive acts of the common people, trying to identify if the assumption that the entire Romanian population "have acted like poor sheep during the severe regime of Ceaușescu dictatorship" is true or not. We sought ways to confront a criminal system. In doing so, we discovered, within the CNSAS Archives, a series of documents that capture various forms of anti-system expression – individual and collective gestures of dissent against the political absurdities of the 1980s.

Using AI, photo-collage techniques, and the verbatim reproduction of archival texts, we reactivated for today's audiences aspects of 1980s reality that find clear echoes – equivalents – in contemporary life.

Two examples of subversive, anti-system actions from the 1980s, both marked by a strong performative and theatrical character, drew our attention and became the starting point of our research:

(1). At the last congress of the Romanian Communist Party, Ceaușescu said that "Romania will return to capitalism, when the poplar will make the poplar pear and poplar apples". The night after the congress, it is known that the students from the Regie campus hung apples and pears in the poplars.

(2). In 1987, in Brașov, at the Steagu Roșu Factory (heavy machinery), a workers' revolt broke out that lasted several days. In Bucharest, there was a statuary complex, dedicated to a peasant uprising in 1907. During the Brasov uprising, in November 1987, someone turned the

"0" from 1907 into an "8", so that the entire statuary complex, desecrated, became for a few hours a symbol of the workers' revolt of 1987.

In today's collective consciousness, the performative and theatrical nature of these two events closely resembles the anti-corruption protests of 2018 or the environmental protests against gold mining at Roșia Montană. Contemporary audiences are well-acquainted with the theatricality and performativity of protest. In the past, however, although protest actions also had performative elements, the strict prohibition of public gatherings meant that their expression took on more of a scenographic, installation-like quality... people were simply not allowed to take to the streets.

One striking parallel between the 1980s and the present – revealed through documents in the CNSAS Archives – concerns labor migration. Today, official statistics indicate that around six million Romanians work abroad (M.A.E., 2021). Before Romania's accession to the EU, most had emigrated and worked illegally. In the 1980s, no one was allowed to leave the country without the approval of the Romanian Communist Party. Even so, thousands of Romanians were sent abroad by the state – especially to work in the Middle East. In the letters sent home by these workers – intercepted and documented by the Securitate – an overwhelming majority complain about inhumane working conditions, delayed payments, salaries far below what was promised before departure, and precarious housing and food conditions.

There are numerous similarities with the present, particularly with the pre-accession period before Romania joined the EU. However, in the public memory, the most vivid and recent episode of Romanian workers being humiliated – with the complicity of the Romanian state – occurred in April 2020 (Crăciun, 2020). At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, the Romanian and German governments agreed to temporarily lift travel bans and reopen airspace to allow thousands of Romanian workers to travel to Germany… to harvest asparagus.

Similar continuities can also be observed in the cultural sphere, particularly in how public cultural institutions are managed. The structural mechanisms, the political pressures, and the bureaucratic logic driving institutional life in the 1980s still resonate – uncomfortably – with the present. Today, there is a strong emphasis on economic efficiency, on the monetisation of all cultural activities and cultural production, and on the notion that cultural institutions – particularly theatres – should generate profit.

In the 1980s, in an effort to become self-sustaining and contribute to the national GDP (Gross domestic product), theatres in Romania were required to turn a profit. One of the most surreal, sinister, and frankly unimaginable activities that emerged from this policy was the repurposing of theatre carpentry workshops – not to build stage sets, as intended, but to manufacture and sell furniture... and coffins, which they sold and in this way they had an extra penny" (Bardan, 2024).

Another absurd facet of 1980s cultural life was the transformation of theatre halls into video parlors. With only two hours of daily programming on the state-run National Television, and with foreign films banned, private VHS players virtually unaffordable – and more importantly, ownership of VHS tapes punishable by prison – public access to global cinema was nearly impossible. As a result, even the National Theatre in Bucharest became a venue where 5–6 films were screened per day. On one of the theatre's stages, two color televisions and VHS players were installed. People would buy tickets to watch dubbed foreign films, often with crude Romanian voiceovers, on screen... in a theatre. This phenomenon is thoroughly documented in the book "It Was Just Like in the Movies: The Securitate's Biggest Business", co-authored by filmmaker Liviu Tofan and historian Stejărel Olaru. The book reveals how Securitate officers were the very people responsible for importing VHS tapes from abroad, duplicating them within the secret police's own facilities, and distributing them to theatres and

public venues (Tofan & Olaru, 2024). Although it was technically illegal to watch foreign films, the Romanian state made hundreds of thousands of dollars annually from this shadow industry.

During our artistic research, we interviewed both Liviu Tofan and Doru Creatoru, a former Romanian government employee involved in organizing the videotheques and discotheques inside theatres across Bucharest and the rest of the country. Theatres were expected to turn a profit and maximize the use of all available spaces and equipment. To use a contemporary framing: "Inhumane, criminal... yet brilliantly entrepreneurial."

In the theatre production "Nostalgia Up&Down", three impartial experts – each benefiting from equally impartial expertise as "trainers of trainers," who in turn train other trainers that will eventually train future trainers for cultural managers specialized in cultural management – present these historical examples to the audience as part of a simulated public consultation. Together, they attempt to offer answers to questions such as: Who owns the artist? Should Art generate profit? Can the impact of Art be measured?

These "three experts" outline the neoliberal frameworks through which art and culture are currently approached – consistently emphasizing the efficiency of the artistic process and of artistic production itself. In a clever act of rhetorical inversion, they revive ideological constructs from the 1980s – concepts they ostensibly condemn – only to repackage them in the language of today: entrepreneurial community engagement, per capita funding, culture as business…

Through this performance, our intention was to create a space for reflection, critical thinking, and public analysis regarding the implications and consequences of implementing such public policies. The performative reactivation of archival materials, their verbatim delivery, the use of AI-generated photo-collages based on original documents, and the staged simulation of "EEG-style sensors" monitoring the emotional responses of the audience – all these elements combine to create a performative environment designed to interrogate the role of Art and the Artist in society.

This artistic research aligns with current international practices where theatre operates not only as a space of critical inquiry into archives, but also as a symbolic reparative act. As Ioana Marinescu (2023)underlines in her study on the destruction of Bucharest's Uranus Hill, the archive is not merely a site of preservation, but one of presence and intergenerational dialogue, activated through image, text, and body

The European project "TabThePAST" (2022–2024), developed by National University of Theatre and Film "I.L. Caragiale" Bucharest, in partnership with Replika and Citizen.KANE.Kollectiv (a collective of artists from Germany), in which the show was conceived, illustrates a methodological approach that transcends conventional archival research by proposing performative interventions in public and stage spaces. These function simultaneously as artistic forms and historical retrieval practices. Within this framework, the need became clear to move beyond institutional censorship and towards documenting the subversive gestures of ordinary people.

5. Technological Mediation and the Ethics of Performing the Archive

The integration of digital technologies in the creative process of the performance "Nostalgia Up&Down" functions both as a means of generating a powerful and novel artistic experience, and as a catalyst for prompting audiences to think differently or discover something new. Conceived as an immersive performative environment, the project incorporates real-time multimedia tools that not only support narrative construction but critically reflect on the mediation and transformation of archival truth. IT specialist and media designer Dragoș Silion was responsible for developing the digital mask system used for live streaming, a technological layer that complements and expands the actors' presence on stage.

The facial expressions of the three live performers are captured using three waist-mounted GoPro cameras. These video feeds are transmitted to a central laptop, composited into a single stream, and then fed into a custom face-tracking application developed with Unity Engine. The application processes the data through Google's MediaPipe to detect and map facial landmarks, overlaying a 3D mesh onto the actors' faces in real time. This layered representation creates a double of the actor – both live and virtual – inviting the audience into a fluid temporality that merges memory, embodiment, and mediation.

The face-tracking system enables nuanced control over each digital mask's opacity, position, rotation, and mouth articulation. Additionally, visual effects such as mouth-covering, halo projection, digital confetti, and monetary overlays extend the performative space into a symbolic and political commentary zone. These interventions destabilize the notion of documentary fixity and introduce the possibility of manipulating layers of representation – echoing the editorial interventions observed in the Securitate archives.

The most significant technical challenges include ensuring reliable video streams from the GoPro devices, maintaining optimal facial positioning for MediaPipe accuracy without obstructing the live performance, and managing the computational load of facial recognition algorithms in real-time without compromising the performance's frame rate.

In parallel with the digital design, the ethical treatment of archival materials is a central pillar of the performance. The live actors read directly from CNSAS files on stage, preserving the texture of the original documents and grounding the performance in documentary materiality. However, a crucial ethical dilemma emerged during development: should the real identities of ordinary individuals surveilled by the secret police be disclosed? Our decision was to redact all personal identifiers unless the documents concerned public figures – artists, educators, cultural managers – whose actions were already historically visible. This selective disclosure seeks to honour both the integrity of the source material and the privacy of individuals who never consented to public exposure.

The multimedia components – animations, scanned excerpts, typographic renderings – are also designed to foreground a structural insight encountered during archival research. Every documented event, from personal anecdotes to collective actions, was initially recorded by a local Securitate officer. These accounts were then successively altered, as they passed through layers of bureaucratic and ideological filtration – from district, to municipal, to central offices. Manuscript annotations frequently transformed the semantic impact of a report. For instance, a document describing "revolts" was corrected by hand to read "some revolts" – a subtle yet powerful minimization. This top-down modulation of narrative became a dramaturgical reference for our multimedia strategy, which explicitly stages the distortion, delay, and contamination of historical memory.

This process of stratifying and distorting a document from an archive reflects Boscacci's observation that "the uncertain authority and authenticity of an archive is both critiqued and celebrated" in contemporary art practices that work with fragments, forgeries, or fictional recoveries (Boscacci, 2015). In this way, within a theatre performance, archival documents are no longer merely carriers of truth – or of a singular truth – but are instead assembled within an ambiguous space, functioning as an interface for various affective reconstructions, and even for critical interrogations of institutional memory.

Theatre performance, through the integration of these layers of visual and textual mediation within its inherent "here and now," offers an ideal framework for the present audience – then and there – to reflect on the conditions under which historical truth is accessed, interpreted, and revised. How can archival material be rendered performatively without collapsing its evidentiary value? How might performativity itself serve as a method of interrogating the archive?

Moreover, a deeper philosophical question emerges: Can we, in retrospect, exonerate the political elites of the 1980s on the grounds that they may have received falsified or filtered information? If the truth was systematically attenuated – both by bureaucratic process and political interest – can ignorance function as a legitimate defense? This question does not seek to assign blame, but rather to encourage a more nuanced understanding of complicity, erasure, and historical responsibility.

In this context, the performative reactivation of archives through technology does not merely illustrate past events but proposes a new mode of historical engagement. It posits the archive not as a static repository of fact but as a performative apparatus – a living, contested space in which memory, power, and representation intersect. Through this lens, ”Nostalgia Up&Down” becomes both an artwork and an inquiry: a search for historical presence within the absence of certainty.

This set of aesthetic and ethical strategies leads to the general conclusions of the research concerning the civic potential of an archive treated performatively, through the creation of a creative space for debate and the processing of "difficult memories" (Marinescu, 2023).

6. Conclusion: Theatre as Civic Testimony and Archival Intervention

Performing Archives demonstrates that theatre is not merely a means of representation but a tool for reactivating memory, generating civic awareness, and questioning historical narratives. By combining archival fidelity, ethical reflection, and immersive media, ”Nostalgia Up&Down” makes a powerful case for performance as both a form of testimony and resistance. Theatre is the living shared with the living.

The proximity of the living body, within a safe environment that fosters critical and analytical thinking, ensures that the theatrical space remains – despite the advance of technology – the only place for true co-creative experimentation.

It is a space where artists and *spect-actors* (Jackson & Boal, 2013) question, discover, and rediscover humanism: the capacity to be creative, to be inventive, to cherish life in all its forms of existence – and, above all, we hope, the capacity to no longer repeat the mistakes of the past.

Pictures from the theatre performance Nostalgia Up & Down
Images of Digital masks during the rehearsal (copywright Replika)







Pictures from the show (copywright Oana Monica Nae):













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The Wheelchair: The Agent to New Embodiment and New Role in the Living Experience of a Person with Paraplegia

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Abstract

For the person with paraplegia, the wheelchair is not merely a thing or a mobility aid to help people who cannot walk. The wheelchair is a mediator that allows persons with paraplegia to adapt to a new embodiment of themselves. The person with paraplegia is accepting and comfortable with the wheelchair as they imagine it is a new part of their body. The wheelchair is likely a representation of their legs, even though it is not a prosthetic device. In such a situation, a phenomenon occurs where a person with paraplegia experiences adapting their body from its existing embodiment to a new one, incorporating a wheelchair.

Design and technology are enabling wheelchairs to become agents for persons with paraplegia, opening up opportunities in their daily activities and social interactions. When the wheelchair is to be a part of their body and living situation, the person with paraplegia has a unique identity that is intrinsic to two conditions: liberation and limitation. A person with paraplegia can go travelling where they like as long as they use a wheelchair; at the same time, they face the problem of accessibility because this world, until today, is built without considering the circumstances of a person who uses a wheelchair to walk.

This artistic research delves into the complex and often overlooked embodied experience of a person with paraplegia when they decide to rise from a paralysed condition, specifically through the lens of the design and technology of mobility devices. All the participants involved in this research are persons with paraplegia from a traffic accident, work accident, or disaster survivors. The methods used to determine how to shift embodiment include ethnographic interviews, participant observation, and somaesthetic interaction design.

Keyword: Embodiment; Mobility; Paraplegia; Wheelchair

Features of paraplegia

Paraplegia and wheelchairs look very common because they are just like representations of people with disabilities and mobility assistive devices. This situation assumes that people with disabilities are the objects of design and technology activities. In reality, it is not so; wheelchairs are more than just a tool or device for paraplegia; they are body parts inherent to people with paraplegia. People with paraplegia are a subject that, together with design and technology, aims to change the world. Design and technology manifest in wheelchairs, enabling people with paraplegia to shape the world more inclusively. Based on the uniqueness of the interaction between wheelchairs and people with paraplegia, this article will discuss the background of the interaction and its phenomenon in more detail.

The uniqueness of the interaction between a wheelchair and a person with paraplegia lies in the condition of the spinal cord injury experienced; the level of paralysis is determined by the height of the spinal cord injury, as shown in Figure 1. Spinal cord injuries caused by trauma can cause paralysis due to damage to the signal from the brain, spine, and whole body.

There are two types of paraplegia: complete and incomplete. Paraplegia in the complete type is characterised by the loss of all motor and sensory functions below the level of injury. In comparison, incomplete paraplegia is characterised by the remaining several working functions in the lower body that can be maintained. (Freund et al., 2011; Herrmann et al., 2011; Jankovic et al., 2018; Marino et al., 2003; Maynard et al., 1997)

Individuals with complete paraplegia generally have a high level of injury located in the high Thoracic (T2-T9) area, which makes it challenging to balance the body when sitting (must lean) and the inability to ambulate. Individuals with incomplete paraplegia typically have a relatively lower level of injury, located in the lower thoracic-lumbar (T10-L2/L3) area, allowing them to attempt to balance when sitting without leaning and to ambulate with assistive devices such as knee-ankle-foot orthoses (KAFOs) and walkers. Several studies have shown that the lower Thoracic (T10-T12) is a critical transition level between complete and incomplete paraplegia. (Hastings et al., 2015; B. A. Lee et al., 2016; Lenggenhager et al., 2012; Scivoletto et al., 2014; Weiss et al., 2010)

In a person with paraplegia, the sensorimotor system is disrupted, resulting in the loss of conscious muscle control and the inability to perceive sensations from the lower body. This situation is related to proprioception, or the ability to be aware of the position and movement of the body in space without requiring a visual process, such as being aware of body movement to the right or left. Disturbances in proprioception also greatly affect the ability to balance the body because people with paraplegia also do not have a reference for balance, in addition to being unable to maintain posture due to paralysis. (Dietz, 2002; Leemhuis et al., 2019; Takeoka, 2019)

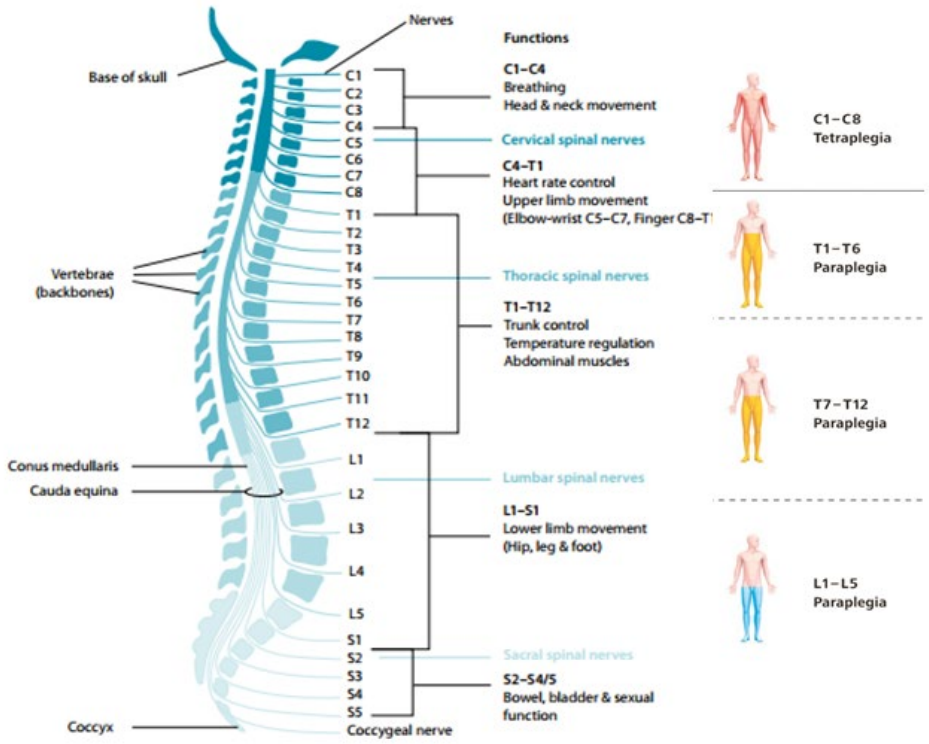


Figure 1. The primary functions of the spinal cord and paralysis due to injury
Source: (ISCOS; The International Spinal Cord Society, 2013, p. 5)

The main problem for people with paraplegia is mobility. The paralysis condition results in difficulty with ambulation or loss of the ability to move and balance the body, with or without aids, to the point where they cannot even drag their body or crawl. This condition differs from

people with leg amputation, who retain the ability to move because they do not have paralysis. Under these circumstances, individuals with paraplegia typically rely on their upper body and hands for ambulation and body balance, such as moving from a bed to a wheelchair or from a wheelchair to a toilet. Therefore, they cannot be separated from wheelchairs, and their sitting position must also lean back, either with a short backrest or a high backrest.

Methods

The activities in this study are based on the somaesthetic design framework (Hook, 2018), combined with ethnographic interviews and participant observation methods to delve deeper into the participants' experiences (Spradley, 1980, 2016). The participants involved in this study were people with paraplegia who had experienced spinal cord injuries due to traffic accidents, work accidents, or disaster survivors. This study involved five friends with paraplegia who were always connected in their daily lives. Some of the activities I participated in with them included visiting coffee shops to discuss various topics, taking a motorbike tour with them, visiting their homes to chat, serving as a buddy at an entrepreneurship exhibition for friends with disabilities, and discussing assistive technology via WhatsApp or Instagram.

The somaesthetic design framework is based on the work of the somatic system in the body. The somatic framework is used to explore the user's bodily experience in greater depth. The exploration of the user's physical experience in the somatic framework is obtained through in-depth interviews and participatory observations. The activities carried out are not explicitly categorised, but they are often repeated or frequently performed by the participants. Each participant engages in various activities, such as daily work tasks and social activities like visiting people with disabilities who require moral support, as well as preparing for the championship as a Paralympic athlete, among many other engaging activities that each participant undertakes. (Ferrando et al., 2023; W. Lee et al., 2014)

The exploration of activities carried out by participants with paraplegia is highly dependent on wheelchairs. Starting from how participants recognise wheelchairs, become accustomed to them, and then explore. The design and technology which manifest in wheelchairs have been inserted into the process of bodily experience. Thus, this study will also explore the role of design and technology in the physical experience of participants with paraplegia in greater depth.

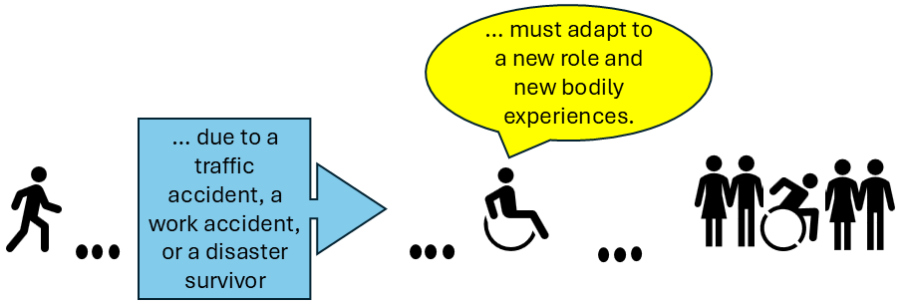


Figure 2. Research scenarios
Source: Research document, 2025

Understanding the new body

The first and second years after spinal cord injury are stressful and confusing times for people with paraplegia. This condition is experienced by all participants, with some experiencing it for up to three years. It is not easy to accept oneself with paralysis, and all participants experience mental devastation and think that their world is over. In addition to the confusion of imagining a new identity because of having a new body condition and socially

having a lack of self-confidence to socialise, they also must struggle to deal with their body condition to be able to carry out daily activities.

All participants with paraplegia still hope that the paralysis they experience is temporary and will recover. In addition to undergoing medical treatment and rehabilitation, they also try traditionally alternative methods with many variations so that conditions can return to the way they were before experiencing paraplegia. Muscle spasticity, which causes uncontrolled movements of the lower body and neuropathic sensations such as electric shocks or burning sensations, is considered by them as a progression of alternative treatment methods. However, waiting two to three years in an alternative way still does not change the situation; they remain sitting in wheelchairs with paralysis.

The situation of paraplegia with paralysis requires a new understanding of the body; their bodies are still visually intact, but they cannot feel the sensation of most of their bodies, such as feeling the tips of their toes. The absence of this sensation makes people with paraplegia unable to move their toes. Many of the participants still hope that their bodies will improve and they will be able to feel sensations in their lower bodies again. They train every day by trying to move the paralysed body part by focusing visually and thinking about the specific area they want to move. Often, they assume that they can feel but still cannot move their paralysed body.

The medical process experienced by participants who generally experience spinal injuries with fractures will undergo surgery and the installation of pins or often referred to as plate and screw fixation. After that, people with paraplegia will be given information that they are paralysed and must use a wheelchair for mobility. Then, they undergo an initial rehabilitation process that includes understanding their new condition, learning to mobilise the body, starting with getting up and sitting in bed, and then extending the sitting time. After getting used to it, they will learn to sit on the edge of the bed with their legs hanging. This initial training is so mentally painful that they feel like useless people because they struggle to get up. The support of family and close friends is very much needed in this initial phase because some participants said that they wished they would die rather than be in a state of paralysis.

In early rehabilitation, hand strengthening exercises are necessary because, after experiencing paraplegia, mobility is highly dependent on the use of the hands. Hand strength is needed for activities such as getting up, sitting, and moving. Even when using a wheelchair, it is used to pedal the wheelchair's push rim. The hands are used to push and hold the body so that it can lie down in a sideways position, serving as a starting point to get up and sit in bed. Then, the hands are also used to maintain a sitting position when not leaning back and serve as supports, conditioning the body to remain balanced. Not everyone with paraplegia is already accustomed to handling the load with the necessary hand strength. There are two participants whose jobs involve lumberjacking; they are accustomed to using their hand strength in their work. Both find it easier to adjust to using their hands for body mobilisation. In addition to hand exercises, people with paraplegia are also trained to stand, not to learn to walk, but for leg health, so that blood circulation is smooth and does not atrophy or shrink because it is never used. The aids used for standing are usually knee braces to tighten the knees and walkers, which are devices that support the body with the hands. The training is then continued by increasing the standing time from an average of one minute to three minutes, then to five minutes.

Efforts made to recognise the body's condition and overcome obstacles that arise are obtained from trial and error. Negotiation between thoughts, desires, and bodily conditions becomes quite complicated in the situation experienced by the participants. Movements must be as relaxed and natural as possible and must not be constrained by thoughts because if the movement is thought about, it will make the body stiff. The mind only determines the direction and stages that will be carried out; after that, the body will then make adjustments. An example of a trial-and-error process is when performing a transfer. It begins with trying, followed by evaluating the success or failure of the procedure. If successful, the procedure becomes a habit;

if it still fails, improvements and adjustments are made, both in terms of stages and body position. What often happens in adjusting the body for transfer is experiencing a sprain or muscle injury in the neck.

The situation experienced by the participants seemed to be an attempt to evaluate Descartes' thoughts on the relationship between the separate mind and body. (Descartes, 2009, pp. 19-20;55;60-61) The participants' experiences showed that the mind and body are connected. This situation is characterised by the participants' approach to overcoming difficulties and problems resulting from paralysis. Participants achieve this by attempting to use their bodies and then projecting, allowing perceptions about themselves and their surrounding environment to emerge. For people with paraplegia, awareness of body position, sensation, and movement systems have been disrupted. This condition then gives rise to a bodily experience that is not only different but completely new. Related to this phenomenon, the Rene Descartes perspective has been evaluated by the new bodily experiences of people with paraplegia. (Gallagher, 2005, pp. 17-39;133-152; Sebanz et al., 2006; Tucker, 2007, pp. 187–230)

Discussion: The Agency of New Embodiment

After going through the crisis, most participants will have a new spirit to be more active. Wheelchairs are the only thing that supports the movement and transfer of people with paraplegia. The World Health Organisation defines a wheelchair as a tool that supports mobility, featuring a seat and wheels, used by people who cannot walk. However, from the perspective of people with paraplegia, a wheelchair is not a tool; the wheelchair is inherent in them because movement and transfer are utterly dependent on the wheelchair. For people living with paraplegia, wheelchairs go beyond the general perception as mere mobility aids. It becomes an essential agent in reshaping their self-realisation, fundamentally changing their life experiences and encouraging the development of new life roles.

This transformation often involves a process of "merging with the wheelchair" (en-wheeled), where the wheelchair evolves from an external tool to an integral part of the individual's body schema and self-perception. This integration can be so profound that the wheelchair is experienced as an inherent part of the body, producing a different way of mobility. This condition signifies the fusion of humans, design, and technology to create a new functional unity. This latest embodiment is not just about a changed physical form but also encompasses different sensory experiences, enhanced spatial awareness, and a reevaluation of personal capabilities. Initially, the wheelchair may be met with resistance or viewed as a symbol of loss. However, over time and with experience, the wheelchair often becomes a conduit to renewed independence, enabling participation in social, professional, and recreational activities that might otherwise be inaccessible. This mobility is crucial in redefining life roles, allowing individuals to resume or start new careers, maintain relationships, and engage meaningfully with their communities.

The relationship with the wheelchair is profoundly personal. It can change throughout a person's life course, influenced by factors such as the nature of their injury, social support, access to resources, and personal resilience. Ultimately, the wheelchair plays a critical role not only in physical mobility but also in the ongoing process of negotiating a new sense of self and forging a fulfilling life experience in the face of profound physical change. It becomes a central element in narratives of adaptation, resilience, and re-imaginings of what it means to live a whole life.

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PETA's Humanitarian Work and Resiliency Education through the Arts and Sustained Community Engagement

Abigail G.

Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA).

The Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) first entered humanitarian work amid the 1991 Mt. Pinatubo eruption, which erased swaths of Central Luzon's rice lands and displaced thousands. With no relief funds but a wealth of skill in the arts, experience and immersion in cultural work, PETA's artist-teachers transformed **Integrated Theater Arts Workshops (ITAW)** into arts workshops for healing and mobile psychosocial support sessions for young evacuees, community members, and Aeta families. This pioneering effort revealed theater's power to process trauma and sow hope.

Escalating Hazards & the "New Normal"

Since 2004, the Philippines has faced stronger typhoons, heavier floods, and more earthquakes. In 2009, Typhoon Ondoy (international name Ketsana) submerged parts of Metro Manila for months. PETA's Children's Theater Program responded by launching **Lingap Sining** (Nurturing Hearts through the Arts), a psychosocial support initiative for children, families, and communities.

Together with partners like the Philippines Against Child Trafficking (PACT), Medical Action Group (MAG), Save the Children, Plan International, and the Citizens' Network for Psychosocial Response, PETA held workshops in affected areas of Metro Manila, Laguna, Pangasinan, and La Union. Activities combined psychosocial sessions with relief, feeding programs, and medical missions.

When Typhoon Sendong (international name Washi) struck in 2011, PETA trained volunteers and educators on using Integrated Theater Arts for trauma processing, especially among children and indigenous communities.

Key Concepts in Community-Managed DRR

Metro Manila's vulnerability to natural and man-made disasters requires more than just relief efforts. It demands education and empowerment. PETA introduced key distinctions:

- A **hazard** is a potential event that may cause damage/ harm.
- A **disaster** occurs when a hazard exceeds a community's ability to cope.
- **Disaster risk** increases with high vulnerability and low capacity.

The disaster risk formula became a vital learning tool:

Disaster Risk = Hazard × Vulnerability / Capacity

Reducing risk means lowering vulnerabilities (e.g., unsafe locations, weak structures) while boosting capacities (skills, organization, resources). Communities learned that while natural hazards cannot be controlled, risks can be reduced by lowering vulnerabilities and increasing capacities.

Empowering Children and Community People as Advocates of Resilience

PETA's work shifted from simply addressing trauma to developing children as advocates for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM). The *Bata Banderitas* activity asked children to answer:

- I AM – Who am I?

- I HAVE – What are my resources?
- I CAN – What are my capacities?
- I WILL – What are my dreams?

This helped survivors express themselves, assess their situation, and imagine "hope" after and beyond the disaster experience. In 2009, PETA adapted Dr. June Lopez's "Bilog ng Buhay" (Circles of Life) framework to deepen the reflection. This time, the guide questions for the sharing were more targeted into processing the survivors experience and geared towards looking at:

1. Surfacing the personal landscape and feelings of the participant at the time of sharing and processing. A visual arts activity to explore lines, shapes and images using paper and craypas serves as a priming activity for the Bata Banderitas.
2. **Kalooban** (inner landscape). What was the experience and how it impacted the internal resources and landscape of the survivor;
3. **Kapwa/Kapaligiran** (relationships & environment). How did the experience affected the relationship of the survivor to significant others – family, friends, community and environment.
4. **Kakayahan** (new skills, sources of strength). Are there any capacities/ new skills that the survivor discovered or enhanced? What were their sources of strength? (Kakayahan)
5. **Kahulugan/Kabuluhan** (meaning-making). How does the survivor make sense of the whole experience? What were the meanings and learnings in the process? (Kahulugan/ Kabuluhan)

The method blends the telling and retelling of stories through visual arts, movement, poetry and songs to assess recovery and chart next steps. These tools combined with PETA's Creative Pedagogy allowed survivors to reflect, connect, and begin healing.

From Trauma to Capacity: Building Community-Managed DRRM in Leyte

In the wake of **Supertyphoon Yolanda (international name Haiyan)** PETA spent three years in Palo, Dulag, and Tacloban, embedding **Community-Managed Disaster Risk Reduction (CMDRR)** into schools' and barangays' capacity building and program planning. Key activities included:

"Padayon" the Musical. Written by J-mee Katanyag and directed by Melvin Lee, *Padayon* ("Onward") toured local schools by popular request for a joyful, song-and-dance portrayal of resilience. Its hopeful tone mirrored community coping mechanisms.

Hands-On Capacity Building

- Hazard-mapping workshops with children and parents using integrated arts. Creative outputs included wearing their advocacies through Painted Go-bags & Statement shirts.
- Integration of CMDRR into School DRRM Plans, Annual Improvement Plans, and School Investment Plans.
- Barangay-level workshops leading to DRR committees, disaster response operations protocols, sustainable-agriculture training, and micro-enterprise projects.

Community Rebuilding through the Pope Francis Village

PETA also assisted in developing the "social infrastructure" of the in-city relocation community from Tacloban Ground Zero to the Pope Francis Village. This was done through community organizing, livelihood development, leadership training, and arts-based values formation. PETA supported capacity building, leadership training and values formation using arts-based and participatory workshops. The goal is to nurture **"Power Within"**, individual self-worth and capacities and **"Power With"**, while working with the collective in various community action.

Arts-Based DRR Mainstreaming Towards a Culture of Preparedness

PETA partnered with the Department of Education (DepEd) Leyte Division in integrating CMDRR in their curriculum and school governance system. Joining other NGOs working with the DepEd, PETA took part in a consultative body towards establishing guidelines and mechanisms for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management in schools including the Safe Schools Framework, addressing the following pillars of action:

- Safe Learning Facilitties. Ensuring that school structures are safe, accessible and well-maintained.
- School Disaster Management. Establishing a "capacitated" DRRM organizational structure, to include coordinators at various levels, and implementing contingency planning, regular drills and communication systems.
- Risk Reduction and Resiliency in Education. Integrating DRRM and Climate Change Adaptation and Education in Emergencies into the curriculum and providing Teachers Training.

PETA collaborated with the DEPED DRRM Focal Person and conducted a Training of Trainers for Leyte educators to weave creative, participatory strategies into DRR education programs, proving that complex concepts including climate change can be demystified through songs, stories, and play.

Developing a Culture of Preparedness and Hope

Through the Lingap Sining project in Leyte, PETA learned alongside its community partners. Some of the lessons learned were:

1. **Engaging & Effective:** Creative, experiential methods anchor Abstract DRR ideas in lived reality.
2. **Arts as Therapy & Capital:** Integrated theater fosters both emotional healing and "mental capital" for civic action.
3. **Innate Creativity:** Filipino communities readily use the arts to process hardship and envision change.
4. **Think Ahead:** Disaster preparedness requires forward planning despite day-to-day economic pressures and struggles.
5. **Hingyap (Hope):** Beyond merely "moving on," cultivating hope and dreams is vital for full recovery.

Despite the daily struggles of life in the Philippines, preparedness requires communities to **think beyond the now**, plan ahead, and nurture a culture of safety, readiness, and participation.

The success of the various interventions showed the power of culturally rooted, creative approaches in resilience education. True resilience demands that DRRM knowledge permeate every level—from personal and household routines to school curricula and **barangay** governance—until preparedness becomes habit and cultural norm.

As PETA is moving towards its 60th year, it envisions **Lingap Sining** as a Theater for Development Program evolving towards **Resiliency Education** that addresses not only natural disasters but also issues of abuse, disempowerment and war conflict. The goal is to build a culture of resilience rooted in awareness, empowerment, and creative community engagement.

Disasters disempower, but **resilience re-empowers**. It resides within individuals and communities as the force that enables them to rise, move forward, and dream again.

PETA hopes to continue working at the grassroots, nurturing local artists and leaders, and fostering partnerships grounded in the Filipino context. By blending art, education, and advocacy, PETA strives to contribute to the **common good**—building resilient, empowered, and creative communities.

Tindog. Padayon. Hingyap.

(Rise. Keep Going. Aspire.)

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Research, Affect, and Asia-Pacific Performance Festival Ecologies

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My contribution explores a recent shift in performing arts festivals across East and Southeast Asia, where curatorial infrastructures increasingly embed artistic research formats into their programming. Examples include initiatives such as ADAM (Asia Discovers Asia Meeting for Contemporary Performance) at the Taipei Arts Festival, Kansai Studies at Kyoto Experiment, and the Lab format at Asia TOPA in Melbourne. Framed as relational infrastructures, these programmes position research not as a preparatory or auxiliary activity but as a situated, sensory, and embodied practice – which enables new forms of knowledge production and collective attunement across geographic, disciplinary, and affective boundaries.

Foregrounding the sensual turn in performance and research, the paper draws on recent work in sensory anthropology and olfactory studies to consider how artists mobilise smell and breath as critical tools for urban placemaking. In particular, I examine works that engage with the atmospheric qualities of water and air — not just as environmental concerns, but as oral and olfactory portals of 'regional *Asian* dramaturgies.' As Nora A. Taylor (2022) reminds us, "hanging out" formed the basis of Southeast Asia's art worlds before the rise of digital connectivity. Today, such durational, porous modes of togetherness are being institutionalised through frameworks that support artistic research as both method and community-forming gesture.

Yet while these curatorial investments may cultivate new ecologies of artistic knowing, they remain entangled in the asymmetries of transnational infrastructures and the commissioning logics of the festival apparatus. This paper asks whether sensorial and site-based practices, particularly those engaging with environmental atmospheres such as air, water, and smell, can genuinely enact political or activist intervention, or whether they risk being circumscribed as symbolic gestures within the aesthetic and temporal economies of the festival. By framing these case studies as both critique and proposition, I consider how artistic research might not only foster resilient, affectively attuned communities of practice, but must challenge the limits of curatorial practice itself.

Im/Materialities of CO-. From CO-researching to CO-imagining.

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Abstract

Co-processes are subject to formal and informal levels of structuring, in which i) forms of verticality and horizontality come into play and ii) perpetual re-/negotiation and transformation imply a constant openness and attention towards repositioning.

CO- is usually thought (of) as being merely a prefix and in terms of collaboration. CO-, for Cogne, calls the between and in-between "I"('s). Convinced that plural/ity is not only a sum of "I" (neither is "we"), one of the main approaches of Cogne is to "think bigger than oneself". Some of the questions addressed are: Can the CO- exist as such, without being imagined (as such)? How does this articulate between theory and practice, "vision" and "doing"? How does CO- relate to a *singular plural?* Is CO- an alternative to "we"? Can a CO- be as particular as it can be general?

Outside and beyond generalization that limits its potentialities, CO- wants to be thought as potentiality instead as a fixed concept.

Keywords : Expanded Choreography; Methodology; Situation; Practical Knowledge; Languages

CO- is a variable geometry engaging notions such as "meeting", "hospitality", "invitation", "engagement", and "responsibility", CO- requires to think "how" to facilitate and engage (within) the im/material aspects that spaces of "meeting" and "working" provide when projects are built on groups of people and "how" to articulate the im/material aspects that support co-researchers to create and engage when co-processing.

In the essay *Facilitator*, I reflect on "situations of co-research wherein a 'situation' becomes the 'facilitator' of the co-working process" (Cogne, 2021, p.160) for all the participants to approach the meeting and/or working situation as a playground without hierarchical related roles or functions beside engaging and being responsible of the situation as a relational element. The 'situation as facilitator' is a dramaturgical tool that implicates three complementary 'spaces' – physical, social, conceptual – to be at play (p.164) in a situation of CO-.

The notion CO- has not always been visible as a concept in my artistic practices and arts-based research projects. CO- is the result of a phylogenesis and terminological transformation. For many years, the adjectives "collaborative" and "collective" punctuated my articulations to invite, even insist on the vision that the work resulted from a group/ing effort. It is during the arts-based research project *Six Formats* (2015-18), that I encountered a turning point in my thinking of creating, gathering, involving "communities" to re/search together. As much as "what is said/proposed regarding 'collaboration' fits my articulation on CO-, […] I also often miss the multiple approaches, representations, and understandings of – or find unclear/limited – the aspects of plurality/richness that the notions having the prefix co- challenge when using only one of these notions. This explains why I isolate CO- to decline its potentialities and limitations." (Cogne, Hölzl, 2018, p.2). I also, stated "that there is no 'we' in language […] to ask the very question (of the authority) of writing: language is (as) representation" (p.1). Following De Wachter (2017, 19f) "the 'co-' prefix is at the root of many other terms, each of which provides a different nuance on the meaning of creating together:

collective, communal, common, cooperative, coordinated, combined. In practice, each group finds its own language to describe its particular kind of collaboration. There are also different levels of collaboration: the work done together by members of a group has a different quality to the work done between the group as an entity and another, external collaborator. Each of these relationships is defined through practice [...]. The passage from being one to being several, which is made through collaboration, can be complex and sometimes lengthy." For Nancy (2000, p.39), "co- defines the unity and uniqueness of what is, in general. What is to be understood is precisely the constitution of this unique unity as co-: the singular plural" (2000, 39). The essay CO- took Nancy's thought "the singular of their essential plural" (2000, p.3), as a spine-concept to unfold the statement that plural/ity is not the sum of "I" but points towards thinking bigger than oneself. CO- "makes space for instability, for the recognition of the unknown in the familiar. It lets the other be while fully sensing the consequences of its presence and doing" (Chauchat, Zacharias, 2016, p.21).

CO- and "[t]ogetherness, in the sense of being a substantive entity, is a collection (as in the theory of togetherness [*ensembles*]). Collection assumes a regrouping that is exterior and indifferent to the being-together ('in common' of the objects of the collection. In a general way, the themes and practices of the 'collective' or of 'collectivism' move in this register" (Nancy, 2000, p.60). CO- co-llects and embraces frictions and f(r)ictionality, supporting and supported by the distancing opened up by different approaches of beings (backgrounds, knowledge, interests). CO- focuses on questioning/approaching/filtering elements, practices, formats that one and others are using, doing, practicing – consciously or not. I am not willing CO- to be considered as 'one'. I insist on the plurality of CO-.

CO- not being entirely graspable, the ambition of this text is not to create a discourse but to (re-)articulate within a written language, points of reference that can allow practical and tacit knowledge to be kept in movement.

CO- is an agent, a protagonist, a space of in-betweenness, a link…

CO- does not exclude the importance of (several layer of) "coordination" (Stamer, 2014, p. 59) performed by one or several actors. The coordination of a "situation as facilitator" requires the concept development a protocol of being with composed of im/material elements and parameters to be taken in consideration by all the participants entering the "playground" of CO-. For the Arts-based research project Six Formats, I conceptualized a multilayered structure based on:

i) six of the formats commonly used in relation to arts-based knowledge articulation and/or communication in the present day: publication, exhibition, symposium, lecture-performance, screening, and workshop;

ii) three circles corresponding to levels of interaction: the main team of the research project, the extended teams involving co-researchers for each format, plus a wider public/audience including peers and visitors. The circles illustrate aspects of communication from internal to the project, to internal to the institution(s), to moving outwards a larger team or other people involved;

iii) three processes: The basic structure of these processes is as follows: pre-process, process, and post-process. Re-adapted to the needs of each format, the processes proposed, identified, used, and developed different forms of meeting and communication for each of the formats. For each of the identified "pre-", "process", "post-" (and "in between" when needed) the guest researchers were involved in varying degrees. In the methodology of *Six Formats*, I conceptualized the pre-process as a time-space wherein *Six Formats*, the partner institutions, and the co-researchers would tune. The tuning also concerns the ways in which a format is (conceptually and methodologically) approached. In practical terms, a "pre-process" is the foundation of the working structure and the principle of

working. Also, the location of each format is a co-participant, filtered by one co-researcher with pre-knowledge of this particular institution. The pre-process period leads to a physical meeting.

From the moment one "enters" a CO-process, there is co-responsibility. A shared responsibility that requires the constant (re-)reading and reworking of the situation. That is the vision I had and my expectation. When I entered the last year of the project, I realized that practical and tacit knowledge – which are/have always been at the core of all my works and research-projects – needed a dedicated and particular attention due to their in/visibility and im/materiality. The essay CO- is one of the three textual materializations presented in the publication *For And By Six Format* (Cogne, 2018). CO- was not the purpose but rather a tacit value in *Six Formats* that I had to (re-)articulate to reclaim its practice and status of knowledge.

A(S) MANIFESTO

CO- *gives*; it is never given.
CO- is both possibility AND impossibility.
CO- is both a gap and a wall.
CO- is always somewhere else.

Working-with does not automatically imply a CO-.
Working-with does not necessarily have a positive connotation–
but here, for me, it is more than mere dealing-with, or
cooperating-with.
There is a working-with, and there is a dealing-with; CO is,
first of all, (as) being-with. CO- thinks beyond product, beyond
producing, beyond production. CO- is more than working together,
is beyond working-with, and yet CO- and co-working are to be
related, and the relation is to be put into question. Co-working is
not (only) working-with.

Is the latter using CO- and/or developing [or doing, (without)
questioning] CO-?
Does CO- have to be thought?
(Maybe it just appears, maybe it does not require to be
conceptualised, maybe it appears in a way that cannot
be thought.)
Do I want to think CO-?
Do I listen to CO-? How can one listen, read, write *together(ness)?*

What does Six Formats "essaye"?
Essayer: to try, to test, to try to do

Image 1: CO- A(S) MANIFESTO (Cogne, Hölzl, 2018, p.18)

To think the movements of knowledge and knowledge in movements and to pursue the reflection on the relations CONTENT – CONTEXT – FORMAT, recurrent in my work since 2008, is certainly conditioned by my trainings in sports (tactic and strategy), in dance and choreography (movement, time and space). I observe both existing and created configurations of setting in relation to CO-displacements and bodily responses and needs: you are a mover or not. The statement of insisting on knowledge in movement, started to manifest in the context of a master program in Dance Anthropology (University Blaise Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand, 2004) when back then I refused the role of the "anthropologist" as I perceived patterns of projections on situations with (often – according to my perception) limited knowledge on the

contexts and situations at play: No to performing knowledge's assumptions... Though, some methodological tools such as "semi-conducted interview" and "anamnesis" allowed me to question my understanding of the status and function of knowledge. Two important knowledge remained with me since then: i) to accept a story of meetings: exploring the format of participation and semi-conducted interview, I came to the point that the only way to resist the supremacy of the researcher over the participants would be to create a dialogue of quotes; and ii) to understand that the attempt of removal of my authorship was a failure. Yet, I understood that translating, editing, and filtering would become central methodological approaches in my research practices.

For twenty years, I have developed different formats and tools to create points of references in between which circulation of knowledge could be facilitated by created situations. Over times I organized my thinking around types of situations, scales, and formats of being with when sharing information, data, and knowledge in live moments. It means that presence, improvisation and translation became central to my understanding of what being in relations could mean and involve. The concept of "playground" (in reference to sport practices) in situations of CO- is my take on the way in which I invite other in thinking the room, the relations and relationalities between the peoples involved, as well as the ways in which communication can take place, or not. In my work, each of the elements, points of reference, and relationalities have been approached as knowledge. Series of im/material tools, objects and works were conceptualized to propose points of reference/departure to be put at play. This has been a strategy for me to facilitate the creation of a common agenda for the peoples involved while developing their own articulations and knowledges, this according to their current needs. Series of rules could be proposed and adapted depending on the curiosity, needs, skills and knowledge of the peoples involved.

When working on the writing of my PhD thesis Displacement(s) as Method(s) (Cogne, 2015), I had to find a way to "accept writing" and was in search of methods to produce the written manifestation of the articulation of my thinking. For many years, I refused to write and decided to only leave immaterial traces that would need to be circulated through memories and orality – and to have the circulation of knowledge performed by peers, audiences, or myself. Obsessed with the idea of the need for knowledge to be kept in movement and not convinced that "in all the wonderful worlds that writing opens, the spoken word still resides and lives" (Ong, 2002, p.8), I developed practices of translation between bodily, spoken, and written languages with the intention to keep and perform the quality of oral articulation into written manifestation. This method started with applying a tactic that I developed over years: it consists of inviting peers to be in conversation with me to activate the (re-)articulation of ideas, a conversation that would be transcribed to be rewritten in a body of text (taking or not the form of a dialogue). Called "articulation via orality" in my PhD thesis, I studied "[t]he process of putting spoken language into writing […] governed by consciously contrived, articulable rules" (Ong, 2002, p.81).

Note: as much as I wanted to be grammatically correct in English as a non-native speaker, I wanted to keep visible the construction of thoughts influenced by my native language (French). For that I decided to have one video-workas a chapter – convinced that if the viewers/readers would listen to the ways in which I talk they would have a multilayered relation to the written material. In *A film as a chapter*, subtitles are also used as a dramaturgical tool to create a dialogue between spoken and written languages. These two modes of presenting knowledge are cohabiting, playing with distraction, activation, and reactivation (Cogne, 2015, p.53). Reflecting on this work ten years later, I would say that thinking CO- was active in that case. Despite displaying the knowledge of a 'self' (a singularity), it was stated in this research

project that the central actor in the circulation of knowledge was the spectator (/audience/viewer/viewer): someone who – in situation of indirect encounter – is the one filtering and combining the knowledge and in consequence the one who create the knowledge that will be circulated. The video-work may drop ideas, yet the articulation of ideas pursues a process of re-appropriation. This principle is reinforced by Ong W.J. (2002, pp-158-159) who wrote ”Roland Barthes (Hawkes 1977, pp. 154–5) has pointed out that any interpretation of a text has to move outside the text so as to refer to the reader: the text has no meaning until someone reads it, and to make sense it must be interpreted, which is to say related to the reader's world —which is not to say read whimsically or with no reference to the writer's world. One might describe the situation this way: since any given time is situated in the totality of all time, a text, deposited by its author in a given time, is ipso facto related to all times, having implications which can be unfolded only with the passage of time, inaccessible to the consciousness of the author or author's coevals, though not necessarily absent from their subconscious.”

CO- performs.

When I create (think, initiate, set up, facilitate) a situation, I conceptualize a matrix (with a variable geometry) that combines a selection of parameters based on the triangle context – content – format. No matter how precisely the situation is planned, it contains a necessary and structural element of improvisation that encourages the challenge of (/an attitude toward challenging) positionings and representations through perception. “[P]ositioning oneself, situating oneself somewhere is not about finding an ultimate position but rather about finding – each time – the spot from where any positioning exposes itself to encounter, change, in short: a never ending slippery work of repositioning” (Caspão, 2010). As a performer and choreographer, I was trained to let myself being exposed to energies of spaces, peoples, and relations. Energy goes beyond what one sees, hears, or touches: one feels, perceives, reads, and can work with it. For Brennan (2004, note 1, p.165) – a psychoanalytic theorist who worked on the physical and “energetic” dimensions of the social – the ways in which “we read affects in others by multisensorial means. For instance, one is aware of stress in the other because its onset produces contraction in the skeletal muscles. As the same time as the muscles contract, the hypothalamus sends chemical messengers to the pituitary gland to release hormones into the bloodstream (and these may be released into the atmosphere via connections with other hormones)”.

The first appearance of “conversation” as a format in my work was in 2009 during the collaborative project titled *Möte09*.Back then, I documented the processes of articulation and circulation of knowledge on formats of meeting with an audience, by recording one-on-one two-minute conversations between the participants invited to contribute to the project. I was not a “moderator” but created the situation.

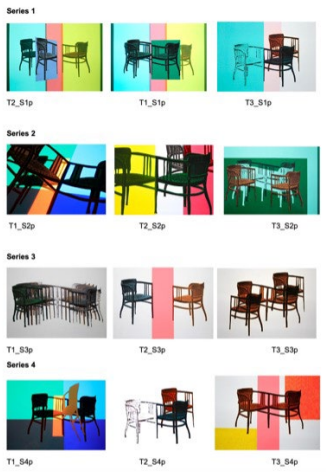
“Conversation” has been a tool, a format, and an object of study.

For my latest arts-based research project, “Conversation” became the central element of study. Within *The dramaturgy of Conversation* (TdoC), “dramaturgy” (re-)presents the approach to the entire research – “dramaturgy” being as much ‘choreographic dramaturgy’ than ‘dramaturgical choreography’ – and “conversation” is the object of study.

“Conversation” is a notion used to qualify live, formal, and/or informal communications based on the principle of articulation and circulation of information between individuals. “Conversation” is an everyday practice and situation, but also a notion that is overused as a title for events and/or publications to announce forms and formats of communication/presentation in the Arts.

A conversation is a *dispositif*, "a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of […] in short, the said as much as the unsaid" (Foucault, 1980, p.194) No matter how precisely the situation is planned, it contains a necessary and structural element of improvisation that encourages the challenge of (/an attitude toward challenging) positionings and representations through perception. As a performer and choreographer, I was trained to let myself being exposed to energies of spaces, peoples, and relations. Energy goes beyond what one sees, hears, or touches: one feels, perceives, reads, and can work with it. In TdoC, various "uses" of conversation in, between, and in-between expanded choreography and process-oriented arts-based research are re/searched to underline, question and appreciate the complexity of communication. A conversation combines spoken and bodily languages, and it is supported by optic, acoustic, and energetic perceptions. The multi-layers of the solicited perceptions invite multiple possibilities of filtering (reading/understanding/ interpreting/re-learning) the content circulating within a conversation, when the modalities of its appearance constantly change and have different temporalities. I researched existing situations of conversation and analyzed through the "doing" created situations of conversation, TdoC was the context in which a self-reflective process could be (re)articulated and a process in which CO- and reciprocal activations of hardly articulable knowledge were performed. With this re/search, I insisted on the need of "conversation" to be practiced and considered as knowledge.

Working with text-based art and languages does not limit the artwork and/or format of communication to appear within the formats of a written conversation or dialogue and a podcast or a video work. I believe in the thinking of im/material knowledge in order to provide points of reference be they visual, textual, material, visible or not. in 2021, I performed several re/searches on the relation object – relationalities – response-abilities in situation of being with. My ambition was to bring attention to the "in between" by materializing the "unoccupied" spaces.







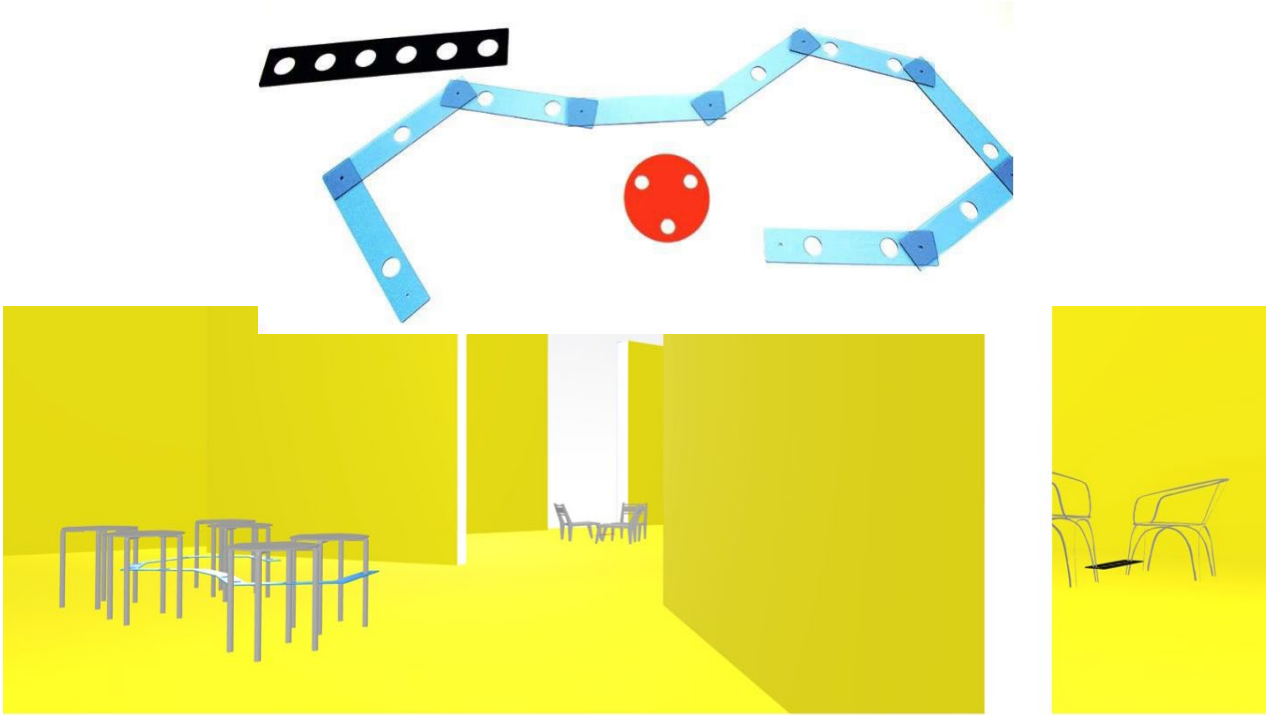
Images 2,3,4: *Ref T series, 2021:* Photo of handmade montages, 21 x 14,8 cm; *Rond de Jambes, 2021:* Mixed material (acryl glass, metal), variable sizes from 80 x 80 cm to 60 x 150 cm; *Tout est dit, 2021:* Photography of a homemade installation with *Prototyp* sitting on a chair 42 x 29,7 cm.

The central image above presents an exhibition view of the artwork *Rond de Jambes* at Galerie Michaela Stock (*Salon#Causer*, Vienna 2021). The piece, made of acryl glass, is nearly invisible and corresponds to the outer edges of the table. The artwork is composed as a site-specific communication tool between the chairs, the round table, the gallery, and the visitors in the space. The piece was at risk a few times, almost stepped on. In sociology: "The external

effects of social goods or people do not remain discrete, they develop their own potentiality in joint arrangement. To bring it to a point, the concurrent perception of various external effects generates specific atmospheres, which – as in all perceptual processes – requires active attention" (Löw, 2008, p.44).

I have been taking risk with several of my works to challenge perception, engagement and responsibility in the meeting with an artwork: when behaviours respond to conditioning instead of being activated by curiosity…

In the series, one could find three other pieces involving from two chairs (a design called "causeuse"), to three chairs (a design called "indiscret"), and finally three to six chairs in the piece that I called "grand jeté" – the latter being articulated (presented below: image 5 and 6). These objects are more of an extension of the furniture than an extension of the bodies involved. The functions of these tools succeeded when explored by movers but became challenging for peoples who would not think their body and others' bodies in 3D, in perpetual movements, and in relations.



Images 5 and 6: the three pieces when animated in a virtual exhibition on: https://artspaces.kunstmatrix.com/en/exhibition/2861719/salon-real-virtual-8-ingrid-cogne-causer

For *Conversations* (Cogne, 2024) I reduced the amount of persons involved to focus on the relationalities and their potentia(bi)lity to response to the twisted designs. With these new objects the relations body - body and body - object cannot be avoided. I tested them with the peoples I sketched and materialized one of the two designs for the exhibition *MÛ au quotidien* (Cogne, 2025).

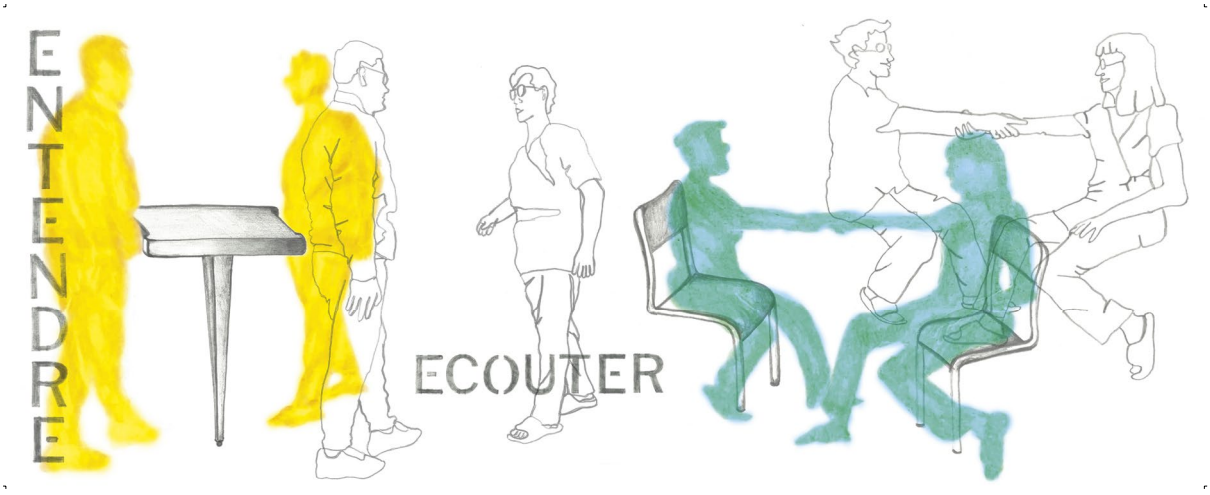


Image 7: *Conversations,* 2024, Print on mesh banner, 200 x 500 cm

For *The dramaturgy of Conversation* (2019-25), I initially planned to activate a series of one-to-one situations as well as a group process. Due to various circumstances, I decided to focus on identifying conversation partners to – together in one-to-one processes – deepen in specific tracks of thinking dramaturgy, conversation, and knowledge beyond the 'self' to reach another layer of articulation and circulation of knowledge by meeting, sharing and expanding together in and as a playground. I invited more than ten people to enter a CO- but decided to pursue the processes with two of them: they are Steven Dixon and Charlotta Ruth. With each of them, I perceived an appropriate tuning and timing within our respective concerns, practices, and agendas.





Images 8, 9: Conversation#1, 2025 Installation, 2 upcycled chairs; Activated by Charlotta and Dominik.

The methodology consisted then in proposing a format of CO- wherein improvisation in bodily, spoken and/or written languages could unfold. I recall: my re/searches focus on i) "how" practical knowledge can be read, unfolded, and circulated within the "doing", ii) facilitating the access to the unknown and the inarticulable, as well as iii) navigating between quantity and quality, fiction and reality, material and immaterial, visible and invisible.

Playing with the circulation of thoughts but also with the activations that bodily movements could perform on the practices and practitioner.s of languages – be it alone or with others – I have been studying situations and sceneries of "gathering", taking in consideration potential and multiple combinations of background, conditioning, and filtering one may have been confronted to when it comes to "how to be with" and "how to communicate". One of the iterations I developed along the years is called "Setting – Seating – Sitting" and builds on a documentation of "chairs" in public space – which often to me do not perform a thinking of and from bodies… *you are a mover or not*.



Image 10-11: "Setting – Seating – Sitting", 2015-25 ©Ingrid Cogne

"How I understood yesterday, when you spoke and said that for you that some places look like 'seats' but they are not really functioning, at least as relational sitting" said Charlotta Ruth while walking on Tuesday 12th of November 2024 during the process of creating video works.More than trained as dancers, we both have been initiating/working on projects that deal with knowledge circulation combining or questioning the relations body-language with a particular attention to choreography and improvisation within various environments. We both have our respective agendas when it comes to spaces, perceptions, and languages. In situation of improvisations, I find facilitating to work with a person who understands and follows my practice but who also develops parallel thinkings and researches (alone and with others) since many years as well. My intention was to do not create a protocol – apart from deciding on a specific environment of gathering or posing for more than one person and installing the portable video and sound recording tools – but to invite the two of us to challenge our respective conditioning when it comes to conversation, improvisation, and bodily language. In the third out of three environments, I proposed to exchange on "conversation" and "dramaturgy". When watching and listening to the documentation materials for *ITERATION 3*, I considered that I was saturating the contents and limiting the circulation of knowledge by delivering an already over-articulated thinking – which led us having to edit and compose the material in order to choreography the knowledge according to a dramaturgy based on the concept of playground.



Image 12: *ITERATION 1, ITERATION 2, ITERATION 3,* 2025 (12:30, 17:00, 12:50), Exhibition view at Mz* Baltazar's Lab, Vienna

Along the years, working with and on formats of circulation and vulgarization of knowledge in, in-between inter-, trans-, multi- disciplinary fields and systems of knowledge, I created several situations and corresponding tools and objects of/for communication displaying printed and textual matters to perform multilayered points of references for various audiences (peers, audiences, students) to circulate in-between.
Words and wordings became an additional playground wherein I allowed myself to affect the spelling with signs such as "-" and "/". Text- and language-based arts became part of my identity as an artist, researcher, and professor.
This track of re/search implied a series of co-written textual matters and materials taking various forms: set of cards, essays and manifestos. Each of them builds on several years dialogical exchanges for Knowledge to be in/and transformation.



Image 13: *Moment(s) of*, 2018. Co-written by Ingrid Cogne and Paula Caspão.

For example, Moment(s) of is a diagram of tensions-movements that searches for spaces of (re-, dis-, inter-, mis-)articulations. It disposes and composes with a set of 38 cards – in order

to write different (co-)movements in parallel: cards, people (manipulators/listeners/readers), and thoughts.

For each of the CO- I initiate/facilitate, I send personal invitations to the persons I wish to work with as co-researchers. Depending on the contexts, the situations may vary, yet the invitations always contain the intention to build a dialogue between one's interests, knowledge, skills,experiences and the ones who are involved in the co-process – this after having taken in consideration or identified an area of knowledge that allows the protagonists to be reciprocally curious and activated by each other practices and ways of functioning.

Creating situations is a method to i) study 'what' can be observed in an open but structured process, ii) to detect what is appearing, and to filter 'how' this process is appearing and unfolding – like in a choreographic improvisation (Cogne, 2015, p.110) – iii) to place the knowledge at play in a practice of tensions-movements and provoke spaces of (re-, dis-, inter-, mis-)articulations.

This track of thinking, also and among other, addresses the question: *How can modes of writing-research embrace the "interval" where the tensions between researching, writing, presenting, and discussing in specific situations stand out, instead of systematically flattening it?*

With my dialogue partner Steven Dixon, we have been for more than two years exploring the relation of systems of knowledge with articulation. Articulation is more than the generalized conversation between (at least) two individuals in the space of communication. Articulation occurs in a larger playground between entities and situations. This playground includes languages, knowledge systems, objects, environmental arrangements of elements, and the engagements and disavowals all of these present in the space of their interchange. Bruno Latour also uses the notion of articulation to expand thinking beyond humans, and focussing on the un/articulated by placing in relation the notions "word" and "world" : "[t]he commerce between the two would already become more regular (in all senses of the word) if we used the term articulation to designate both the world and words. If we speak in an articulated manner, it is because the world, too, is made up of articulations in which we are beginning to identify the junctures proper to each mode of existence." (2013, p.144) So articulation is a broad property that exists between objects and words. We are also supporting the proposition of Haraway regarding knowledge systems that "*argue for a practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connection and hope for transformation of system of knowledge and ways of seeing."* (1988, p.584-585).

For that we – with Steven – work toward an organisation of various knowledge systems, that do not erase others but converse with each other. We rethink forms of collective life and action to address critical societal, economic, and environmental challenges and oeuvre toward a space for RE-Articulation of knowledge. I felt that Steven would be the ideal partner to develop a reflection on the "/". The "/" recurrently appears in my work. It became one track of thinking and articulation in *The dramaturgy of Conversation*.

Content wise, the slash became a central tool in this research when the "–" (dash) was central in my PhD thesis and my post-doctoral research project. Even if it was already performing in the notion of RE/SEARCH back then. The / gave me the space to insist on the relation between immaterial and material as well as invisible and visible: In/visible and Im/material being central concepts and tools to facilitate my articulation on tacit and practical knowledges. The "/" embodies a space as much as what is placed before, after, above or beside it. The / is a carrier of possibilities that invites projections that may contradict or concur in an agile liminal space of interchanges and discussions. The / is a space of movement. It carries un/conscious choices, transformations, and possible rearticulations. The / is where knowledge manifests both as system and materialization of contents.

"Manifesto" being the format I cherish the most to impact established hierarchies of knowledge and provide spaces to explore and manifest in/visible and im/material knowledge, I proposed to Steven Dixon to co-write *The / Manifesto* to exhibit our CO-articulation printed on a 613 x 460 cm mesh banner as one of the elements composing the exhibition *MÛ au quotidien (2025)*.

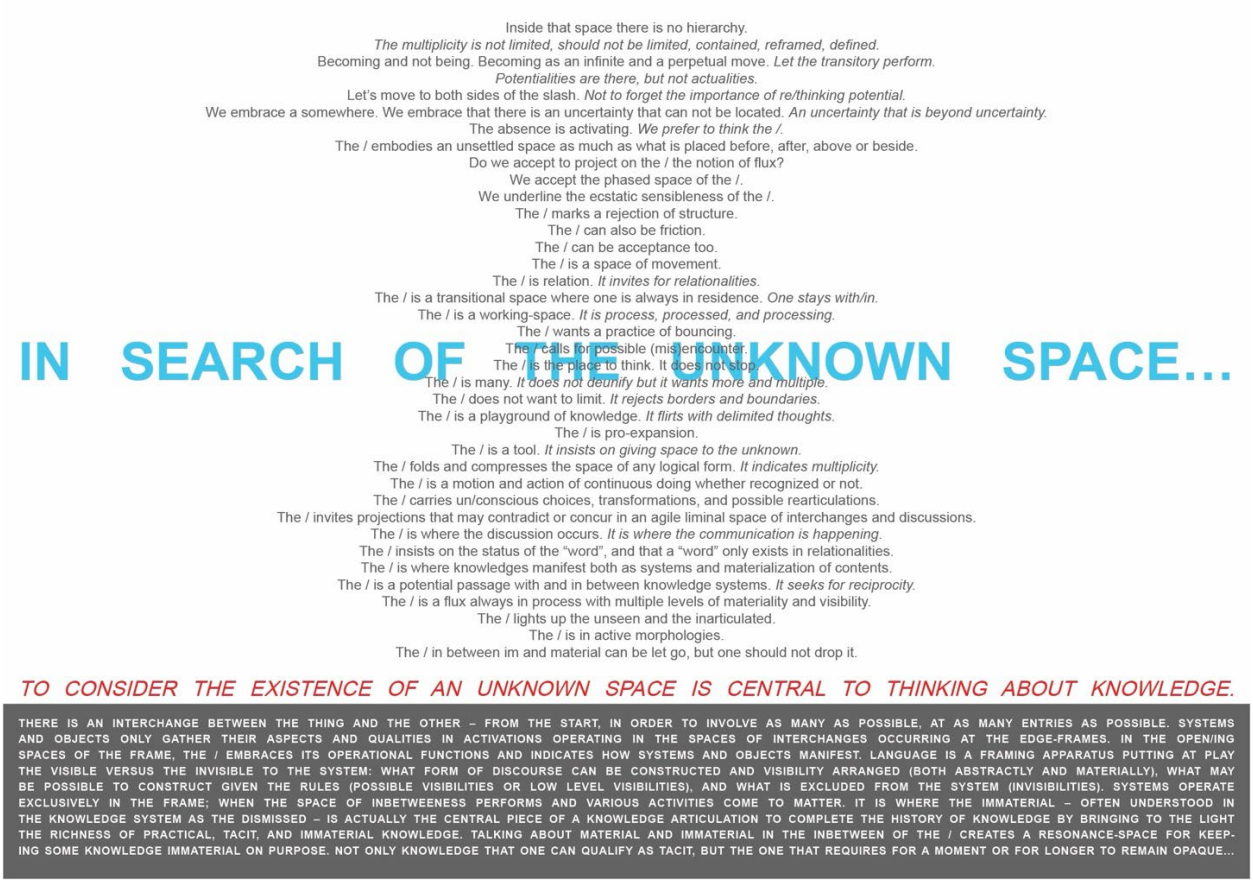


Image 14: *The / Manifesto 2*, 2025

I cannot remember when I started playing with langue and language. Using translation but also detouring some words in order to activate and more than anything to break some situations and patterns.

The following section hopes to provide an insight on the ways in which I implement CO- in didactical and pedagogical situations of teaching when being in the function of professor of Text-based Art with a particular attention to methodology – as knowledge is anyway and always specific to the particularities of the context where it is (dis-)placed or performed and I believe that the practices of today and tomorrow can only exist with CO-.

The principles of my art-based research methodology apply to the creation of teaching situations. These are slightly more explicitly organized in order to limit potential overwhelming due to the amount of information put at play in the playground of rethinking and expanding knowledge. Let's me take one of the courses I conceptualized as an example: for IM/MATERIAL KNOWLEDGE_Shirtology, a course aiming at creating a collection of T-shirts at the intersection of textual and textile matters and materials, I clearly enounced in the official curriculum – presented to the students prior to their process of selection for spring 2023 – the ambition of the course:

"IM/MATERIAL KNOWLEDGE question and involve, combine or isolate various languages appearing in variable (material and immaterial) forms and formats of Communication (performative, visual, oral, and/or written). From concept development, production, to the present(ific)ation of the group project, the artist-students will develop:

1) a toolbox of CO-practices: how to be with? how to work together? how to expand individual knowledge within a collaboration? How to learn with, from and for others?
2) formats and methodology of presentation, performance, circulation, and communication of both immaterial and material knowledge,
3) trans-, inter-, cross- disciplines approaches with a particular attention to tacit and practical knowledge.
4) a set of textual and text-based art practices for the artist students to create visual communication material to support the concept of im/material knowledge."

Resulted from the co-process, an exhibition in progress – a concept I introduced in the invitation letter sent to the students one week prior to the beginning of the course – that was invented with and by the students. The "manifesto" was created with the textual materials produced during one exercice I proposed called "collection of Statements for a Co-llection of T-shirts". The choices to focus on i) upcycling textiles, ii) exploring what a T-shirt is, canbe and to which extend, and iii) moving from a collection of T-shirts to a giant T-shirt resulted from the co-processes facilitated by situation of teaching wherein everybody in the room (me included) would be responsible of both the processes and productions.

Collection of Statements for a Co-llection of T-shirts

A Co-llection of T-shirts...

is a body of works
is not limited
must co-exist
is considered as something by someone
is better together

is coherent
is not degrading
must be comfortable/wearable
is considered as several objects of a whole/collection
should be able to exist in the same space

is both speaking as a unit and the individual T-shirt
is not possible without exchange in the collaborative process
must speak as a whole – a unit, red thread
could be just one T-shirt

is to move and be moved
is not a question of quantity
must be bigger than oneself
is considered as an in-between space – of circulation and of possibilities and of relationalities
is for being with, for emancipation, for you and me and more
to invite to introduce elsewhere
is an &

is an idea to gather around
is not necessary an end in itself
must reflect on itself as an operation
is considered as pop cultural and connected to fast fashion
has already generated a of thought-provoking discussion

is a new way to hoard together
is not freedom
must talk to all
is considered as not a yoghurt or a piece of toothpaste
will form and shape the rules we cannot break

is a set of ideas and designs put together
is not nothing
must catch the eyes, be a tool to spread messages
is considered as a genuine creation by artists and ideas

is a collection
is not in this case only about the clothing items
must seem appealing (make you react in a way)
is considered as people have seen a lot already
should seem cool also to those who didn't make the T-shirts

PRO 213/313 – KMD, 2023



Images 15, 16, 17: *MIX-TAPE,* 2023
Variable sizes depending on the configurations and exhibitions.
Presented at the Norwegian Textile Industry Museum, Salhus, Spring 2023

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Conjuring the Holy men : art activism and rearticulation of locality

Worathep Akkabootara

Abstract

This article examines the Phi Boon ("Holy Men") movement in northeastern Thailand as a historical framework of resistance against Siamese centralized authority. Bangkok's administrative reforms during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries undermined traditional power structures in Isaan, generating significant socio-political tensions. The implementation of new taxation systems and regulatory frameworks was perceived as unjust, while economic challenges exacerbated existing vulnerabilities among the region's inhabitants.

The contemporary manifestation of this resisting impetus is analyzed through the "Ubon Agenda," a decentralized coalition of activists employing minimalist expressive strategies with do-it-yourself methods. Despite its informal structure, the movement effectively rearticulates narratives of marginalization while establishing communicative channels for historically disenfranchised communities. The study highlights how the movement's emphasis on localized micro-narratives contributes to the formation of multidimensional conceptualizations of regional identity and place-based consciousness within specific geographical contexts.

This article aim to point out how historical resistance frameworks evolve in contemporary sociopolitical environments, demonstrating continuity between traditional resistance movements and modern activist expressions. The findings suggest that decentralized resistance strategies effectively address regional marginalization by reframing collective identity through locally-resonant narratives.

Keywords: Holy Men, art activism, locality

Purpose

1) Study everyday cultural practices applied by local art and cultural practitioner collectives that shift notions of "locality" relevant to their interest in micro-narratives and the Phi Boon Rebellion Movement.

2) Study Ubon Agenda collectives' activities and analyze how the Ubon Agenda exemplifies shifting historical resistance frameworks within contemporary contexts by reframing collective identity through locally-resonant narratives.

Research Methodologies and Timeline

This research stems from my sustained engagement with cultural practitioners, particularly their collective activities and interventions since 2020. My involvement began with observing and collaborating with activists and artists across various locations, commencing with the street protests of October 14, 2020, where I first encountered prominent figures such as Thanom Chapakdee. This study also incorporates accounts gathered through both formal and informal interviews, specifically addressing the Phi Boon movement in Isaan since the early 19th century.

Furthermore, the genesis of this research is rooted in my ethnographic fieldwork conducted at the massacre site in Ubon Ratchathani. This fieldwork facilitated numerous invaluable encounters with informants, including Buddhist monks actively involved in public service and serving as community spiritual anchors. Notable informants include village headman

Ang-Jirasak Wattanarat (Ban Sapuer Moo 5), Witayakorn Sowattara, who provided crucial insights into the history of the Lao nationalist movement led by senior Buddhist monks in the early 19th century, and Pinit Prachumrak, a retired government teacher, who offered invaluable hospitality and rich contextual information regarding community backgrounds.

Study Outcome

This research adopts a multi-faceted approach, primarily combining a comprehensive literature review with ethnographic research. The ethnographic component draws significantly from the authors' direct experiences as curators and collaborators, having actively engaged with and observed cultural activism from 2020 to the present. This experiential insight provides a unique perspective on contemporary cultural practices and movements.

To provide a robust theoretical foundation for this empirical investigation, the research will preface its findings with a critical review of key theoretical frameworks. This foundational discussion will delve into relevant notions includes, Holymen Rebellions or 'Phi Boon', specifically in Isaan , Locality, and Aesthetics of resistance. The study results are organized into four sections: 1) Background and Theoretical Framework, 2) Holy Men Rebellions and its pale afterimages, 3) Ethnographic work from cultural practitioner, and 4) Conclusion.

1. Background and Theoretical Frameworks

1.1) Aesthetics of Resistance

Recent studies of everyday resistance reveal that oppression is never complete—the oppressed retain capacity for negotiation and subtle defiance that preserve their dignity and agency. This perspective challenges narratives reducing oppressed peoples to mere victims, instead recognizing sophisticated survival strategies embedded within daily practices. However, this scholarly turn raises profound questions about political implications. While such research reveals the dignity and agency of oppressed people, countering dehumanizing portrayals, it risks romanticizing powerlessness itself. The focus on micro-resistances, particularly when viewed from academic distance or through historical narratives emphasizing resilience over structural change, may deflect attention from urgent political transformation. By celebrating how people navigate oppressive systems, we might avoid confronting the need for fundamental change that would eliminate the necessity for such resistance. The challenge lies in acknowledging real agency while maintaining focus on dismantling the systems that necessitate resistance.

1.2) Locality

Key characteristics of locality reveal its unique perceptibility, distinguished from Abstract or geometric conceptions of space by emphasizing the lived, experiential dimension of spatial relationships. Localities function as "bounded" spaces of lived experience where social relations are actively reproduced through daily practices. Unlike a site, which typically refers to a specific location or position, 'locality' encompasses the social processes and relationships that occur within and help define a bounded area.

Because of these boundaries, local places become more than just physical spaces—they actively shape how societies reproduce themselves. This is especially clear when we look at economic changes and how migrants move across borders. As Barney Warf observes, localities operate as "bounded spaces of lived experience where social relations are actively reproduced through daily practices," demonstrating their capacity to shape and be shaped by the social processes they contain. This dynamic quality distinguishes locality from static spatial concepts, positioning it as both container and active participant in social life (Warf, 1988: 179). Connecting locality to this study reveals how spatial transformation operates through the intersection of state planning and lived experience. A pivotal moment occurred with the 1958 National Economic and Social Development Plan, which reconfigured Isaan into both a resource base and cultural site of interest. This process contributed to emerging

"regionalism"—a phenomenon that acknowledged distinct regional identities while demonstrating how central planning both shaped and was shaped by local specificities.

The reconstruction of Isaan's regional geography through infrastructure development and resource management exemplifies how broader social currents interact with locality-specific experiences. Rather than treating these changes as mere administrative reorganization, elevating embedded local narratives and "small histories" from empirical description to theoretically informed analysis illuminates the dynamic interplay between state intervention and local agency. This approach reveals how administrative plans become entangled with cultural and political forces, transforming localities into active sites where national development strategies encounter and are modified by existing social relations and spatial practices.

1.3) Agendas of "Ubon Agenda"

The Ubon Agenda collective engages with traumatic historical narratives not to adjudicate historical fact, but to demonstrate ongoing resistance against the formidable dominance of state-propagated tools, such as history book chapters and retold anecdotes. Their approach involves connecting everyday popular movements with accessible tools to re-narrate and subvert the unilinear historical accounts that condemned the 'Holymen Rebellion.' This endeavor aligns with Michel-Rolph Trouillot's assertion that historical narratives are products of knowledge production and power dynamics. As Trouillot (1995) meticulously argues, the 'actual historical processes and power dynamics' inherently determine which historical accounts are privileged, preserved, and legitimized. Consequently, the Ubon Agenda's methodology can be understood as pursuing a 'third way' that acknowledges both the material realities of historical processes and the profound influence of power in shaping historical knowledge production. While historiography is predominantly based on written or manuscript evidence, the pursuit of historical truth extends beyond the confines of academia. Notably, one insightful commentator and acute thinker offered a multifaceted perspective on the Phi Boon rebellion, revealing the rebel leader's ties to senior Buddhist clergy and the Laotian independence movement during the era of Western colonial expansion. A compelling finding by Witayakorn Sowattara highlights the empathy expressed by the respected abbot of Wat Burapha toward citizens who were killed and posthumously branded as rebels. This monastic voice adopted a notably sympathetic stance toward the Isaan populace, courageously identifying the irregularities and deficiencies of state authorities—including both the pre-existing local governors and the officials dispatched from central Siam—and acknowledging the harsh realities that necessitated the Isan people's rebellion, as recorded by Phra Ubalee Kunupamajara (Chan Sirichanto).

The record states: "The populace endured severe hardship, characterized by pervasive poverty and meager agricultural yields, even with persistent cultivation. Furthermore, the absence of ownership documentation complicated cattle trading, and the prevailing legal framework dictated that any stray livestock, such as horses or elephants, apprehended and presented to the central court would be confiscated by the state, often without recourse for their owners. Financial opportunities within their localities were scarce, as labor, particularly in agriculture, commanded extremely low wages (e.g., 2-5 baht annually for a year of rice farming). Additionally, instances of fraudulent collection of tribute money from citizens were common in larger cities, where individuals posing as officials would demand payment without issuing proper receipts. This lack of verifiable documentation frequently led to the plaintiffs' defeat in legal proceedings, stemming from a pervasive sense of injustice and confusion."



Figure 1: Activists participating in the 'Stand to Stop Detention' or ‘Yuen Yood Khang,’campaign at Ubon Ratchathani University, circa 2020. (Photo courtesy of Ubon Agenda)

2. Holy Men Rebellions and its pale afterimages

The region of Isaan, etymologically derived from Sanskrit meaning "northeast," has undergone significant administrative and cultural transformations. Initially integrated into the modern Thai state through the Thesaphiban system, this top-down centralized control aimed to incorporate the region into the national framework.

Cultural activist Thanom Chapakdee examines this geographical reconstruction as a crucial intersection between top-down administration and local agency. Khon Kaen's transformation under Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat exemplifies this dynamic—Sarit encouraged leveraging the city's geographical traits, mobilizing it as a model for educational and industrial advancement, demonstrating how national objectives intersect with local dynamics to create specific regional outcomes. The Ubon Agenda and the Artists' Front, while distinct in their historical context and specific artistic mediums, share a significant conceptual parallel with the Phi Boon Rebellion: all three demonstrate the potent and often overlooked power of vernacularism and everyday forms of communication as tools for social and political agency, particularly when confronting dominant, heavily armed, or state-controlled forces.

The Ubon Agenda and the Artists' Front are presented as instances of "ephemeral activism" where Thai artists sought to "detach from state-controlled artistic expression and engage more directly with contemporary social and political transformations (Teh, 2017: 133)." Crucially, they "resisted the use of vernacularism and everyday strategies of popular form of communication such as song, rhyme and lyrics by the commoners." This is precisely where the Phi Boon Rebellion provides a compelling historical echo and a testament to the enduring effectiveness of such strategies.

As Thanom remarks, the Phi Boon Rebellion, despite its "modest weaponry" against the "Siamese Army's heavy artillery," wielded a "highly effective form of soft power: their

own culture and customs." The core of this soft power lay in the "fantastic prophecies and songs" disseminated by the "Phi Boon" (the Holy Men) through both oral and written means. This mirrors the "vernacularism and everyday strategies of popular form of communication such as song, rhyme and lyrics by the commoners" that the Ubon Agenda and Artists' Front are noted for resisting.

Specifically, the use of "Molam", a local folk song form, to "embolden the Isan people...to disobey Siamese rule," directly parallels the contemporary artists' "engagement with contemporary social and political transformations" through their own artistic forms. The rapid spread of these messages and songs "from person to person, village to village, district to district" underscores the grassroots efficacy of these communication methods, bypassing official channels and leveraging community networks. The propagation of "magic spells, hex spells, incantations, and, most commonly, prophecies" by monks and mystics in Ubon Ratchathani and Khorat's peripheral further reinforces the idea of using culturally resonant, non-traditional forms of expression to foster dissent and mobilize populations. (Chapakdee, 2022: 73)

The Phu Mi Boon Rebellion (named for the "Phu Mi Boon" or "benevolent men" - a deliberate rebranding that emphasized prophetic righteousness over the ghostly connotations of "Phi") provides a compelling historical precedent for understanding contemporary artistic movements. This uprising demonstrates how the strategic use of culturally rooted narratives, songs, and prophecies - essentially a form of vernacular "soft power" - can effectively inspire resistance, shape public opinion, and challenge established authority, even when facing overwhelming material disadvantages. The Ubon Agenda and the Artists' Front, by engaging with similar grassroots communication strategies (even if through a different artistic lens), are thus tapping into a long-standing and demonstrably potent tradition of popular dissent in Thailand.

3) Ethnographic work with cultural activist-practitioners

This study is based on my ethnographic research, which is informed by extensive collaboration with cultural activist-practitioners. These individuals actively engage in political expression activities addressing a spectrum of concerns, such as freedom of speech, resource rights, and the reinterpretation of traumatic historical narratives. They freely contribute and leverage diverse skills, drawing from foundational training in various fields like literature, linguistics and theatre.

3.1 Vocalizing the weak

During 2020-2021, Thailand experienced an extraordinary mobilization of cultural activists, particularly young people and university students, who organized street demonstrations opposing Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-o-cha's regime. The movement centered on three primary objectives: demanding the Prime Minister's removal from office, revising the constitution, and reforming the monarchical system. These protests were remarkable not merely for their extensive participation, but for their systematic and widespread use of artistic and cultural forms as mechanisms of resistance and community organizing. This period represented a pivotal transformation in which creative practices—encompassing live performance, visual arts, and social media—emerged as formidable forces for confronting entrenched power structures, signaling a fundamental evolution in how social discontent was expressed and political transformation was sought.Simultaneously, various groups of activists with dissenting views emerged across different regions. Activities were organized not only within universities nationwide but also saw the formation of cultural practitioner collectives. Notable among these were Free Art and Ubon Agenda in Thailand's Northeast.

As a founder, Thanom's strategies aim to de-hierarchize artistic practice and foster collaboration with non-artists. These strategies involve the appropriation of cultural activism, drawing inspiration from movements ranging from Dada to the Situationist International (Stimson & Sholette, 2007: 277). Thanom often recounts how cultural activism can manifest in simple, unconventional, and even 'seedy' spaces, in stark contrast to the elaborately constructed, state-sanctioned art festivals like biennials. This 'guerrilla-like' approach allows ordinary individuals to actively participate and express themselves. Furthermore, his work embodies an 'alternative art festival' ethos, fundamentally exploring 'community art and a participatory perspective.' This underscores the critical importance of engaging creative practice as a means to cultivate genuine relationships, speaking with rather than at or to participants. (Vickers, 2019)

Drawing from his profound engagement with art activism, art practitioner, Thanom conceptualizes his work as a "syllogism." His practice, rooted in diverse disciplines, engages with what German writer Wolfgang Welsch terms the "aesthetics of resistance" to vocalize and critique the suppression exerted by central political powers on various regions. Notably, his work reinterprets historical narratives such as the millenarianism of the Holy Men Rebellion. He also endeavors to expand the creative scope for cultural practitioners by integrating diverse preceding artistic strategies. These range from the provocative events characteristic of Dadaism to the Situationist International's embrace of DIY culture and the impactful spectacle of street parades featuring drummers and rousing messages.

3.2) The Devil Is in the Details: Contested Memories and the Transient Nature of Collective Lament at Ban Sapuer

At the Ban Sapuer massacre field in Trakan Puech Pol, Ubon Ratchathani, activists/practitioners transformed a site of painful memory into a powerful symbolic performance, igniting a spirit of resistance that continues to burn. Their deliberate choice of a location marred by tragedy not only honored those who perished but also served as a stark declaration that the brutality of the past must never fade from collective consciousness. The carefully crafted performance attire, metaphorically embodying the "Phi Boon warriors," evoked the historical struggle of ordinary people who united against the Siamese state's suppression. The appearance of these "Phi Boon warriors" wasn't merely a reenactment; it was a potent reminder of the unwavering strength of an oppressed populace that, despite facing immense oppression, valiantly fought for justice and human dignity. Thus, this performance acted as a crucial bridge between past and present, urging people to recognize the enduring importance of collective action in safeguarding rights and freedoms—the very bedrock of an equitable society.

The emergence of "holy men" rebellions in various regions, including Lan Xang, stemmed partly from the central state's policies. These policies weren't solely aimed at suppressing internal dissent from an overtaxed populace, but also at confronting the invasions of British and French colonial powers. (Keyes, 1977: 293) The stories of rebellions led by holy figures still impact the present, resembling faded, hidden accounts from the past that lie beneath the surface of Thailand's current landscape. These uprisings, such as the Haw and Ngiao rebellions in Phrae, exemplify what Michel-Rolph Trouillot describes as histories that have been deliberately silenced—events that challenged the emerging state power and consequently faced strategic exclusion from official narratives. The confrontations and subsequent suppression efforts between the Siamese state and local communities were closely linked to the evolution of modern Thai bureaucracy as it established its national army. These rebellions should not be viewed as isolated acts of defiance; instead, they represented instances of 'unthinkable history' that posed a threat to the cohesive representation of the

modernizing Thai state. The systematic marginalization of these events was carried out through what Trouillot refers to as 'formulas of erasure,' allowing the state to portray its military and bureaucratic advancements as a natural process of modernization, rather than acknowledging the violent repression of alternative sources of authority. Today, these buried histories persist in contemporary political awareness, influencing Thailand's ongoing challenges with religious authority, regional autonomy, and state legitimacy, in ways that official historical narratives consistently overlook but cannot fully erase.

The initial commemorative activities were planned to begin with a gathering at the memorial site, followed by a guided tour of the area. A central goal was to foster collaboration between participants and local villagers in creating a performance piece that would honor the historical significance of the events.

Participant Teerawat Mulvilai, a Silpathorn Award-winning theatre artist, emphasized the importance of building strong relationships with the local community. He recognized that establishing genuine rapport with villagers would be essential for developing an authentic and meaningful theatrical work that could properly represent their shared history and experiences. The approach prioritized community engagement and cultural sensitivity, understanding that any commemorative performance would need to emerge from genuine collaboration rather than external imposition.

Indeed, Teerawat had originally envisioned a collaborative project with elderly villagers to reconstruct the historical narrative of the 1901 Phi Boon Rebellion, a pivotal event culminating in the massacre of troops from Khemaraj by the Siamese army. However, significant resistance from various village leaders, particularly government officials, rendered a direct historical retelling impractical. This strategic impediment compelled Teerawat to recalibrate his artistic methodology.

Consequently, Teerawat redirected his focus towards a performance-based approach, meticulously exploring the enduring traces and embedded memories of this traumatic historical episode. He posited that history, rather than being effaced, was intrinsically interwoven within the tangible relics of the landscape. This profound realization materialized during his exploratory excursions, alongside performers and the Rassadrum ensemble, into the paddy fields re-marking the Phi Boon massacre site. His resultant artistic endeavor thus functions as a potent interrogation of a history that subtly yet persistently resonates within both the physical topography and the collective mnemonic landscape.

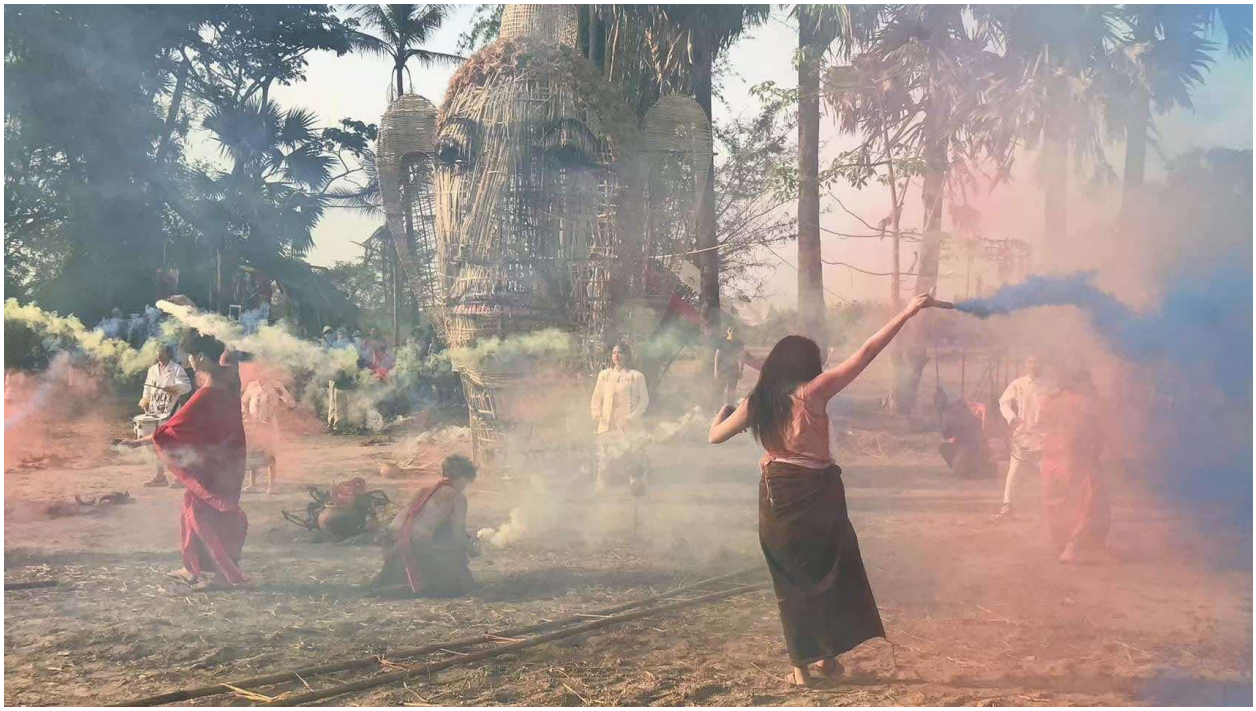


Figure 2: A performance event to commemorate Phi Boon (the Holymen) massacre on 4 April 1901, at Ban Sapuer, 3 April 2022 (Courtesy of Teerawat Mulvilai).

Concurrently, while drummers involved in the performance were prudently advised against explicit commentary on the abrogation of the Lese-Majesty Law (Article 112), their performative expression subtly articulated a critique of the prevailing established order. The physical embodiment of the warriors' movements by the performers served to reframe perceptions regarding suppressed resurgence. Despite the pervasive sociopolitical climate and the unpredictable environmental variables, such as wind, dust, and sunlight, the cultural practitioners adeptly navigated these constraints, adjusting their work to manage audience expectations within this challenging milieu.



Figure 3: Rassadrum members concealed the word "king" by covering it with paper tape on their clothing, April 3, 2022 (Photo courtesy of Teerawat Mulvilai).

Coincidentally, the initial dissensus concerning the expression of suppressed freedom was mitigated by the endorsement received from the spiritual leader, the abbot of Wat Burapha Temple. The abbot's voluntary agreement to the Phi Boon commemoration proved highly beneficial, leading to manifold positive outcomes. These included the facilitation of merit-making ceremonies dedicated to those who were victims of the massacre, whom the abbot recognized as sharing a common Lao ethnic background. Furthermore, this ecclesiastical support fostered enhanced cooperation and solidified spiritual devotion among community members.

3.3) Contested Narratives and the Politics of Commemoration: Narasith Vongprasert's Performance at Thung Si Mueang

Narasith Vongprasert, an active cultural practitioner and a formal instructor in linguistics at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Ubon Ratchathani University, orchestrated a significant ceremonial performance at Thung Si Mueang. This event, a posthumous tribute to Thanom Chapakdee, serves as a compelling case study illustrating both local hero-making and the inherently contested nature of historical narratives within urban cultural landscapes. This analysis meticulously examines the multifaceted meanings embedded in the event, situating them within the broader theoretical framework of memory politics and cultural production in contemporary Thailand. Thung Si Mueang itself is a pivotal site, distinguished by its dual function as both a public park and a prominent cultural venue. The space embodies a historical palimpsest, reflecting the profound transformations of modernization and state formation in Thailand. Its conversion from the private rice paddies of local rulers into a public domain during King Rama V's reign (Chulalongkorn) exemplifies the centralizing policies and administrative reforms characteristic of the Siamese state's strategic response to late nineteenth-century colonial pressures.

Cultural practitioners utilize "pseudo-guerilla" public interventions to create sites of contested memory. For instance, the commemorative act following Thanom Chapakdee's death exemplified navigating public spaces where diverse cultural expressions vie for legitimacy. The presence of monumental Buddhist iconography, like the fiberglass candle for Buddhist Lent festival (*Tedsakarn Ork Pan Sa*), highlights how religious symbolism constructs provincial identity and functions within tourism economies. These interventions reveal complex negotiations between local cultural agency and state-sponsored religious nationalism.



Figure 4: Narasith Vongprasert performing in front of a Buddhist Lent Candle fiberglass sculpture, September 15, 2022 (photo by the author)

The park's architectural features, particularly its gates—Ubon Det Pracharak, Ubon Sak Prachaban, Ubon Kan Prachanit, and Ubon Kit Prachakon—serve as material inscriptions of this historical layering. Their names, combining "Ubon" with terms of civic virtue, suggest deliberate efforts to forge a civic identity rooted in local specifics while aligning with national narratives of progress. Numerous commemorative structures within Thung Si Mueang create what Pierre Nora calls "lieux de mémoire"—sites where memory crystallizes (Nora, 1989: 7). The City Pillar Shrine, established in 1972, represents a relatively recent attempt to anchor spiritual legitimacy within the urban landscape, drawing on pre-modern Thai cosmological frameworks that view city pillars as protective talismans and markers of political authority. The monument to Phra Pathum Worarat Suriyawong (1778-1795), the city's founder, operates within established dynastic commemoration traditions. Its placement in a public park rather

than a royal or religious precinct, however, suggests the democratization of historical memory. Similarly, the sculpture honoring Somdet Phra Maha Wirawong invokes Buddhist spiritual authority. Together, these elements form a tripartite foundation of secular governance, royal patronage, and religious legitimacy that underpins the site's symbolic significance.

Narasith's commemorative performance introduces contemporary layers of meaning that critically complicate established historical narratives. The temporal proximity of the event—occurring two months posthumously—suggests a tension between immediate grief and the institutional procedures necessary for public commemoration. This temporal gap underscores the complex negotiations involved in transforming private loss into public memory, particularly when the deceased lacks formal recognition. Furthermore, the performance explicitly incorporates historical stigma, as exemplified by the text on Narasith's white shirt. This text, explicitly referencing a royal mandate (*Rachakitja Nubeksa*) from King Chulalongkorn, authorized Sapassathiprasong (who served as governor of Ubon Ratchathani and the peripheral regions at that time) to detain, imprison, and execute individuals condemned as members of the Phi Boon rebellion.

Holding the commemoration in Thung Si Mueang re-positions Thanom Chapakdee within the existing pantheon of local heroes, yet simultaneously underscores the contested nature of such positioning. Unlike the other commemorated figures—a city founder, a revered monk, and the Abstract concept of civic protection—Chapakdee's claim to heroic status arises from more recent and potentially more contentious historical circumstances. Not only conduct adhocism on the historical embded symbolism of Thung Si Muang, the performance also raise an arguments on 'Hero-Making as Cultural Process.' Due to the phenomenon observed in Narasith's performance aligns with Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities, where collective identity formation requires continuous symbolic reproduction (Anderson, 1991). However, the local specificity of this commemoration also reveals the limitations of purely nationalist frameworks for understanding memory politics in contemporary Thailand. The layered geography of Thung Si Mueang suggests instead James C. Scott's concept of "local knowledge"—understandings emerging from particular historical experiences that resist subsumption within broader nationalist narratives (Scott, 1985).



Figure 5: A group performer sits beside a fiberglass Buddhist Lent Candle sculpture, September 15, 2022 (photo by author)

The contested nature of hero-making becomes evident when examining the differential legitimacy accorded to various figures within the space. While Phra Pathum Worarat Suriyawong and Somdet Phra Maha Wirawong benefit from established religious and royal endorsement, Chapakdee's commemoration relies primarily on community recognition and cultural performance. This distinction illuminates ongoing tensions between formal and informal processes of historical validation. As an implications for urban cultural politics, doing an interventionist performance suggests that spaces like Thung Si Mueang function as contested terrain where multiple historical narratives vie for recognition. The accumulation of commemorative markers reflects not harmonious consensus but rather ongoing negotiations over whose stories merit preservation and public acknowledgment. Narasith's performance thus represents not merely a tribute but participation in broader struggles over historical interpretation and cultural authority.

This case has broader academic importance beyond its local context, as it reveals common patterns in how post-colonial societies handle the politics of memory. Communities face the challenge of balancing traditional sources of authority with modern expectations for democratic involvement in shaping historical narratives. The complex geography of Thung Si Mueang offers a concrete example of these dynamics, showing how urban spaces function both as containers for established collective memory and as active 'locality' where that memory is constantly being reworked and redefined.

The incorporation of northeastern territories into the Siamese state apparatus exemplifies what broadly termed the "production of space"—a process whereby Abstract administrative logic transforms lived social space into rationalized territorial units. The deployment of modern infrastructure technologies (telegraph networks, railway systems) alongside administrative reorganization through the mandala or '*Monthon*' system represents a comprehensive strategy of territorial integration that extends beyond mere political control. This modernization project represented what could be called governmental rationality—the

systematic organization of populations and territories through the production of bureaucratic knowledge.

Rather than viewing Thung Si Muang as simply a symbolic representation of Buddhist enlightenment, marked by the gigantic fiberglass Buddhist Lent Candle Monument, or a territorial expression of Siamese political expansion, the practitioner, Narasith strongly concentrated on discerning the semantic and productive functions embedded within the place and space.

Building upon scholarly observations regarding the spatial rationalization inherent in urban planning and the creation of public spaces like Thung Si Mueang, it becomes evident that while these areas are ostensibly designed for public utility, such as recreation or transit, they simultaneously reproduce and transcribe specific socio-cultural meanings. Narasith leveraging his expertise as a linguistics instructor, underscored this phenomenon through his performative engagement with the semiotics of attire. He drew a deliberate contrast between the conventional white garments worn by Thai individuals for merit-making ceremonies at temples, which connote benevolence and grace, and his own act of painting his body white. This stark visual choice intentionally invoked the imagery of a condemned soul or the deceased, thereby striking the viewer and powerfully communicating the historical significance of Thung Si Mueang as a site of execution. This artistic intervention thus highlights the complex interplay between spatial design, symbolic representation, and the contested memory of historical trauma.

The "spatialization of public space" emerges as a critical dimension of this modernist project, wherein urban environments become subject to administrative logic that governs both their physical organization and symbolic meaning. Foucault's concept of heterotopia provides analytical leverage for understanding how these rationalized spaces function as simultaneously real and imagined sites—institutionally implemented spaces that both reflect and contest dominant social orders (Foucault, 1986: 178). The emergence of European-inspired urban forms, including public squares and boulevards, within Siamese cities reveals the complex dynamics through which colonial modernity was selectively appropriated and indigenized. As scholars have noted, this process involved not mere imitation but rather strategic adaptation that aimed "to create new meaning for power by deconstructing and reconstructing culture within a given space, the first step involves dismantling and nullifying the old values and meanings embedded in that space. For instance, traditional practices of the indigenous people, such as the symbolically rich and elaborate "cremation of the ruling class in the style of the Hadsadilinga Cremation Pavilion, were forbidden. Their practice was restricted to only senior monks. The next step was to introduce new traditions that would create fresh meanings within that space. Through this process, the Siam polity began to reveal the foundational elements of what would eventually become the Thai nation-state. This included emphasizing the concept of the Monarchy as the essence of the nation." Despite technocratic attempts to render space neutral and purely functional, lived experience persistently maintains sacred-mundane distinctions that shape social organization and spatial practice. This persistence suggests that spatial rationalization remains incomplete, creating fissures where alternative spatial logics and practices can emerge and challenge hegemonic spatial arrangements.

Sapasittiprasong statue's role as royal proxy in constructing "local heroes" represents a sophisticated mechanism of cultural hegemony that operates through spatial inscription. The deliberate adoption of Bangkok-centric nomenclature for local figures reveals the center's attempt to domesticate peripheral histories within dominant nationalist narratives. However, this process of heroification does not entirely subsume alternative historical voices; rather, it creates layered palimpsests where competing narratives of ruler and ruled coexist within the same commemorative spaces. These contestations illuminate the tensions inherent in modern

nation-state formation, where local particularities must be simultaneously acknowledged and subordinated to centralized authority.

3.4) The Devil's Advocate - Misuse of Euphemism of Phi Boon

Sorapote Sevanakunakorn, an activist and cultural practitioner based in Ubon Ratchathani, currently serving as a theatre instructor, posits that interventions or reinventions of activities within a given space foster a "third space" or "middle space." This conceptual space facilitates collaboration and encourages open, free-flowing interaction among local inhabitants.



Figure 6: Sorapote Sevanakunakorn's 'Phi Boon Manifesto' in Ubon Agenda's event, titled 'Vara Varin', November 2020 (photo courtesy of Witayakorn Sowattara)

Such activities temporarily generate a transit area that transcends the routine symbolic meaning of the space, thereby overlaying it with new significance. For instance, an intervention at Ban Sapuer could empower local inhabitants to amplify their local histories

and confront suppressed memories concerning the Phi Boon Rebellion massacre field. This form of intervention not only challenges or critically re-evaluates stagnant interpretations and uses of physical space but also establishes locality as a zone of contact, enabling intersubjectively overlapped interpretations.

Sorapote suggests that "Phi Boon" or "Phu Mee Boon" serves as a euphemism, designed to mitigate the perceived severity or danger of rebellion movements that swept across not only Siam but also Lan Xang (Lao) and Cambodia. He asserts that the primary objective of these movements was to improve living conditions. These "Phi Boon" or Millenarian movements, characterized by their adherence to utopian ideals, originated as early as the Ayutthaya Period and have consistently recurred throughout history, particularly in the form of widespread peasant rebellions across various regions, including Siam.

In a deliberate act of re-commemoration for the Phi Boon Rebellion, Sorapote's performance—staged within a confined, cage-like wooden structure—strategically employed keywords of contemporary resistance, including 'respect my tax,' *'Thalu Fah*' (Breakthrough the Sky), and *Kwab Kub Kaen* (wrath). This performative choice visually encapsulated themes of suppression and confinement, intentionally creating a voyeuristic spectacle that both attracted public scrutiny and compelled viewers to confront notions of "impurity" and "danger" associated with dissent. Drawing upon Mary Douglas's seminal work Purity and Danger, this act highlighted how societies establish symbolic boundaries between the trustworthy and that which is ostracized for exclusion (Douglas, 1966: 115). Sorapote's performance deliberately distanced itself from conventional historical narratives through powerful symbolism. Rather than perpetuating sanitized stories about revered historical figures, the work inverted these "pale narratives" by highlighting what had been marginalized or suppressed. This reverse approach brought forgotten perspectives back into public view, creating a meaningful commentary on how history is told and retold.



Figure 7: Phi Boon Memorial designed by Chatri Prakitnonthakan, envisioned for the massacre site in Ban Sapuer (photo courtesy of Chatri Prakitnonthakan)

4. Conclusion

The Ubon Agenda's cultural activism offers a powerful case study in contesting memories and navigating oppressive political structures. By focusing on the local scale, where individual subjectivity and social reproduction are deeply rooted, the initiative critiques the silencing of community voices. Their flexible artistic practices, interwoven with and challenging site-specific symbolism, demonstrate how cultural practitioners can significantly influence their environment. This approach is evident in their daily interventions, where local "lived worlds" are permeated by direct and immediate forms of meaning, actively shaping how people engage socially and navigate everyday existence.

Through initiatives like the Ubon Agenda, cultural activists work to create dialogue and shared understanding around historical events. Rather than accepting single, official versions of what happened, they actively challenge the cleaned-up stories often told about important historical sites, including locations where massacres occurred.

This advocacy takes concrete forms: building monuments at memorial sites and organizing public ceremonies to honor those who died. These efforts bring local voices into historical conversations, ensuring that official narratives include the real experiences and varied perspectives of community members who lived through or were affected by these events.

The politics of meaning are central to the work of these cultural practitioners, who simultaneously reinvent and subtly erode the established symbolic and physical meanings of cultural objects and spaces. They engage in what can be termed "meaning jamming" or a form of euphemism, reinterpreting everything from monuments to routine spaces like Thung Si Mueang. This dynamic process highlights how cultural activism can actively reshape public understanding and memory by reconfiguring the narratives embedded within both tangible and intangible cultural forms.

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The Space of Happiness: Spirit, Body, and Breath — Integrating Visual Art and Contemporary Practice through Human Dialogues

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Abstract

This article focused on the study of "The Space of Happiness" through the art process which connected the cultural roots with the Contemporary Performance Art as well as the Healing Art. This study was conducted with the emphasis on the local participation and the roles of the artist as the facilitator and also performance artist during field researches at four provinces, including Nakhon Pathom, Chaiyaphum, Suphanburi and Nonthaburi Provinces. Also, as a part of the creative initiative entitled "Integration of Visual Art with Mixed Media: Performance Art and Digital Art," "Performance Art as Visual Art and Interdisciplinary Integration with Mixed Media: Spirit, Body and Breath" was aimed at exploring the potentials of Art in transforming mind and society, particularly summoning "Kwan (means consolation/encouragement/heartening)" and its linkages with Art, rituals, beliefs, and happiness of people in the targeted study areas. By contemplating on "Kwan" as the medium of spirit, local beliefs and rituals, this study significantly indicated the potentials of Art in healing, opening dialogues, and integrating interdisciplinary knowledge which all eventually led to the mind and social wellbeing. The artist's previous researches, for instance, "The Happinesses Space: Spirit of Kwan" (2023), "The Garland: Spirit of Kwan" (2024), "I'm My Own Queen: Spirit of Kwan" (2024) และ "Spirit of Kwan" (2025), attested the creation of spaces for healing, communicating, and integrating interdisciplinary knowledge together.

Keywords: Contemporary Art, The Space of Happiness, local participation, Healing Art, Kwan, Visual Art, Mixed Media, Performance Art

Introduction

The Space of Happiness was not only the space for art expression but also the melting pot of body, breath and mind of the artist and the participants as it functioned as the apparatus for healing and mutual understanding between oneself and others. Started from the utilization of Applied Theatre approach, this creatively generated space was merged with the local knowledge and later developed into Fine Art and Performance Art which possessed "healing and self-sacrificing/offering" spirit embedded in its structure.

1. Study Rationale

In the age of globalization with swiftly advanced technology, the ways of life of people around the globe were essentially changed in a way that their perceptions, values, interpersonal relations, as well as their body and mind were transformed along the pace of consumerism and digital world. Although the Visual Art was continuously developed especially through the integration of new media and multimedia with the aesthetic expression, there existed increasing problems related to body and mind wellbeing. According to the report of ThaiHealth Watch Resource Center 2023, it was found that the study samples from the application DMIND indicated the ratio of risk of depression 89.3% and among 35,000 of them were found struggling with health problems from long COVID. (ThaiHealth Watch Resource Center,

2023) This markedly reflected that people needed some space for re-discovering themselves through positive communication and connection with tangible cultural foundation.

"Kwan" is the cultural concept and ceremony of consolation or encouragement which have been ingrained in Thai society for more than 700 years. This Abstract mind or soul of human being reflected their identity, beliefs, and rituals in their livelihood such as Kwan making, Kwan incanting, and Kwan retaining ceremonies held at various intersecting points in life. (Anuman Rajadhon, n.d.; Khanithanun, 1987) Therefore, Kwan is not a mere ceremony but the reflection of the "living" understanding among human beings, contrary to the robots or automatic mechanism in this technology-driven era.

The artist thus proposed utilizing Performance Art with Mixed Media and contemporary narrative approach to decode "Kwan" to body language through visual elements and body movements in form of live performance and video performance. The objective was to connect the cultural roots with diverse changes in the new era to highlight the value of life and human spirit through constructive artworks made possible by accumulated knowledge and experiences of the facilitator who had her background in Applied Theatre.

2. Study objectives

2.1 To create and introduce Performance Art by focusing on Kwan and Kwan rituals - inspired body movements

2.2 To present constructive performances from contemporary artists who studied the cultural roots of Kwan in Thai culture

2.3 To experiment, analyze and develop a new body of knowledge from integration of visual elements, movements, Mixed Media, body, sound, video, digital art, and local media such as local rituals to produce pieces of artwork that could communicate in the academic communities

2.4 To support learning in the 21st Century through construction and development process of each artwork from dialogues with local communities and self-reflection of the artist to elevate skills of those who are interested in contemporary Performance Art and disseminate the study outcome to the public.

3. Scope of study and creative works

Content: To present the concept of "Kwan" and its rituals through Aesthetic Art performances with positive attitude and contemporary body language

Format: Performance Art

Technique: Live Performance and/or Video Performance

4.Theory, assumption and conceptual framework

Conceptual framework

This study was carried out from main sources of document research and contemporary theories including

- *RoseLee Goldberg* (2001), *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* which gave importance to the body of performance artist, the interaction with audiences and time and space contexts
- Research of Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, Wilaiwan Khanitthanan, on Anthropological Exhibitions, Silpakorn University, with an analysis on Kwan rituals in Thai cultural contexts
- Analysis on visual elements in art works
- Connecting with local communities and communication through contemporary technology

Assumption

The use of body as art language through visual elements design such as dot, line, color and surface could powerfully translate the Abstract of "Kwan" and Kwan rituals in new contexts. It led to cultural communication across time. The concept of "Kwan" was analyzed from five dimensions, including

1. Words of Kwan
2. Tools used in the ritual
3. Kwan performer
4. Kwan's owner
5. Audiences

Moreover, the study also gained insights from signs that appeared on historical artefacts such as Ban Chaing porcelains and bronze drum used as anthropological data to decode the Contemporary Art.

Content

The performance artist was interested in mind training and utilizing mind in art performance. From her personal experience of meditation and mindfulness practice in Buddhism, the performance artist could apply what she has learned to develop her communication through senses and spirits. These elements became the crux of live performance and Performance Art. Therefore, the performance artist aspired to communicate and share her interest through the creation of common space with the use of meditation to either heal people from sufferings or generate at least temporary "The Space of Happiness" for them while they were watching her performances. These performance artworks, to name a few, **"The Happiness Space : Spirit of Kwan," "I'm My Own Queen: Spirit of Kwan"** and **"The Garland : Spirit of Kwan,"** thus principally enacted the incantation of "Kwan" or auspicious encouragement, thereby leading audiences to happiness. The performance artist still continued generating constrictive artworks which highlighted the space for women and their roles in Mahayana Buddhism. This gave rise to further profound exploration about "Kwan" and "Mind" through body movements in ritual and self-sacrificing/offering ceremonies. Moreover, the performance artist developed her knowledge and experiences in meditation and Buddhism in creating more contemporary visual art, particularly "The Space of Happiness" which not only conveyed the serenity in digital art and live performances but also connected with spiritual and social dimensions. With her focus on the convergence of realistic contents, traditional dances, communication of contemporary art through Performance Art, the performance artist integrated her Performance Art with Mixed Media, spirit, body and breath to showcase the dynamics of art development which bridged the past and the present. It could be academically analyzed particularly from the contexts of Aesthetics Art.

1. **Connecting the past and the present within the concept of cultural roots and deciphering its meanings through Contemporary Art**

The combination between the traditional dances that were unique in each locality and the Performance Art revealed the mobilization of cultural roots in Contemporary Art. Traditional dances were the process that reflected the soul of community as they were mostly involved with rituals such as offering ceremony, Kwan summoning ceremony and communicating with supernational beings. Significantly, they reflected the vital force and relationships between human beings and nature which in turn could create new contexts that unraveled social problems nowadays, for examples, relations between one's own self and others, embodiment, and struggles to find the balance of mind in the currently stressful and haste-ridden world. The use of body as the communication tools through live performance then enabled the audiences to feel the balance between body movement and peacefulness as well as the connection between body and mind in the world which people tended to neglect their own voices. To put it in other words, the live performance and video reflected the stress that affected

body and mind of people and that was why it was important to stimulate their recognition about these effects so that they could search for adaptation or keeping the balance.

2. Integration of interdisciplinary knowledge in Visual Art among mind, body, digital art and multimedia

The performance artworks of **"The Happiness Space : Spirit of Kwan," "I'm My Own Queen: Spirit of Kwan"** and **"The Garland : Spirit of Kwan,"** emphasized the vitality of "relationship between human beings and themselves" through breath. This was actually the life process which connected body, mind and mindfulness or presence in the Performance Art. In practice, the physical sciences such as body movement, posture or voice were utilized to express the Visual Art through Performance Art, thus enabling the powerful communication in terms of emotions and intelligence. Also, when digital art was employed in artworks such as animation and video through "immersive" experiences which drew their participation in art process, the meanings of mind and breath were extended to new dimensions which participants could directly experience. That is to say the movement of human beings was the crucial key to the creation of happiness through meditation in the overlapping realms of human being's mind and the world.

3. The significance of Performance Art from aesthetic dimension: Enabling the communication through minds to open spaces for social criticism as well as participatory connectedness.

The artworks of "Performance Art as Visual Art and Interdisciplinary Integration with Mixed Media: Spirit, Body and Breath" focused on the concept of "body is the medium of mind." That means the use of body in Performance Art acted as the bridge that connected the external world (reality) and the internal world (mind and soul). The generation of this contemporary constructive work gave the leeway for building spaces for criticizing complicated social issues such as the roles of women in rituals, identity seeking, and life balancing through culture and art. The Performance Art employing mind and body then helped arouse audiences' constructive participation such as joint meditation through body moving and breathing to re-examine oneself. This in turn reflected the functional potentials of art as Healing Art or Therapeutic Art.

4. The combination with digital art and multimedia to enlarge the Visual Art areas and build memory through Art

The use of digital art helped extend the areas of Visual Art beyond its physical limits. For example, the digital image could be used as the "substitute" of spirits that floated in format of Augmented Reality or Virtual Reality. Apart from that, the work that combined live performance and digital media generated the experiences of overlapping reality and virtual reality. The multimedia helped retain and transfer the knowledge of traditional dances and rituals which could later be utilized in further study or academic work in the future.

5. The importance of Aesthetics Art and the creation of new dimension of integrated art and linkages between art and aesthetics of life

The work of "Sukumala" helped understand profoundly about art as tools for identity seeking and social criticism. Especially, it shed more light on issues related to mind and relations between human being and themselves. Through the integration of art and interdisciplinary knowledge with Mixed Media, aesthetic experiences were engendered with profound insight about human being in this digital age. Therefore, the creative working of "Performance Art as Visual Art and Interdisciplinary Integration with Mixed Media: Spirit, Body and Breath" not only reflected the connection between the past and the present but also generated new approach for Aesthetics Art as an interdisciplinary knowledge that integrated original body of knowledge, contemporary art, and technology together. As a result, it could be used to mobilize art, restore wellbeing and inspire those who were interested in integrative art.

The discussion could further address the importance of bodily awareness and the pursuit of balance of mind through artistic practices, presenting art as a transformative medium that contributes to a new dimension of holistic well-being in 21st-century life.

Under the larger part of the creative initiative of "Integration of Visual Art with Mixed Media: Performance Art and Digital Art," the "Spirit of Kwan," a work series of "Performance Art as Visual Art and Interdisciplinary Integration with Mixed Media: Spirit, Body and Breath" by Assistant Professor Dr. Sukumala Nithipattaraahnan not only functioned as the artistic apparatus for healing and engaging with communities but also served as the prime space for reflection of "body" and "mind" of women in the contemporary societies, particularly within the contexts of Buddhism and the existence of female in the digital era.

Remarkably, this creative work served as a process of cultivating awareness and reflection for the artist herself about with the roles and paths of women which were made equal with men in Buddhism for over 2,568 years. However, the emergence of the Mahayana tradition imposed limitations on them towards attaining the gist of Buddhism, for instance, through female ordination. Then, there arose critical debates and questions whether women could attain the highest state of enlightenment, or so-called Nirvana or not. The discourse about female roles in Buddhism therefore ignited the artist's interest in exploring to communicate to the public that female could also access to spiritual realization, meaning her status equivalent to men under Buddhism. This vitally inspired her subsequent works focusing on the creation of space for women in Buddhism. During the current era which online communication and virtual space increasingly reigned the societies, more and more people cared less about their mind to the point that their wellbeing of mind became precariously fragile. "The Space of Happiness" was the creative artistic space that not only made spirit, body and breath intertwined through local participation, rituals, Performance Art but also healed, restored and initiated dialogues across disciplines among artist and communities within diverse cultural contexts. The details were as followed.

1. **Art as a 'Slow Art Space,' utilizing the distinctive qualities of art to connect with physical and mind experiences.**

In a world teemed with speed and competition, art could serve as a "Slow Art Space" that encouraged people to pause and step away from the urgency of daily life for self-reflection. Many artists incorporated elements such as slow and deliberate movement, regulated breathing patterns, and natural sounds to evoke a state of tranquility. These works not only embodied a philosophy of balanced living but also enabled audiences to engage deeply with their spirituality. By harnessing the distinctive aspect of connecting physical and mind experiences, the artworks which emphasized the body and mind awareness excelled at building "shared or common feelings." This was made possible through the integration of Mixed Media, combining sculpture, painting, digital animation, and live performance. Such artistic works not only transcended aesthetic appeal but also offered tangible and immersive experiences that cultivated profound bonds between the audiences and the artworks.

2. **Towards Art for Well-being: A Unity Driven by 'Spirit and Technology"**

The distinctive feature of the integrative visual art series of "Performance Art as Visual Art and Interdisciplinary Integration with Mixed Media: Spirit, Body and Breath" under the "Integration of Visual Art with Mixed Media: Performance Art and Digital Art" was its role as a bridge linking art with mental health. Activities were implemented to promote bodily awareness through mindful art practices that incorporated artistic techniques. For instance, live performances encouraged the audiences to gain their self-awareness through participatory processes that invited them to engage in common breathing or moving their bodies alongside the artists at the artistic sites. By doing that, participants started to explore of the relationship between their body and mind. The artworks that stimulated the recognition of life balance or utilized art as a form of mental healing often emphasized spirituality through artistic processes.

For instance, the artistic works relating to rituals, offerings, evoking symbols of tranquility and healing, such as the use of natural materials in installations or Kwan puppetry, reflected the importance of returning to spiritual roots. Moreover, when integrated with digital technologies, such as interactive installations, these works introduced new dimensions to the pursuit of balance by transforming exhibition spaces body and mind healing space. Apparently, these technologies enhanced the accessibility of art, the expansion of communication scope, and the stimulation for more profound interactions in the 21st century. Thus, Art was functional as a vital medium for well-being and holistic health.

3. The Power to Drive Social Change

Awareness of the body and mind cultivated through art not only impacted individuals but also possessed significant potentials in social transformation. This included the creation of spaces for exchanging dialogues on stress in the digital age, the utilization of art as a tool to connect communities, and the fostering for understanding across cultures through spiritual dimensions. Consequently, art becomes a powerful medium for restoring both body and mind, promoting for the balance in a fast-paced world, and reminding people to reflect and stay focused on the often-overlooked "being here and now".

4. Questioning about "Roles of Women in Buddhism"

Although Buddhism has existed for over 2,500 years and principally recognized that all sentient beings have equal potentials to attain Nirvana, certain concepts and regulations within the Mahayana tradition have constrained the roles of women in terms of rituals, purity, and accessibility to higher spiritual attainments. The work of "I'm My Own Queen" challenged these notions by demonstrating that women could create their own "Space of Khwan (encouragement)" through art which integrated body, mind, and spirit within the Buddhist framework, while embracing the expressive possibilities of the contemporary world.

5. Body Awareness – Body as Temple

In Sukumala's artwork, the bodies of both the artist and the audience are not merely physical objects but are regarded as sacred "temples." They serve as the starting point for a return to the self, aligning with the concept of Embodied Practice in contemporary performance art, where the body is not only a medium but also a "doctrine" that conveys inner energy.

6. Mental Balance in the 21st Century

The contemporary world faces a crisis of stress, loneliness, and disconnection from nature—especially within digital spaces that have become virtual realms where many now reside. Artworks such as The Happiness Space: Spirit of Kwan serve as "balance spaces" where individuals can pause, attend to their breath, and restore their mental well-being within a contemporary context.

7. The Connection Between the Individual and the Collective

In a context where women have traditionally been viewed as passive subjects within rituals, the art in this series reverses this narrative by empowering women to become creators of their own sacred spaces. The artwork not only transforms physical spaces but also restructures deeply ingrained social and religious meanings, opening up possibilities for women to define their own sacredness.

Summary of Discussion

Sukumala's art is not merely a presentation of works but an opening of a genuine and living "space of happiness." This space is cultivated through attentive listening to the body, honoring one's own spirit, and critically questioning the structural powers that dominate cultural, religious, and social realms.

Artworks that integrate contemporary art with healing practices and rituals open new social and spiritual spaces. These "spaces of happiness" serve as tools for cultivating inner strength and fostering genuine connections between artists and communities. The

recommendation is to support artists in engaging directly with communities, working collaboratively, and fostering shared understanding of the role of art in everyday life.

1. Artistic Roots and the Development of a Distinctive Approach

Experience in visual arts, combined with the practice of meditation and mindfulness, forms the core of media performances that question the role of women in Buddhism, particularly regarding spiritual attainment and structural religious constraints. These works do not merely pose intellectual inquiries but use art as a space for meditation, where bodily movement becomes a language of the spirit.

2. Fieldwork: Art Engaging with Real Life

The Spirit of Kwan series is developed annually through in-depth fieldwork:

Nakhon Pathom: A site for meditation practice combined with art therapy, focusing on restoring happiness and mindfulness in the lives of women in rural communities.

- **Chaiyaphum:** An exploration of beliefs in the Naga serpent, ritual offerings, and the communication of traditional beliefs through performative art.
- **Suphanburi:** Connecting local folk culture and women with the ritual of *Bam Boong*, leading to an integration of contemporary art with indigenous beliefs.
- **Nonthaburi:** Creating urban performance spaces through participatory art activities that enable audiences to engage in self-healing.

3. Art as a Space of Transformation

The "space of happiness" is not exclusive to the artist but serves as a "safe space" where individuals can freely discover themselves and experience transformation emotionally, spiritually, and relationally. This is especially significant in communities where art has not previously been encountered as a healing process. The Integrated Visual Arts, Mixed Media, Visual Performance, and Digital Art: Spirit, Body, and Breath series represents both artistic and scholarly work that connects visual art with spirituality and religious beliefs, as well as the role of women in society. This is expressed through diverse media including bodily movement, breath, and ritual offerings. The academic foundation of this work encompasses visual arts, dance, and drama, offering a creative perspective that integrates Thai culture with contemporary performance.

Recommendations

Additional Recommendations for Enhancing the Integrated Visual Performance Art Project: Spirit, Body, and Breath

From the three creative series comprising fifteen works, each embodies a dimension of contemporary relevance by engaging with social issues related to mental health and urban stress. The works deepen spiritual and cultural aspects by drawing upon local traditions and rituals that incorporate beliefs and ceremonies related to "kwan" (spirit), "breath," and "mental restoration." These elements are integrated into the creations to present a unique identity reflecting the roots of Thai society. The artworks establish a connection with nature by incorporating natural elements such as the sound of flowing water, herbal scents, and animations depicting forests, mountains, animals, butterflies, and flowers. These sensory components aim to evoke a genuine sense of returning to nature for the audience. Furthermore, storytelling is enhanced through technology that reflects contemporary digital life, using art as a healing space for individuals experiencing psychological fatigue. Digital and interactive technologies, such as audience participation through animations and interactive art installations, are employed to engage viewers of all ages. The project thus promotes awareness of the body and the search for mental balance through art, offering a new dimension of holistic living in the 21st century. The following additional recommendations are proposed:

1) Creating a holistic immersive experience through multi-sensory integration by incorporating elements such as sound, scent, or tactile sensations within the artwork. For example, using floral or herbal fragrances to evoke atmosphere or designing spaces where

viewers can physically engage with materials related to the art. This can be combined with a collective meditation space, providing designated areas for audiences to practice meditation or synchronized breathing together, using art as a tool to stimulate awareness.

2) Expanding into an international-level project (Global Connectivity) by inviting international artists to collaborate and opening spaces for artists from abroad working in similar fields to participate. This approach aims to enhance the project's diversity and connect with global issues, such as mental restoration in the post-COVID-19/digital era or the impact of urban acceleration. It seeks to amplify effective communication through storytelling centered on the concept of "Kwan" (spirit), reflecting the creators' narratives. Additionally, organizing hybrid exhibitions that incorporate online platforms, such as virtual exhibitions accessible worldwide and live dialogues with artists, will further extend outreach and engagement.

3) Building an Art Community through participatory workshops that actively engage audiences in practices such as breathwork, art therapy, and physical movement alongside artists to promote experiential learning and academic discourse. The project includes seminars and panel discussions addressing key themes, such as the intersection of art and well-being, and the integration of traditional cultures with new media. This approach aims to create long-term impact (Sustainability and Legacy) by fostering sustainable artistic practices. The initiative is grounded in the concept and methodology of integrated visual performance arts combining spirit, body, and breath, contributing to ongoing development, production, and exhibition of works within communities that require multidimensional psychological healing and restoration.

These recommendations enhance the project's depth, convey its contemporaneity, and create a distinctive unity. The creators are confident that this will open a space for self-exploration and offer opportunities for international expansion, thereby broadening the scope of learning and generating sustainable social impact. The key points can be summarized as follows:

1. The space is both physical and abstract, emerging from art—not merely as artwork but as a "state" produced through participatory processes;
2. The concept of "Kwan" serves as the central axis, representing life force, faith, and internal restoration;
3. The outcomes result from integrating contemporary arts (visual art, performance, digital art) with local rituals and immersive fieldwork;
4. The focus is on healing and promoting well-being through art, rather than solely communicating aesthetics or content;
5. Artists function as "listeners," "spiritual communicators," and "interdisciplinary facilitators," embodying the values and meanings of the "Happiness Space"—a "spiritual space" awakened by art through the body, breath, the sound of Kwan, and human participation.

Under the conceptual framework of the creative project series integrating visual arts, mixed media, visual performance arts, and digital art, the interdisciplinary approach combining spirituality, the body, and breath transcends mere "artworks." It is a "process" that generates phenomena and energies leading to transformative shifts in mindset and modes of existence within contemporary society. The ability to synthesize traditional culture, technology, and the needs of modern humanity positions this form of art both as a source of inspiration and a symbol of hope in a world striving for balance and tranquility. The project emphasizes the dissemination of research, creative works, and contemporary art by faculty members and students at an international level through both onsite and virtual exhibitions. This approach fosters knowledge exchange, develops academic networks, and propels Thai arts and culture onto the global stage as a collaborative and participatory platform. Ultimately, it supports the faculty's vision to become a regional hub for contemporary art in Asia and internationally.

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Creating The Whispers Of Hala Bala Soundscape Album

Sutthiphong Ruangchante

Abstract

The Whispers of Hala Bala Album presents a combination of soundscapes from the tropical rainforests of Southeast Asia with music created by AI, focusing on the natural sound from southern Thailand, especially the Hala Bala tropical rainforests in Narathiwat Province. The project aims, first, to foster a deep sense of connection between people in the communities and urban soundscapes, as well as the natural soundscape of Southeast Asia's tropical rainforest, and second, to promote environmental awareness of this unique tropical rainforest soundscape focus on the Hala Bala Wildlife Sanctuary in southern Thailand. The album, which focuses on four important points in Narathiwat Province, consists of eight tracks: (1) Awakening the City, (2) The Heart of the Forest, (3) Interlude of the Stream, (4) Echoes of the Ancients, and tracks five through eight, combining AI-generated music compositions with authentic ambient sound elements, including hornbills, siamang gibbons, dusky langurs, rough-sided frogs, rain, flowing water, and other natural acoustics, accompanied by contemplative melodies. The result is an engaging audio experience that takes listeners right into the sounds of Southeast Asia's tropical rainforest, helping them feel calm and more aware of their environment while they explore the related exhibits. The project not only celebrates the natural beauty of the region's soundscapes but also demonstrates the transformative potential of AI to create meaningful and deeply immersive listening experiences. We design these experiences to inspire reflection, promote mindfulness, and foster a renewed appreciation of the tropical rainforest in Thailand. We achieve this by seamlessly blending traditional and contemporary elements. It is important to note that music created by AI has certain limitations, and humans continue to be the most nuanced creators of soundscapes with music composition.

Keywords: tropical rainforest soundscape, Hala Bala, the Whispers of Hala Bala Soundscape Album

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

At present, climate change is having a serious impact all over the world. It is caused by both natural and human behavioral changes. One of the important factors affecting global temperature variability is the encroachment of forest areas without understanding the ecology, biodiversity, and value of forest resources that affect the balance of the ecosystem and global temperature.

Forests are natural resources that help maintain a stable global temperature because forests can absorb carbon dioxide (CO2) from the atmosphere. In addition, many Trees can help increase humidity by releasing water vapor into the atmosphere, protecting the soil from sunlight, and maintaining the balance and diversity of nature. According to the World Resources Institute (WRI), The forests are a watershed area, a natural water storage, and a habitat for a variety of wildlife. Global Forest Watch in 2019 found the world has approximately 4.2 million hectares or 262.5 million rai of forest, accounting for 31 percent of the world's total area. However, within just 30 years, the world has lost more than 420 million hectares of forest, which accounts for approximately 10.34% of the total forest area. In 2021 alone, the world lost 12% more forests. (World Resources Institute, 2019). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 2022 stated that, although the rate

of deforestation has decreased somewhat. The world still loses around 10 million hectares of forest annually, or approximately 62.5 million rai. Moreover, the impact of forest loss has severely impacted species, with over 80% of amphibians, 75% of birds, and 68% of mammals facing habitat loss. (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2022; Seub Nakhasathien Foundation, 2022)

Forest Situation in Thailand, in 2022, Thailand had approximately 102.14 million rai of forest area, accounting for 31.57% of the country's total land area. However, between 2023 and 2024, the highest loss of forest area in the past 10 years was found, accounting for 317,819.20 rai, resulting in the remaining forest area in 2024 being approximately 101.82 million rai, or 31.47% of the country's area. Although more than 101.63 million rai of forest remains in its original state, and an additional 190,335.90 rai has regenerated as new forest, the overall trend still shows a continued decline. (Forest Land Management Office, 2025)

The decline in forest areas in Thailand has affected the ecosystem in many ways. Not only does it cause the loss of wildlife habitats, but it also causes problems of natural imbalance. To cope with the problem of forest loss, sustainable forest resource management policies are needed. Both at the international and local levels, such as supporting reforestation, promoting community participation, and strictly controlling land use. In particular, raising awareness of the conservation of natural resources and forests in the southern region of Thailand, which is Thailand's rich tropical rainforest.

The Hala Bala Forest" is a large tropical rainforest in the southernmost part of Thailand. It covers an area of approximately 626.7 square kilometers, covering Yala and Narathiwat provinces, and connects to the Belum Forest of Malaysia. It is an important source of biodiversity, especially hornbills, which are found in 9 out of 12 species in Thailand. This biodiversity is an indicator of the richness of the forest. Hala Bala Forest is also home to rare animals such as the Siamang, which is black and larger than the common gibbon, the black-handed gibbon, the toad frog, which is the largest frog in Thailand, and many rare trees. In addition, there are also ecotourism attractions such as the Two-Country Sea of Mist Viewpoint, the animal viewing point, the giant sequoia tree, and many waterfalls such as Sri Thaksin Waterfall, Sirindhorn Waterfall, Sai Rung Waterfall, and Bale Waterfall, which help promote learning about nature and sustainable tourism (Tourism Authority of Thailand, n.d.)

The tropical rainforest Sound is a natural phenomenon that occurs only in the environment of the tropical rainforest, which consists of natural sounds, animal sounds, and various species of insect sounds. It also includes sounds of human activities such as ritual sounds, daily life sounds, local language sounds, and ethnic music, which resonate throughout the day. Justin Winkler, a sound geographer, has defined the term "silence" as a consideration of sound and ecology. In his concept, silence is a soundscape that is different from the stillness of an industrial city or factory. "... Silence is a concept that shines, separate from noise and disturbances..." (Winkler, 2006, p. 184)

The soundscape will make the listener perceive the feelings, environment, and phenomena in that area, together as tropical rainforest soundscape, meaning the soundscape in the tropical rainforest. Which is considered a part of the acoustic ecology that humans can perceive, both environmental sounds and sounds from animals, both tangible and Abstract sounds. The tropical rainforest soundscape consists of 2 words, *first*, tropical rainforest, meaning forests near the equator that receive over 100 inches of rain a year and maintain high average temperatures, and *second*, soundscape, consists of sound, meaning vibration that propagates as an acoustic wave, it can be music and noises, and scape, meaning, landscape, seascape, or soundscape. In summary, the tropical rainforest soundscape means "sounds that occur in a certain area and certain time in forests near the equator that receive over 100 inches of rain a year and maintain high average temperatures" Currently, there are compositions of

music that imitate and use tropical rainforest sounds as an important component in the compositions.

The person who began to study acoustic ecology seriously and is considered a pioneer of soundscape is Raymond Murray Schafer, a Canadian composer and ecologist. He studied sounds, the sound environment, and noise pollution. He is also the founder of the World Soundscape Project (WSP), along with many other notable artists and researchers such as Barry Truax and Bruce Davis. Soundscape refers to the perception and emotional experience of a place or environment, shaped by the various sounds present in that soundscape area. Soundscape is Mostly recordings of the atmosphere or events at a place, that create memories and open perception in another form because sound can also tell stories.

Applications of soundscape studies include planning for sustainable development in harmony with the environment, designing public spaces that prioritize quality of life, and developing policies for noise control across various areas. To create an environment suitable for people's lives in society and their living habits in various areas (Schafer, 1993, pp. 15-53) With such origins and importance, the author is interested in the story of tropical rainforest soundscape, especially the soundscape of the tropical rainforest in the Hala Bala Wildlife Sanctuary. (Narathiwat Provincial Administrative Organization, 2021)

The project aims, first, to foster a deep sense of connection between people in the communities and urban soundscapes, as well as the natural soundscape of Southeast Asia's tropical rainforest, and second, to promote environmental awareness of this unique tropical rainforest soundscape focus on the Hala Bala Wildlife Sanctuary in southern Thailand.

Approach

This project uses a soundscape composition and recording technic, integrating soundscape concepts and theories, music theory, the sound of physics theory, and sound engineering theory. It is a journey to find sounds that indicate the identity of the tropical rainforest, considering the theory of Time and Space. It used knowledge of geography, biology, and sound physics as basic information and used technological devices to collect high-quality data. In addition, the data was collected using a Zoom H8 field recorder, two condenser microphones, and cameras. For mixing and editing, home studio recording equipment was used, along with sound editing software, additional plug-in applications, and an AI-assisted music editing program.

The album represents a unique fusion of world music, and an in-depth exploration of the tropical rainforest soundscapes found in Southeast Asia particularly those of the local markets and the Hala-Bala Wildlife Sanctuary in Narathiwat Province, southern Thailand. This project aims to foster a deep sense of connection between the urban environment, world music, tropical rainforest soundscape, and the ideals of peace and mindfulness of Listeners. The Listening Concept is as follows:

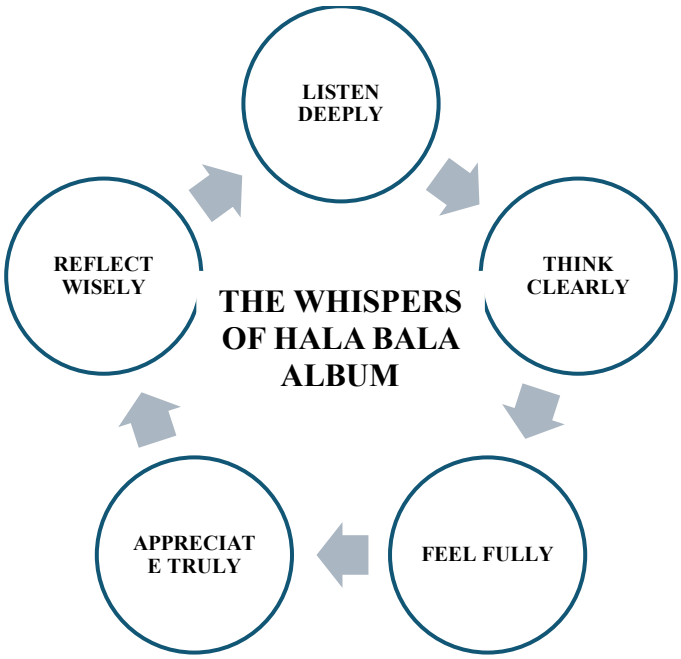


Figure 1: The Listening Concept for the Album Whispers of Hala Bala

The design process is inspired by the 10 innovations of Doblin (2020); the Human-centered design process by IDEO (2013); and the PDCA Circle by Edwards Deming (1951). The Design Process for The Whispers of Hala-Bala Album consists of five steps as follows:



Figure 2: The five steps creative process behind The Whispers of Hala Bala Album

Step 1: Inspiration, the step consists of 3 components. (1) Problems, natural changes, and human behavior of forest encroachment are big problems. (2) People, human live in the forest and surrounding areas lack knowledge and understanding about forests and ecology, and people living outside the area have difficulty accessing the area. (3) Need, the demand for space and resource consumption in the forest area has increased. Cities have expanded and encroached on the forest, reducing the forest area. In addition, global warming caused by many factors has a direct impact on the rapid decrease in the sound of the tropical rainforest. The extinction of living things in the area has greatly reduced the density of the sound of the tropical rainforest, making the sound of the tropical rainforest rare. Therefore, the need to experience the value and benefits of tropical rainforest sound has increased.

Step 2: Ideation, the step has 2 components. (1) Brainstorming, creating, or generating new things requires a team to brainstorm, share ideas, and debate to find strengths and close weaknesses in thinking based on creativity towards innovation by analyzing problems from real situations, asking questions such as what problems there are, what do people think, and what are the needs of the audience and the market? And (2) Planning, planning under the conditions of policy, time, place, and budget are important.

Step 3: Implementation consists of 6 components, (1) Fieldwork, the purpose of this fieldwork is to collect data in the actual area, survey, and experiment with sound recordings to further develop into future spatial research. The trip will be held from October 26-28, 2024, by

plane from Suvarnabhumi Airport to Narathiwat Airport. The survey and sound data collection points are Muang Narathiwat Municipal Public Park, Narathiwat Central Mosque, Buketa Border Checkpoint, The Khok Mai Rua Wildlife Breeding Station, and The Hala Bala Wildlife Sanctuary. (2) Soundscape Composition and Recording, this Album used 2 types of Composition techniques: First, finding the right place and time, installing sound recording equipment, and second, recording sound at every point and then taking the resulting sound files into the sound design process in the recording studio. (3) Data Analysis, this is the process of managing raw data to convert it into in-depth information. and useful information and analyze the information to obtain meaningful sound data that can be used to create works. (4) Plan and adjustment, when we have useful sound data, we design the album and go back to review the Ideation process again to design the works. (5) Mixing, Balancing the various sounds in each soundscape track, both music and sounds of all types of instruments, to be in the right place in terms of loudness-softness, and front-back dimensions, taking into account the mood of the song, bringing out the sounds of important instruments and those of groups of soundscape and music instruments to be prominent, to increase the pleasant sound, linking to sound in The Hala Bala Wildlife Sanctuary. And (6) Mastering: The process of taking soundscape tracks that have been mixed and then carefully adjusting the overall bass and treble tones, managing the level of tightness or transparency of the sound, and adding dimensions to the vocals, soundscape, and musical instruments to maintain the identity that the composer intended to communicate.

Steps 4 and 5: Evaluation and Publication, these steps involve the assessment of the creators, the team, and relevant experts. The publication phase initiates the process of reflection and critique through discussions, learning reflections, and online platforms. The goal is to gather audience feedback and use it to enhance future work.

By seamlessly integrating both traditional and contemporary elements, this project not only celebrates the inherent beauty of the region's soundscapes but also demonstrates the transformative potential of AI in crafting deeply meaningful, immersive auditory experiences. These experiences are designed to inspire reflection, foster mindfulness, and promote a renewed appreciation for the natural world.

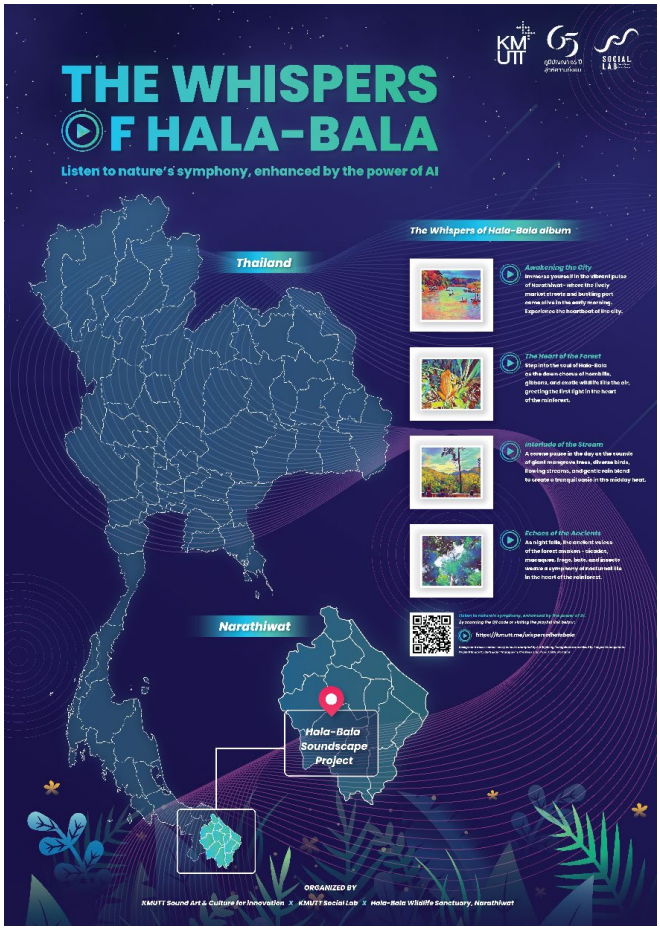


Figure 3: The Whispers of Hala Bala Soundscape Album Poster

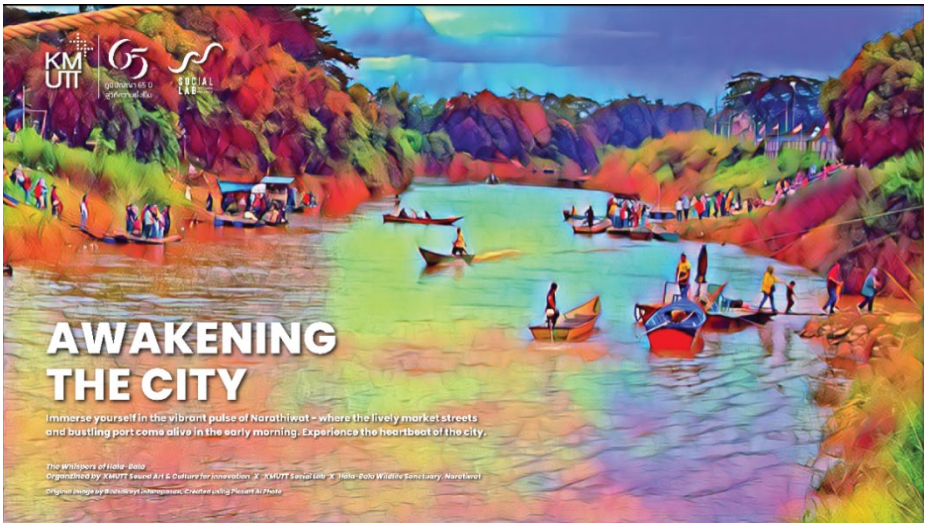


Figure 4: Awakening the City Poster



Figure 5: The Heart of the Forest Poster, Interlude of the Stream Poster, and Echoes of the Ancients Poster

The album, which focuses on four important points in Narathiwat Province, consists of eight tracks: (1) Awakening the City: Immerse yourself in the vibrant pulse of Narathiwat—where the lively market streets and bustling port come alive in the early morning. Experience the heartbeat of the city, (2) The Heart of the Forest: Step into the soul of Hala Bala as the dawn chorus of hornbills, gibbons, and exotic wildlife fills the air, greeting the first light in the heart of the rainforest, (3) Interlude of the Stream: A serene pause in the day as the sounds of giant mangrove trees, diverse birds, flowing streams, and gentle rain blend to create a tranquil oasis in the midday heat, and (4) Echoes of the Ancients: As night falls, the ancient voices of the forest awaken—cicadas, macaques, frogs, bats, and insects weave a symphony of nocturnal life in the heart of the rainforest.

Tracks five through eight combine AI-generated musical compositions with authentic ambient sounds tropical rainforest sounds—such as hornbills, siamang gibbons, dusky langurs, rough-sided frogs, rain, flowing water, and other natural acoustics—accompanied by contemplative melodies.

Results

The Whispers of Hala Bala Soundscape Album: The album intricately blends AI-generated musical compositions with authentic environmental sound elements—such as rain, birdsong, flowing water, and other natural acoustics complemented by meditative melodies. The result is an immersive auditory journey that transports listeners to the heart of the Southeast Asian rainforest encouraging a deep sense of tranquility and heightened awareness of the surrounding environment.

An engaging audio experience in the sounds of The Hala Bala Soundscape: The Album takes listeners right into the sounds of Southeast Asia's tropical rainforest, helping them feel calm and more aware of their environment while they explore the related exhibits. The project

not only celebrates the natural beauty of the region's soundscapes but also demonstrates the transformative potential of AI to create meaningful and deeply immersive listening experiences. We design these experiences to inspire reflection,

The results of the publication in 3 Areas: First, this work has received attention and has been invited to participate in the academic conference of the Council of University Presidents of Thailand (CUP) 2024 (AI IN HIGHER EDUCATION), held on December 21, 2024, Auditorium Room, Learning Exchange (LX) Building, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi. Second, this work has also received attention and has been invited to participate in the art exhibition and charity concert of Shinawatra University 2025, held on February 13, 2025, at the Small Auditorium, Thailand Cultural Center. This work aims to showcase the artwork of Shinawatra University's doctoral students and the performance of the YES Chorus, and the Last. In addition, this work has been used as teaching media in the SSC222 Arts and Humankind course in the first semester of 2024, which is a free elective course in the Social Sciences and Humanities program, Faculty of Liberal Arts. King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi's special case of the course is creative soundscape recording through art, science, and their Integration. The learning outcomes are that learners will be able to create, and present soundscape recordings based on core principles and demonstrate awareness of their environmental impact as well as an appreciation for the value of soundscapes.



Figure 6: The academic conference of the Council of University Presidents of Thailand (CUP) 2024 (AI IN HIGHER EDUCATION),



Figure 7: Shinawatra University Art Exhibition and Charity Concert 2025



Figure 8: Teaching Classroom: SSC222 Arts and Humankind semester 1/2024

Reflections on the Listening Experience of The Whispers of Hala-Bala Album by Participants in the First and Second Exhibitions: Listening to the sounds of nature recorded from The Hala Bala Wildlife Sanctuary made participants feel calm, beautifully, like they were really in the tropical rainforest. It was relaxing and suitable for listening, especially when they feel stressed or before going to bed. It can be used for therapy. I like it, am very impressed, and understand nature more. I am aware of nature. Listening through various forms of sound media—such as analog recordings and AI-processed audio creates a profound experience that evokes emotion, highlights beauty, and fosters environmental awareness. The sounds feel incredibly realistic. To the point that it can create an atmosphere that makes the listener feel like they are truly in the middle of a natural forest. However, while those sounds reflect the beauty and tranquility of nature, the listeners feel sad and aware of the fragility of the ecosystem because they know that The Hala Bala Wildlife Sanctuary is one of the forest areas that is facing threats from human activities. Nature is not only the environment around humans but is an important element of life and spirit. Therefore, the sounds of nature are not just background sounds, but the sounds of living things that are beautiful and balanced in themselves.

Reflections on the Listening Experience of The Whispers of Hala-Bala Album by Students in the SSC222 Classroom: It is a new experience for listening and imagining through the sounds of The Hala Bala Wildlife Sanctuary. This Album has artistic value and deep psychology. Furthermore, it can stimulate the feelings and imagination of the listener powerfully. The represented sounds are not just ordinary sound data, but it is a medium that takes the listener on a journey to experience the natural environment through creating imaginary images of the movement of living things, wind, water, and various elements around. What is interesting is that listening to these sounds not only provides relaxation but also creates excitement and curiosity. The listener wonders in their mind, what is the sound they hear. This question not only reflects personal curiosity but also offers the listener a chance to truly experience the act of "listening" in a new way. Especially, sounds that they may have never heard before in their daily lives. Listening to natural sounds in this way has the potential to stimulate interest and learning about the soundscape of the tropical forest, which is a dimension of the environment that is often overlooked. The sounds of birds, wild animals, flowing water, and wind are not only the sounds of things in nature but also symbols of a complex and fragile ecosystem. When these natural sounds are disturbed by human activities, such as deforestation or noise pollution from machines and vehicles, it affects the balance of the natural sound system. Being aware of this point is therefore very important. Because listening to the sounds of the tropical rainforest is not just an activity for enjoyment, but also an exercise in observation, thinking, analyzing, and interpreting critically. Ultimately, listening to the sounds of nature has the potential to create awareness of the role of forests as habitats for various species of life, and can become an inspiration for listeners to realize the value of nature, leading to serious action to protect and conserve the environment.

Reflections on the Listening Experience of The Whispers of Hala-Bala Album by the Team Working: More than just hearing, it is listening with heart. Not only just listening for enjoyment, but also a good tool for practicing mindfulness. The sounds of the tropical rainforest connect the listener to nature place. When we listen intently to the sounds that tell stories—whether it's the voices of people, the rain, a flowing stream, or the calls of creatures in the forest—these sounds help us feel calm, stay mindful of the present moment, reflect on our thoughts and emotions without rushing, and bring balance to both body and mind. In addition, listening intently creates awareness of the beauty and fragility of nature, inviting us to question how long these sounds will continue to be available for us to listen to, creating a sense of cherishing and wanting to be a part of conserving nature so that these sounds will continue to exist.

From the perspective of wanting to create this work through AI, The Whispers of Hala-Bala Album is one example of combining Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology with natural sounds to create a listening experience that connects humans with nature. Although currently, Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology can create sounds that imitate nature, the sounds that occur from nature still have something that technology cannot completely imitate, which is aliveness, which reflects the presence and movement of life in nature. Whether it is the sound of prayers in a mosque, the sound of heavy rain mixed with the sounds of frogs competing to cry, sounds of wind blowing through the leaves of the giant sequoia tree. All of these are sounds that arise spontaneously unplanned and beyond our control. More than just hearing, we feel the emotions that nature conveys through sound. Preserving nature in the real world—not merely recreating it in simulations—is a responsibility we all share.

CONCLUSION

Due to the current severe climate change caused by both nature and human activities, especially the encroachment on forest areas without understanding the ecosystem, the world has been continuously losing forest areas, affecting the balance of nature and wildlife habitats.

Despite the efforts to restore it, the trend of forest depletion, such as in Thailand, is still worrying. One of the forests that is important to the world is The Hala Bala Wildlife Sanctuary, located in the southern part of Thailand. It is a source of biodiversity, both rare animals and endemic plants. In addition to its abundance, this forest also has a tropical rainforest soundscape consisting of sounds from nature, sounds of things, and sounds of human life, which reflects the relationship between the environment and multiculturalism in a valuable way. The Whispers of Hala Bala Soundscape Album is the first project to explore the tropical rainforest soundscape of the Hala-Bala Wildlife Sanctuary. It not only supports physical conservation efforts but also fosters awareness and environmental consciousness through the power of sound. These sounds have become an important tool in creating an understanding of the environment and are a new approach to sustainable nature conservation, especially in important areas such as the Hala-Bala Wildlife Sanctuary.

Reflections on the experience of listening to The Whispers of Hala-Bala album reveal that listeners have opened themselves to new experiences that powerfully stimulate their feelings and imagination. Tropical rainforest sounds are a medium that takes listeners to experience the natural environment, making listeners question what the sound is. It makes listeners turn to experience its value and benefits and create awareness. Because listening to the sounds of the tropical rainforest is not just an activity for enjoyment, but also a practice of observation, thinking, analyzing, and interpreting critically. Using the heart to listen is not just listening for enjoyment, but also a good tool for practicing mindfulness. The sounds of the tropical rainforest can connect listeners to nature. When we listen intently to the sounds that are telling stories, the sound will lead listeners to calmness, mindfulness, unhurriedness, and balance in life.

Finally, The Whispers of Hala-Bala Album is a sound recording in the Hala-Bala Wildlife Sanctuary to be a database of how much diversity and density of sound ecology there is in each area at a given time. This work can help understand participation in the tropical rainforest, create awareness of the impact on the soundscape in different areas, as well as educate communities about conservation and sustainable use of sound. It can also inspire listeners to realize the value of nature, leading to serious action to protect and conserve the environment, to the beauty and fragility of nature, to question environmental conservation, and finally, to the use of AI in this piece. There are still things that technology cannot make this work alive, which is still a challenge for technology developers to continue developing AI in the future.

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Embodied Cartography in Masinloc, West Philippine Sea

Annelys De Vet[1], Josephine Turalba[2], Lyn Viado[3]

Introduction

Scarborough Shoal, locally known as Bajo de Masinloc or Panatag Shoal, has long served as a natural refuge for small-scale fishing boats. The shoal's natural formation, with its lagoon surrounded by reefs, has historically offered calm and safe shelter during stormy weather, which is the basis for its local name 'Panatag' (Lopez, 2024), meaning "calm" or "tranquil" in Filipino. The term holds both emotional and historical resonance for Filipino fisherfolk. However, this sense of refuge has been disrupted by intensifying geopolitical conflict in recent years.

220 kilometers off the Philippines' largest island, Luzon, Panatag Shoal sits within the exclusive economic zone and municipal fishing grounds. Its strategic location in the West Philippine Sea places it on a corridor carrying about $3.4 trillion in trade annually. Over the past two decades, China's aggressive military expansion in the region has prompted increased naval and surveillance activity from other foreign powers seeking to protect vital trade routes. Local communities now face restricted fishing, constant monitoring, and militarized waters, straining both their livelihood and their bond to the sea. In this climate, the right to represent one's place, to name and narrate it, becomes both an act of agency and survival.

Drawing on the Subjective Atlas framework's emphasis on lived, emotional, and sensory geographies, we organized a workshop with the fisherfolk as narrative-makers and visual co-authors of place. Memory, story, and embodied knowledge are validated through subjective mapping as essential ways of knowing, capable of challenging colonial and technocratic norms of representation. This participatory art-based approach engages in reframing its cartography, not as an extractive or imperial tool, but as a method of listening, reciprocity, and co-authorship.

The activity was part of Project PANATAG, led by artist Josephine Turalba. The workshop applied the Subjective Atlas methodology, developed through Subjective Editions as part of Annelys de Vet's design practice in critical and participatory cartography. Their joint *Subjective Atlas of the Philippines* brings this methodology into local contexts through collaborative visual mapping. This article reflects on the participatory mapping workshop held in Masinloc, Zambales, where our respective artistic research practices intersected through embodied cartography and subjective mapping. In Masinloc, we came together with fisherfolk, marine biology students, and local artists to co-create drawings and visual narratives that surfaced memory, cultural knowledge, and lived experience in the West Philippine Sea.

While building on the momentum from prior workshops in the context of the *Subjective Atlas of the Philippines*, the Masinloc workshop stood out for its immediate geopolitical relevance and emotional depth. While still being in the middle of the process, and eager to learn from our experiences, this article examines how participatory visual methods may contribute to place-making, narrative sovereignty, and political presence in contested maritime spaces. Through this reflection, we seek to understand how embodied cartography can become a tool for both representation and resistance.



Figure 1. Young learners actively contributing their insights and creativity during the workshop. Photo by Viado, 2025.

Methodology

A conceptual anchor of PANATAG is the *Mapa de las Islas Filipinas* (1734), created by Jesuit priest Pedro Murillo Velarde and engraved by Filipino artist Nicolás de la Cruz Bagay. While often cited in legal efforts to assert Philippine territorial claims, the map is also a colonial artifact, designed to fix borders and assert imperial control. By juxtaposing this map with the community-generated visual expressions from Masinloc, with our way of working, we aim to reclaim the right to draw and to redraw. It repositions cartographic authority from the state to the sea's stewards, demonstrating that maps can emerge not only from surveyors' tools but from the hands of those who fish, remember, and resist.

To understand the socio-political and cultural dimensions of coastal life in Masinloc, we employed a framework that is grounded in artistic research, participatory design, and embodied cartography. These methodologies are rooted in the Subjective Atlas framework, which positions mapping as a political and cultural act shaped by lived experience (De Vet, 2007, 2015). Here we treat cartography not as a static or objective tool, but as a performative, sensory, and participatory process that centers co-creation and local authorship.

The workshop design evolved organically as well as was intentional, shaped by the participants' responses, available energy, and unfolding conversations. Rather than following a linear structure, the day unfolded fluidly, beginning with a simple icebreaker, followed by a short presentation of previous workshop outputs to help set expectations and establish rapport, then drawing, sharing, and collaborative engagements that emerged naturally from the group dynamic. While the overall day unfolded with flexibility, many components were intentionally designed. Flag collages, for instance, were offered as a continuous option throughout the workshop. Participants engaged with it voluntarily—some during breaks, others in between drawing or after completing their main work. This open structure allowed for layered engagement and self-paced participation. This flexibility supported varied expressions and levels of participation.

Drawing was prioritized as a low-barrier yet expressive form that allowed for both individual and collective meaning-making. Collaborative drawing with Casa San Miguel resident artists enabled layered interpretations, while participants also shared media—photos and videos—from their mobile devices, which were collected by the project documenter with their consent. Facilitators posed questions such as "What's the first word that comes to mind when you think of your region of the Philippines?" and "How do you experience your environment through daily life?" to activate reflection. These guided prompts were supported by group discussions and hands-on art-making.

24 Participants included seventeen (17) fisherfolk and extended community (mostly men) and eight (8) student trainees of B.S. Fisheries from President Ramon Magsaysay State University. Tables were initially mixed to encourage dialogue across backgrounds, but participants naturally gravitated toward configurations where they felt most comfortable. Each table was supported by facilitators and CSM artists to assist with translation, motivation, and story-to-image development.

The project was structured with embedded ethical care. Informed consent was secured at registration, and participants received a modest honorarium to compensate for lost income. A gender sensitivity briefing was conducted by a social worker. Facilitators remained flexible, allowing participants to engage in their own ways, through quiet drawing, spontaneous karaoke, or oral storytelling. The atmosphere was kept relaxed and hospitable, supported by unlimited coffee, a mid-morning snack, a full lunch, and a mid-afternoon snack served before the workshop concluded. These provisions were essential in sustaining energy and signaling care throughout the day. In Filipino culture, eating together fosters connection and dialogue, and mealtimes are moments of informal exchange and trust-building among participants and facilitators.

This situated research methodology affirmed the agency of all participants, not merely as contributors, but as co-authors. Rather than imposing rigid forms, PANATAG facilitated conditions for an emergent and embodied mapping practice grounded in lived experience, cultural rhythm, and community trust. By facilitating processes rather than imposing form, PANATAG cultivates the conditions for an alternative cartography, rooted in lived experience, sensory presence, and the fluid rhythm of coastal life.

The contributions will appear in the *Subjective Atlas of the Philippines*, internationally distributed as both a printed volume and a downloadable PDF. Published under a Creative Commons license, the work can be freely circulated and republished across platforms, expanding its accessibility and reach. The book will also be shared directly with the fisherfolk and other participants upon completion. Beyond its printed format, select contributors will be invited to speak at public launch events to present their contributions and use their visualisations as storytelling tools. These presentations offer participants an opportunity to further articulate their lived realities, allowing the visual material to function not only as a representation but also as a generative tool for personal and political narration.

The reflections and observations in the following section are drawn from this single-day workshop and informed by the authors' field notes, facilitation, and documentation of the co-creative process. While mediated through researcher observation, they reflect the voices, drawings, and shared experiences of Masinloc participants.

Findings / Field-Based Insights

The following four insights emerged from our shared fieldwork during the Masinloc workshop. The reflections are drawn from conversations with the participants, informal storytelling, and artistic expressions exchanged throughout the day. They represent our collective interpretation of the experiences voiced and visualized by the community. They are grounded in unpublished field notes by three of the workshop's primary facilitators and documenters: Annelys de Vet, Josephine Turalba, and Lyn Viado (June 2025).

1. **Community maps reveal profound emotional ties to the sea that challenge official narratives.**
   Participants' responses during the Masinloc workshop revealed deeply rooted emotional and cultural ties to the sea that challenge dominant territorial framings. As Turalba recounts, "The act of naming terms like laot [open sea], layag [sail], tyaga [perseverance], banayad [calm], and mamamana [hunter/fisher with bow and arrow] reflects deeply felt experiences and relationships with the sea, which contribute to the emotional and cultural mapping of maritime space." These terms go beyond mere geographic markers; they carry affective, ancestral, and livelihood meanings.



Figure 2. Responses for the one-word ice breaker. Photo taken by Annelys De Vet.

Community-generated maps transcend traditional cartographic boundaries by capturing these emotional, cultural, and spiritual connections—dimensions often absent from official representations. We further observed that their songs, drawings, and stories created a collective mapping, rooted in a sum of individual voices, and inspired or informed by each other. The workshop space itself became a site of both vulnerability and vitality. These expressive cartographies reveal affective geographies that directly challenge dominant state narratives, reframing maritime discourse through deeply personal storytelling and art, focusing on experiences with place rather than depicting 'neutral' geography.

Lyn Viado's detailed observations provide vivid insight into the lived realities behind these maps:

"Geovani is a local artist in Masinloc. He creates reggae music and sometimes performs at the beach resorts with his band. He is also a local tattoo artist in the area and was recognized by his fisherfolk friends as a great artist. During the workshop, he created a flag that symbolizes free sailing or 'Malayang Paglalayag' [Free Sailing]. He also drew the common food of the fisher folks, known locally as 'daing' [sun-dried fish], paired with fresh tomatoes and seaweed. According to Geovani, they typically eat this dish when they can't go out to sea because of bad weather."

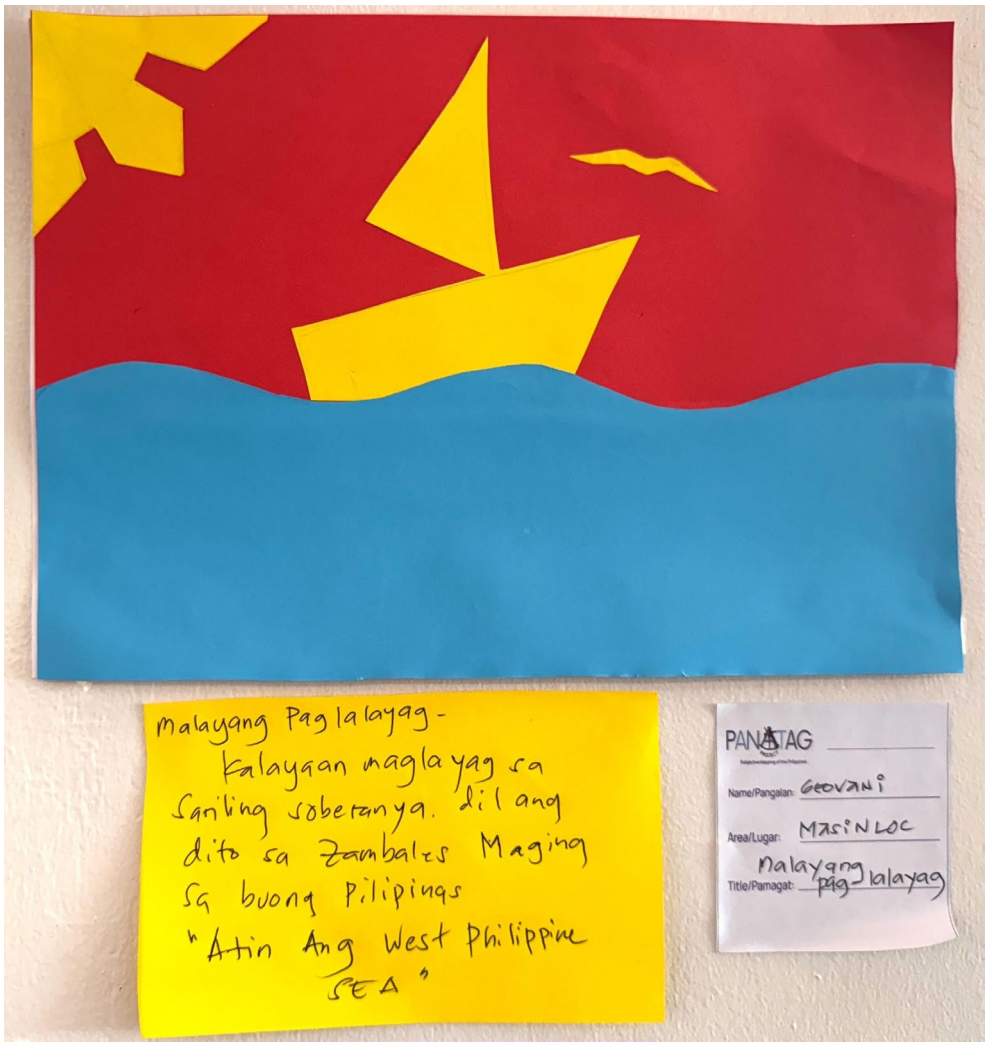


Figure 3. *Malayang Paglalayag* by Geovani Macatuno. Photo taken by Josephine Turalba.

> Viado also recounts how environmental and geopolitical challenges shape the community's experiences:

"We used to catch a lot of fish, but now, due to dredging activities in their area, their catch of fish has significantly reduced. Geovani verbalized that, 'Marami na po ang tatlong isda sa isang laot.'[Catching even just three fish in one fishing trip is already considered plenty.] There are also recent mining activities in their area, which result in flooding whenever there's a typhoon. Other fishermen shared that they usually fish in the area of Scarborough Shoal because this is where a lot of different fish live, and they catch a lot of fish for a living. However, due to the presence of Chinese personalities and infrastructure in the area, they are not allowed to go there or even near the Scarborough Shoal. They fear reprisals by water cannons from the Chinese if they are spotted in the area. Since the territorial dispute has been affecting their source of living, fisherfolk are forced to find alternative work aside from fishing."

In addition to these hardships, cultural practices remain vital:

"Some participants also shared how they honor their cultural practices when fishing. One fisherman averred, 'Pag pumapalaot po kami, may mga baon po kaming pagkain. Binibigyan

po namin ng kapiraso ng pagkain naming ang mga isda at hinuhulog sa dagat para maka huli kami ng maraming isda.' It is also their way of giving back to the God of the sea, which they call 'Bathala,' for all the fish that they catch when fishing. Also, this serves as their charm to catch more fish every time they sail."
Echoing these perspectives, De Vet states, "I believe art opens another space... we ask for their stories, any story, not a particular story," highlighting the power of open-ended, participatory storytelling in shaping alternative spatial imaginaries grounded in lived experience.



Figure 4. *Ingat Papa* by Anthony "Kapitan Tony" Collado, Rendered map.

2. Naming Panatag asserts local sovereignty and cultural memory.

This theme emerged directly from the stories and discussions shared during the workshop, where naming practices—both formal and informal—surfaced as key expressions of identity, memory, and place. In the broader geopolitical context, the contested shoal is referred to by the Philippines as *Panatag Shoal* or *Bajo de Masinloc*, while China calls it *Huangyan Dao*（黄岩岛）. These divergent names reflect competing territorial claims and geopolitical narratives. Against this backdrop, the fisherfolk's continued use of "Panatag" or "Bajo de Masinloc" reclaims a localized, lived relationship to the sea, rooted in history, livelihood, and cultural memory.

We heard fisherfolk speak about Scarborough Shoal and their historical fishing rights there, asserting their connection and traditional knowledge about the territory. As Lyn Viado recorded:

"Other fishermen shared that they usually fish in the area of Scarborough Shoal because this is where a lot of different fish live, and they catch a lot of fish for a living. However, due to the presence of Chinese personalities and infrastructure in the area, they are not allowed to go there or even go near the Scarborough Shoal. They fear reprisals by water cannons from the Chinese if they are spotted in the area."

This highlights how naming *Scarborough* affirms their lived experience, cultural memory, and claims to local sovereignty despite territorial restrictions. As Turalba explains, the term *Panatag* embodies resistance by asserting community identity and memory against external impositions

By invoking Panatag, the community reclaims a narrative of peace and safety in a geopolitically tense region. This localized naming functions as both an act of poetic resistance and a tool for galvanizing solidarity. It fosters pride, continuity, and stewardship of land and sea. Naming transforms Abstract geopolitical struggles into lived realities—where identity, memory, and place intersect meaningfully (A. De Vet & L. Viado, unpublished field notes, June 2025).

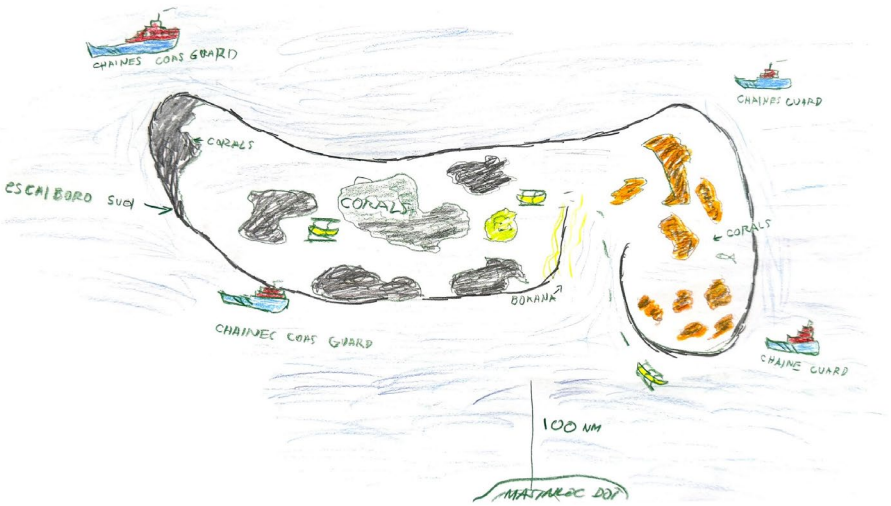


Figure 5. *Bawal Mangisda* by Marcial Lequiron, Rendered map.

Thus, naming reclaims agency, articulates belonging, and resists erasure. It reinforces the community's stake in shaping their maritime future on their own terms.

3. **Embodied cartography contributes to collective solidarity.**
Throughout the workshop, we witnessed how mapping and image-making became practices of togetherness. Group artworks—such as Geovani's flag, symbolizing "Malayang Paglalayag" (Free Sailing)—emerged as powerful expressions of shared identity and aspiration. As Viado wrote, "He also drew the common food of the fisher folks, known locally as 'daing,' paired with fresh tomatoes and seaweed" (Viado, unpublished field notes, June 2025).

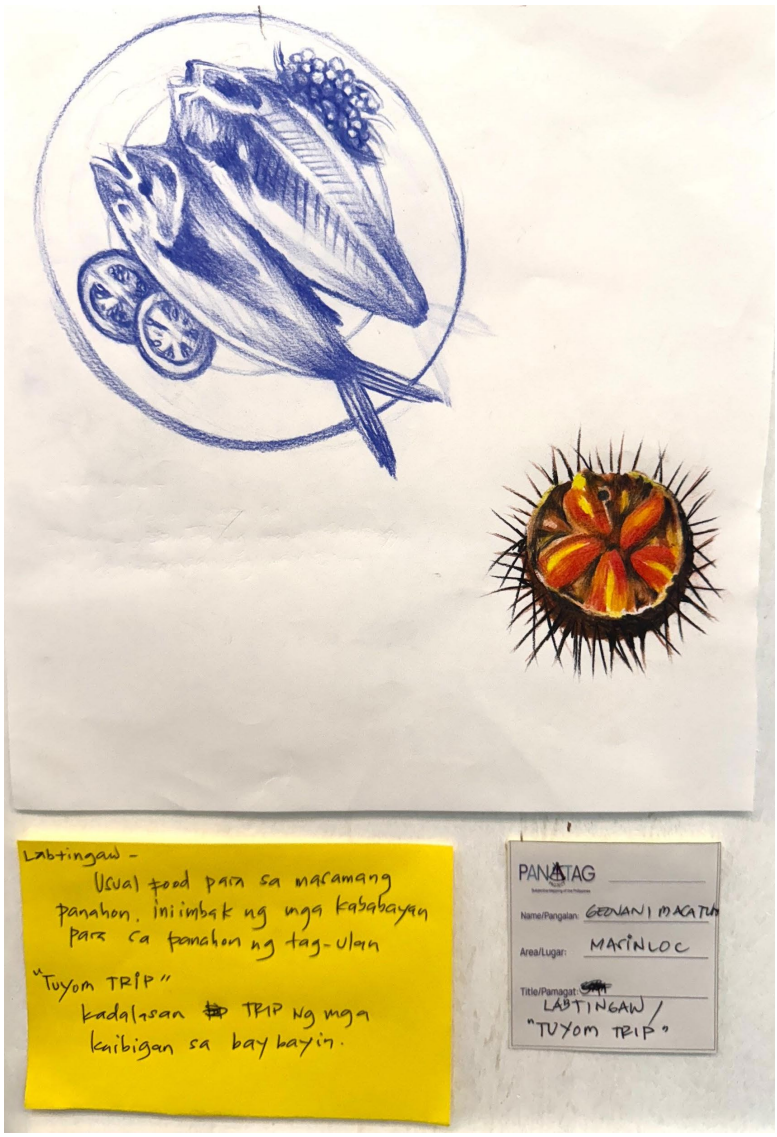


Figure 6. *Labtingaw / Tuyom Trip* by Geovani Macatuno. Photo taken by Josephine Turalba.

These drawings, hung side by side, became visual anchors of both personal expression and communal meaning. Through collaborative creation and storytelling, the artworks reflected shared hopes and fostered solidarity across the room.

Facilitators and artists played an active role in animating these expressions, moving from table to table to support, translate, and amplify the stories being told through images. De Vet (unpublished field notes, June 2025) noted that while flag-making was introduced as an optional activity, "more and more people wanted to make one." This growing interest in shared visual expression underscored the resonance of the activity.

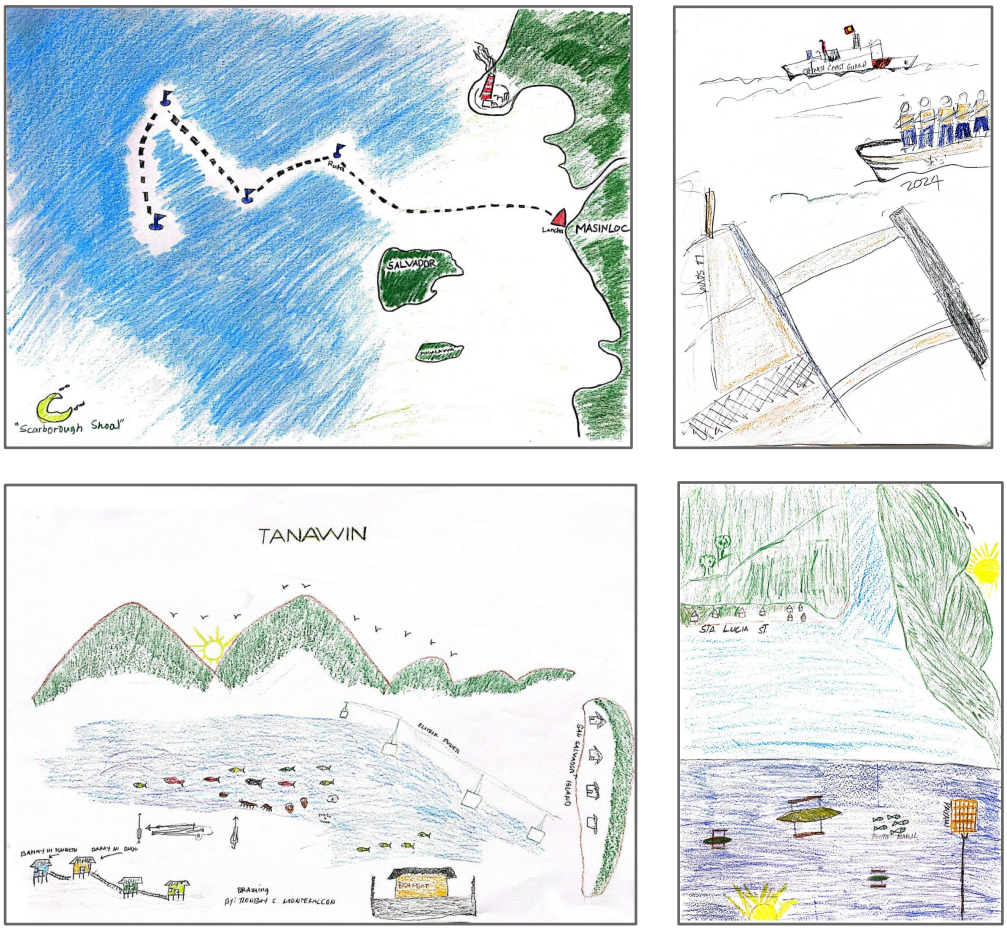


Figure 7. The maps trace movements through embodied cartography, revealing personal rhythms, memories, and emotional landscapes.



Figure 8. Series of alternative flags designed by the fisherfolk during our workshop.

Co-creation fostered camaraderie across differences. Whether participants were fisherfolk or students, seasoned artists or first-time illustrators, each group found commonality in the act of drawing. The visual nature of the process leveled the playing field, allowing for communication beyond words.

Importantly, the collective nature of the cartographic output—walls lined with flags, maps, and drawings—gave shape to a visual archive of community experience. These works did not merge into a single map, but together composed a mosaic of perspectives that collectively mapped affective, cultural, and ecological connections to place.

4. **Artistic practice opens safe spaces for dialogue amid maritime tensions.**

In an environment marked by geopolitical tension and insecurity, art emerged as a crucial medium for emotional expression and collective dialogue. The Masinloc workshop invited participants to engage not only in drawing but also in song, two culturally embedded practices that encouraged comfort, openness, and spontaneity.

As **Annelys de Vet** observed in her unpublished field notes, June 2025:"Almost all participants started to draw immediately, without hesitation. And for me, as an outsider, not understanding the language, these drawings were a beautiful way to tap into their narratives, and sometimes stimulate a certain artistic twist (like making the colours brighter)."

A key turning point came when participants were invited to sing. **Karaoke**, familiar in many Filipino coastal towns, became a gateway to storytelling and emotional vulnerability. **Kapitan Tony** stood up and sang **Max Surban's "Kaming mga Mangingisda"** ("We Fisherfolk"), a Cebuano song that describes the rhythms, hardships, and blessings of fisherfolk life:

> *Kaming mga mangingisda, kaming mga sakayanon*
> *(We are the fisherfolk, we who live on boats,)*
> *Nagasalig lamang sa dagat, nagapuyo daplin sa baybayon*
> *(Relying solely on the sea, living along the shore.)*
> *Kining kabus namong pangita, pangisda ra gyud intawon*
> *(This humble livelihood is only fishing, truly)*
> *Grasya alang kanamo, gikan sa kahitas-an.*
> *(A blessing for us, from the heavens above.)*

The performance inspired another participant to share a rap song he had written and recorded about illegal mining in Masinloc. Shifting the focus from the sea to the land, his lyrics linked the loss of fishing grounds to the degradation caused by extractive industries. In it, he critiques broken promises and corruption surrounding resource extraction:

> *Parating na ang panahon, ayan nanaman si Simon / Maririnig natin ang pangako niya noon*
> ("The time is coming, here comes Simon again / We'll hear once more the promises he made back then")
> …
> *Tatabang bulsa't kapangyarihan / Ano ba ang dahilan? Abáy, di ko alam 'yan*
> ("Power and pockets will lose their flavor / What's the reason? Well, I don't know that")

The rap underscored how threats to livelihood and environment extend beyond maritime disputes, weaving political commentary with imagery of environmental loss.

Several fisherfolk later said that they had **never spoken so openly** about their maritime lives, not even in interviews or formal consultations. The karaoke set a tone of shared joy and cultural affirmation. As one participant shared, *"The song captured the rhythm of our lives better than any news article."*

After the karaoke, a drawing session invited participants to visualize their marine encounters. **Kapitan Tony**, energized by his song, created a drawing that mapped the fish species he had named. He explained that they offer a portion of their food to the **"Datu of Skarboro"** upon entering Scarborough—a gesture of ritual respect.



Figure 9. Screenshots from the video of Kapitan Tony singing Max Surban's Cebuano song, opening a space for shared memory, vulnerability, and storytelling through music.

These spontaneous artistic moments, whether through drawing or song, **dissolved social barriers**, fostered trust, and created space for meaningful exchange.

As Annelys de Vet further reflected:

"The karaoke was brilliant (and opened a more vulnerable space). Participants became comfortable quickly. Fishermen opened up and shared their stories more easily than in journalistic settings. The fisherfolk particularly enjoyed the drawing activity."

Turalba echoed this sentiment:

"What truly energized the session was the spontaneity. Kapitan Tony became one of the central figures, singing Max Surban's "Kaming Mga Mangingisda," a joyful listing of local fish species. With Annelys' enthusiastic approval, his impromptu karaoke moment lifted the whole room. He later translated the song into a drawing, mapping out all the fish he had named, and proudly displayed his work."

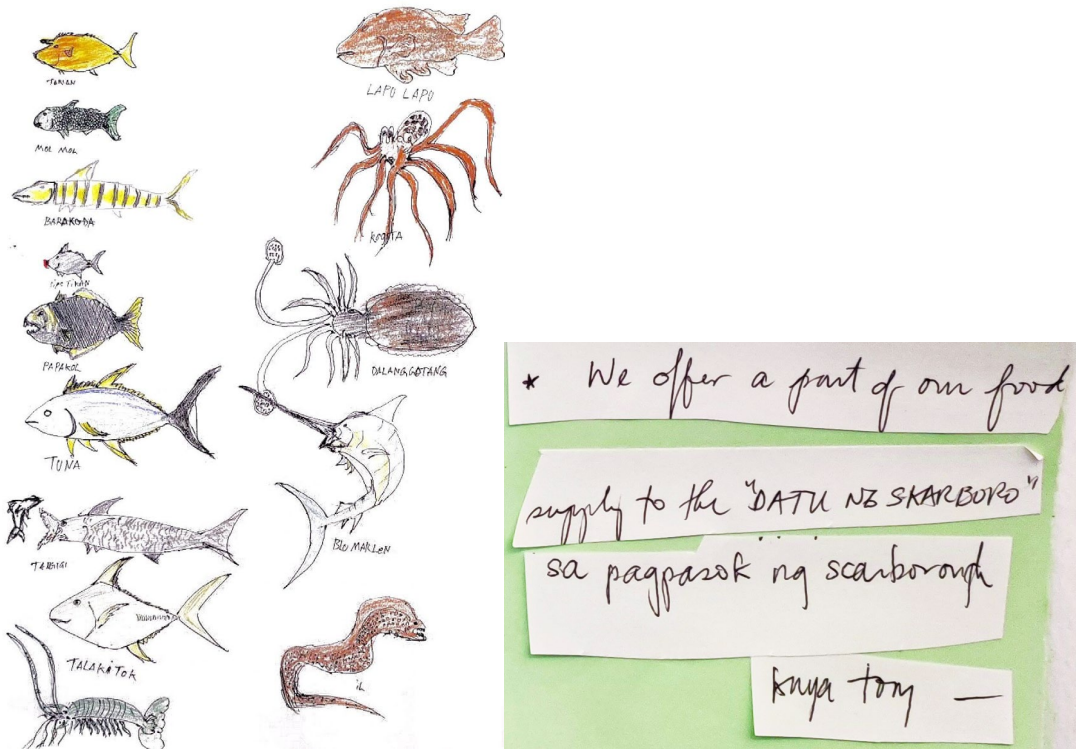


Figure 10. *The fish I catch* by Anthony "Kapitan Tony" Collado. He mentions that they offer a part of their food supply to the "Datu of Skarboro" upon entering Scarborough. Rendered image.

Art in this context functioned as a relational tool. It fostered morale, empathy, and communal recognition. The workshop reaffirmed that artistic methods can create safe spaces for dialogue, especially in communities navigating the emotional weight of displacement, militarization, and restricted access to ancestral waters.

Limitations

While our findings illuminate critical dimensions of artistic research with Masinloc fisherfolk, several limitations should be noted:

Site Specificity

This study draws from a single-day workshop held at the Masinloc Department of Tourism. While previous PANATAG engagements informed the methodology, the insights presented here are grounded in this particular session. Participants came from various coastal communities, including Masinloc (Barangay Inhobol and Goliat), as well as neighboring towns such as Santa Cruz, Candelaria, Cabangan, Botolan, and Subic. However, the workshop did not reach farther island barangays such as San Salvador, which is geographically closest to Scarborough Shoal and locally refers to it as "Bajo de Masinloc." San Salvador is widely recognized as the Philippine locality most directly affected by maritime tensions. Future research should consider on-site engagements in such communities to access firsthand perspectives from those most immediately impacted.

Language and Translation

Facilitators and CSM artists provided real-time translation across Tagalog and Visayan dialects, but nuances may have been lost. Our reflections are based on field notes and limited recordings, which may not fully capture emotional tone or idiomatic meaning.

Temporal Scope

The Masinloc workshop spanned only one (1) day. While meaningful exchanges and creative outputs emerged, longer-term engagement (e.g., repeated visits, follow-up sessions, or longitudinal tracking) would yield richer data on how art-based interventions influence community resilience over time. We acknowledge that sustaining momentum requires ongoing interaction beyond the workshop's limited timeframe.

Researcher Presence and Positionality

As facilitators, primarily Filipinos with one international collaborator, we were embedded in the dynamics we sought to observe. Our design choices, questions, and methods of interaction inevitably shaped the flow of engagement. While we practiced reflexivity through debriefs and feedback sessions, our presence influenced the outcomes. Future iterations may continue pairing local researchers with external collaborators to ensure a grounded yet critically reflective approach that honors both insider knowledge and outside perspectives.

Materials and Visual Outputs

All photos and videos shared from participants' mobile devices were collected with consent and archived alongside the artworks, which were willingly donated by both fisherfolk and student participants. While not all visual materials could be included in this article due to space and time constraints, they remain documented for future use and exhibition. In future workshops, additional tools such as mobile scanners or digital transcription setups could further enhance archival completeness.

Focus on Fisherfolk Experiences

While we directly engaged with fisherfolk, this article reflects the facilitators' observations rather than first-person narratives or co-authored texts. By conducting the workshop at the Department of Tourism office rather than in the participants' home barangays, we also missed perspectives from family members such as wives and children, whose roles are vital to understanding the broader fabric of coastal life. Additionally, by centering lived experiences, the article does not incorporate broader scientific, policy, or geopolitical analyses. We embrace this as a situated perspective but acknowledge its boundaries.

Facilitator-Driven Voice

This article speaks from the vantage point of the facilitators rather than the fisherfolk themselves. Although we draw directly from their field notes, we do not include first-person accounts from participants, nor can we reflect on the long-term fate of the visual work, as these experiences remain very fresh. Future iterations may consider incorporating fisherfolk authorship (e.g., co-written reflections or follow-up interviews) and revisit how the community sustains or adapts their creative outputs over time.

Despite these constraints, the Masinloc case remains a valuable example of how embodied cartography and participatory artistic research can foster agency, solidarity, and resilience in coastal communities facing geopolitical tensions.



Figure 11. Group photograph of workshop participants, including fisherfolk and facilitators at the Subjective Atlas of the Philippines project workshop in Masinloc, Zambales (PH), May 27, 2025. Photos taken by JL Diquit.

Conclusion

The making of the *Subjective Atlas of the Philippines* is not only a platform for expression, but also offers an infrastructure of care, resistance, and shared authorship. Through embodied cartography, where mapping becomes a physical, collaborative, and emotionally resonant act, project PANATAG fostered spaces for deep listening, storytelling, dialogue, and creative co-making. This approach challenges conventional cartography—which often abstracts and generalizes—by foregrounding lived experience, emotional geographies, and culturally rooted knowledge.

In the context of the West Philippine Sea, where maritime conflict frequently silences local voices and disrupts ties to ancestral waters, our experiences affirm that those who live in close relation to the sea should be at the forefront of the conversation that shapes its future. While their perspectives are often overlooked, they carry crucial experiential knowledge. The subjective mapping methodology helped visualize and amplify these perspectives through artistic research, offering tools, platforms, and language to articulate memories, hopes, and claims that might otherwise remain invisible.

Rather than claiming definitive outcomes, we ask: *might creative practices such as visual storytelling and image-making evoke layered ties to place, memory, and cultural continuity?* This leads us to the potential of artistic research as a space for connection in coastal communities navigating complex maritime realities.

By centering artistic research as a method of situated inquiry and relational ethics, PANATAG gestures toward narratives of refuge, memory, and belonging that can challenge extractive and militarized perspectives. Our short-term fieldwork in Masinloc, supported by CSM's locally embedded networks, suggested that co-creation may help foster trust, empathy, and shared reflection. This remains an open question, pointing to the potential of artistic research as a space for connection in coastal communities navigating complex maritime realities. When multisectoral actors—artists, fisherfolk, students, local leaders, and educators collaborate with mutual care, the potential for shared stewardship begins to emerge. Our approach gestures toward how embodied cartography and artistic research might foster dialogue, agency, and resilience. The workshop offered a glimpse of what becomes possible when local knowledge, creative practice, and collaborative exchange intersect with intention and care.

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Karang Penyu: The Investigation of Site-Specific Installation as a Coral Garden.

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Abstract:

In this study, a site-specific installation was constructed in an open location used as a studio, where the concept of objectivity or neutrality of knowledge is practiced. I was inspired by this space and created a site-specific installation using recycled materials sourced from the surrounding area. These materials were identified and examined through research methods that include literature analysis and documentary studies to ensure their safety in constructing a coral garden. This study aims to contribute to contemporary art discourse while strengthening the connection between art, science, the environment, and spatial context in artistic thinking.

Keywords: Site-Specific Installation, Assemblages, Artificial reef.

Introduction and Materials Review

The world is currently facing the challenge of environmental pollution, and it cannot be denied that, at times, we either forget or remain indifferent to this issue. Much of the pollution stems from industrial activities, urbanization, excessive plastic usage, and air pollution, all of which significantly contribute to environmental degradation.

Pollution has led to many problems, from a decline in human health, loss of biodiversity, climate change, water resource depletion, and threats to marine life. Therefore, to have a sustainable future. We must be active and responsible for our actions through awareness campaigns, conservation projects, and green innovations.

All of us, whether we are individuals, industry, or the governing body, should strive and take responsibility for conservation efforts to help curb ecological damage and promote long-term sustainability.

I initiated the 'Karang Penyu' project by conducting a literature review based on journals and articles encompassing two key disciplines: art and science. The aim is to deepen my understanding and establish connections in art methodologies, movements and contemporary practices, both locally and internationally.

This site-specific Installation is deployed at 2'50'34"N 104'09'29"E , near to Jeti Kampung ABC, Tioman island at the state of Pahang. According to a research conducted by Reef Check it was found that Microplastic waste is fine pieces of plastic less than five (5) millimeters in size that are almost invisible to the naked eye and are everywhere. and they also collected A total of **2,945kg of ghost nets** were successfully removed from the waters of Pulau Tioman on the same year.

I am deeply fascinated by sculpture as it is a three-dimensional art form that interacts with its surroundings and allows viewers to experience it from multiple perspectives. Art can

tell a story, convey a message, or even narrate an event within a space. It serves as an expression of the artist's vision.

Through this research, I also hope to explore materials, techniques, or themes that have received less attention in art studies. This study has broadened my understanding that art is often closely interconnected with other fields, such as science, philosophy, psychology, and sociology.

Art can serve as a powerful message that leaves a profound impact. It is not necessarily confined to gallery exhibitions but extends across various forms of expression, creation, and science, focusing on studying coral reefs. Watching documentaries like 'Chasing Coral' helps to deepen my understanding of coral ecosystems.

I have learned about the importance of tackling coral bleach and communicating this message in raising awareness after watching this documentary. It was an effective storytelling created from an interdisciplinary approach from climate science, marine biology and media arts, establishing a strong point that collaborated to develop impact narratives. As an audience member, I found that it was a very engaging, emotional storytelling case study about the critical environment that we live in. It also highlights the logistical difficulties in underwater research, like equipment failures and unpredictable environmental conditions and how research can lead to tangible policy shifts, offering me a valuable lesson.

Coral reefs are important as they provide habitats for organisms and fish, nurseries for the young, and storm protection, but many fishes/molluscs would not be available. Sighting coral reefs in their natural environment might make the person feel connected to the ecosystems, appreciating them even more in terms of aesthetic value and worth.

A Complete reef formation can take anywhere from **10,000 to 30 million years**, depending on the scale and conditions. The growth of coral significantly depends on environmental conditions; however, Coral calcification rates have declined by approximately 18.6% over the past 31 years due to rising ocean temperatures

According to Kaandorp, J, **Massive corals (e.g., Porites lutea)** in Southeast Asia exhibit **annual growth rates between 7–15 mm (0.7–1.5 cm) per year**, with variations linked to **sea surface temperature changes**.

And in another research, Nie, B., Chen, T., Liang, M., Wang, Y., Zhong, J., & Zhu, Y**.** (1997) stated that Branching corals (e.g., Acropora spp.) can grow up to 10 cm per year, depending on environmental conditions

Environmental Art and Entropy: The Influence of Robert Smithson

The Spiral Jetty by Robert Smithson (1970) was created in Utah. Great Salt Lake immerses and amplifies a dynamic interplay of their spatial, historical, and social settings, often redefining the space to form the artwork. The 1,500-foot-long spiral formation, composed of rocks, earth, and salt crystals, not only symbolizes the rhythms of nature but evolves with them. Its form is continually altered by the lake's fluctuating water levels, salinity and environmental conditions.

It's a significant example of environmental aesthetics; Spiral Jetty engages directly with landscape and ecological transformation, exploring entropy and temporality and integrating natural processes into artistic practice.

His methods suggest a framework where art can be reflected, critiqued, and meaningfully interact with natural environments while fostering deeper contextual awareness and a more ecologically attuned form of artistic engagement.

Smithson's work explored the concept of entropy by immersing itself in natural and industrially transformed environments. He aimed to reflect the effect of human civilization on ecologies. His work underlined the irreversible effects of time, transformation, and human activity on the landscape.

His works, including "Asphalt Rundown" and "Glue Pour," show his interest in natural processes such as erosion and sedimentation forces that progressively break down and reshape the land. These process forces activate geological rather than biological time

Figure 1: The Spiral Jetty	Fig 2: The Asphalt Rundown	Fig 3: Glue Pour
		
Note: Holt/Smithson Foundation. (n.d.). Spiral Jetty. Retrieved May 5, 2025, from https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/spiral-jetty	Note: Holt/Smithson Foundation. (n.d.). Asphalt Rundown. https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/asphalt-rundown-0	Note: R. Smithson, Glue Pour, 1970, From left, R. Smithson, D. Lunden and L. Lippard, (Photo by Christos Dikeakos)

Through 'Karang Penyu', I'm exploring how artistic practice can respond to the urgent environmental challenges we face today and create space for dialogue, awareness, and meaningful engagement with the natural world. This project is guided by prioritizing ecological sensitivity. Unlike Smithson's works, all the materials chosen must not harm the ecosystem but support health and be suitable for environmental restoration. To incarnate a form of 'reverse entropy,' transforming degradation into growth as a coral garden.

After studying Smithson's work, I questioned the nature of permanence in art. If an artwork like Spiral Jetty, submerged by water, eroded by salt, and revealed again by drought, exists in a state of perpetual transformation, can it ever be considered 'complete'? And if art is no longer a fixed object but a dynamic interplay with natural forces, how do we redefine its lifespan, meaning, or purpose? Smithson's Spiral Jetty is unique precisely because it surrenders to nature's rhythms: sometimes visible, sometimes hidden, always changing. This instability challenges traditional notions of artistic completion. But beyond philosophical questions, I also ask: How can art function simultaneously as an aesthetic expression and ecological agent?

Material Consciousness: Lessons from Arte Povera

In contrast to Smithson's monumental interventions, the 'Arte Povera' movement emphasized simplicity and the poetic use of everyday materials. This a question to me; can art, function as both an aesthetic element and ecological infrastructure?

Smithson created his works not to support or give new meaning to life but rather to reflect on natural process like entropy, a gradual geological decline into disorder. In contrast, I made the 'Karang Penyu' piece to provide a new meaning to the bio- habitat. The field explored by Smithson is entropy, a natural process that leads to disorder. While Smithson's art explores decay and transformation, 'Karang Penyu', a coral garden, symbolizes ecological fragility, climate change, or reef degradation, transforming entropy into a call for awareness and regeneration.

I was inspired by 'Arte Povera', the most significant and influential avant-garde movement in southern Europe in the late 1960, 'Arte Povera', refere to an italian phrase for "poor art" or "impoverished art". As described by The Art Story (n.d.), "It included the work of around a dozen Italian artists whose most distinctly recognizable trait was their use of commonplace materials that evoked a pre-industrial age, such as earth, rocks, clothing, paper, and rope: literally 'poor' or cheap materials that they repurposed for their practice. These practices presented a challenge to established notions of value and propriety, as well as subtly critiquing the industrialization and mechanization of Italy at the time"

This aligns with my vision for the project, which is to embrace eco-conscious practices by encouraging engagement with raw textures and emphasizing that materiality is integral to meaning. I aim to highlight the artistic potential of repurposed, natural, or discarded materials.

Ephemeral Aesthetics: Andy Goldsworthy's Natural Interventions

Building on the ideas of entropy and material consciousness explored by Smithson and the Arte Povera movement, Andy Goldsworthy's ephemeral installations offer a more intimate and organic dialogue with nature. Andy Goldsworthy is a British sculptor and photographer renowned for his ephemeral art, where the process is related and works with natural methods that highlight impermanence and the passage of time.

One of his works that really caught my attention is 'Storm King Wall' (1997–1998), located at Storm King Art Center in New York. It's a snaking dry-stone wall that weaves through trees and even dips into a pond, blending human craftsmanship with the natural landscape. This creates a mystery and interaction with nature. It took him the help of 5 men and 250 tons of stone to build its 2,778-foot length.

To me, 'Storm King Wall' is a masterpiece with a strong visual aesthetic, crafted in an organic method that evokes both a modern sensibility and an ancient reverence for nature.

Figure 4. The Storm King Wall



Note: Storm King Wall (1997–1998) by Andy Goldsworthy. Reprinted from Artlyst, by Hubbard, S., 2023, Artlyst.

Symbolism and Ecology

Turtles hold deep symbolic significance for local communities. They are tough herbivores surviving powerful waves and violent storms during migration. They are also ecologically pivotal to marine ecosystems. Using their form as a metaphorical design element highlights their importance in biodiversity and habitat interconnection.

The name and form of 'Karang Penyu' draw inspiration from the plight of local turtle populations, which depend on the region's rapidly diminishing coral reef ecosystem. Turtles hold deep cultural significance: in Chinese and Japanese traditions, they are sacred symbols of longevity, wisdom, and harmony with nature. Among Southeast Asian coastal communities, they are also revered as guardians of the sea.

Resilience in Artistic Practice: Navigating Failure, Growth, and Adaptation.

A Question of Worthiness.

Creating 'Karang Penyu' has been a up-and-down experience, requiring me to constantly reflect and adapt to to changing environments The time spent in the area has been significant and valuable, especially considering the journey to the site. To get there, I must drive at least six hours from where I stay, followed by a ferry ride lasting between one to two hours, depending on the weather and sea currents. After that, the journey continues with a 30-minute truck ride before finally arriving at the construction site.

Fragment and growth.

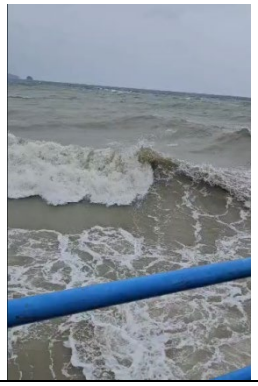
As an artistic researcher, I conducted preliminary site visits to understand the area, engage with residents, and identify potential materials that could be collected and used for this project. Additionally, I needed to look at elements such as wave patterns, topography, and weather resistance, especially given the unpredictable nature of the monsoon season in this region. to build the aesthetic function of the site-specific installation. As shown below, this is the actual scene of the monsoon season last November 2024.

During the process of relocating 'Karang Penyu', it broke apart. When I failed and could not continue my initial artwork, intended to be a larger installation placed on the ocean floor, I fell into deep distress, overwhelmed by the universal obsession with grandeur and magnificence. Failing to me is often related to an endpoint; I crumbled under the weight of my disappointment, and for a moment, the thought of abandoning my research studies crossed my mind.

It took me a long time to resume my academic research journey. I questioned and struggled with a dilemma. What scale should I build? A quiet voice in my heart reminded me that in today's world, scale plays a crucial role. I learned through this experience the importance of embracing the beauty of smallness. There is no need to create something grand to celebrate victory and success.

I told myself to embrace imperfection, impermanence, and lopsidedness and to value natural decay as an essential aspect of beauty. 'Karang Penyu' will acknowledge that art, like reefs, must change and adapt to its surroundings. It will be a reflection of nature's evolving state.

Figure 4. The monsoon season

	
Note: During the monsoon season, many areas are severely affected.	Note: Large waves have heavily eroded the cliffs around the chalet area, causing significant destruction.

Before execution, I started with initial sketches with a few criteria and observations in mind. I wanted them to reflect and relate to Malaysian culture or the local context, like bunga raya [hibiscus flower], reef, and turtle. The design must also allow burrows or designs enabling coral to grow and marine life to make homes.

I chose the turtle shape to ensure structural stability and durability in unruly seabed conditions, especially during the monsoon seasons. The aerodynamic shape encourages optimum water flow around the structure, reducing sediment upsurge. The grooves and contours are crafted to support the attachment of broken corals, create micro-habitats, and foster coral growth and marine life colonization. The texture will be emphasized on uneven surfaces and organic formations to intentional reflections of nature's evolving state. The work acknowledges that art, like reefs, must change and adapt to its surroundings.

Figure 3. The Prototype Models

		
Prototype Model 1: 3D rendering to test how different textures, finishes, or supports will translate to the final material. Assess proportions, composition, and aesthetics before committing to large-scale production.	Prototype Model 2: Forming proportions, structures with paper clay to analyze shapes and groove patterns.	Prototype Model 3: Study and experimentation of adhesion techniques on cockle shells, rocks, pebbles, and cement to ensure the applied materials remain intact and to estimate the materials required for the artwork.

From Waste to Reef: The Artistic and Ecological Role of Up-cycled Materials.

> **As Miwon Kwon (2002) articulates, site-specific art is "unavoidably tied to its context," emphasizing that such artworks cannot be fully understood or appreciated when detached from their original environment. By integrating with their surroundings, site-specific installations establish a dynamic dialogue with physical, historical, and social dimensions, ultimately shaping their significance and reception.**

'Karang Penyu' resonates with the ideology of utilizing materials prone to erosion and transformation. In this project, I use up-cycled materials, re-purposing discarded items and giving them a second life with enhanced purpose. For example, I collected leftover wires and re-bars to make the foundation frame and crushed concrete from nearby construction sites to rebuild structures in the area. These materials are functional and reduce my workload to help reduce landfill waste and support environmental sustainability.

This practice aligns with the principles of 'Arte Povera', where the poetic re-purposing of everyday materials challenges traditional notions of artistic value and sustainability.

The installation began with a base made of metal re-bars, over which chicken wire mesh was shaped to form the structure and support layers of neutral pH cement. This type of cement was chosen to minimize the risk of altering the surrounding water chemistry and to ensure the sustainability of the reef. It also encourages coral larvae to settle and grow.

As part of a natural resource-based approach, the coarse aggregates are primarily sourced from leftover construction materials and local suppliers. Pebbles and rocks were also collected from a stagnant stream, which, when cleared, helped improve water flow to the surrounding orchards. The organic contours and tactile imperfections of the materials invite corals to cling and thrive, weaving new life into the seabed and stitching together a resilient marine tapestry.

Cockle shells were also used in this project; they were collected from local food stalls, cleaned, sun-dried, and prepared for use. Some were crushed and mixed with cement, while others were applied directly as textured surfaces. As shown in Table 1, their composition enhances structural integrity and biological suitability for marine applications. They are rich in minerals, including calcium, magnesium, sodium, and phosphorus, which support marine life and contribute to reef regeneration.

Table 1. The mineral composition of cockle shells.

Component	**Percentage (%)**
Continuous assessment component (Cac)	98.7
Magnesium (Mg)	0.05
Sodium (Na)	0.9
Phosphorus (P)	0.02
Others	0.2

Note. Data adapted from Ramakrishna, B., & Sateesh, A. (2016). Exploratory study on the use of cockle shell as partial coarse & fine aggregate replacement in concrete. International Research Journal of Engineering and Technology, 3(6)

Figure 4. Tools and Equipment used.

Tools /equipment	Uses
Grinder	Cutting rebars
Gasless Welding machine	For welding purposes
Pliers	Cutting wires and shaping works
Hammer	For forming
Shovel /Hoe	Mixing motar
Gloves	For protection during welding and hammering activities.
Wheelbarrow and carts	Mobility - taking and mixing cement mixture.

Figure 5. The materials use to build the texture

		
Pebbles and rocks were also collected from a stagnant stream, which, when cleared, helped improve water flow to the surrounding orchards.	Cockle shells used for this project are collected from local food stalls, washed, dried under the sun, and dried before use.	The reef-safe epoxies used for securing broken corals. These epoxies are formulated to avoid leaching harmful chemicals into marine water.

Figure 6. The Building Processes

		
Design Process 1: Fabricating the frame/structure with re-bar and chicken wire mesh.	Design Process 2: Applying rocks and pebbles to enhance. texture and form the base structure.	Design Process 3: Forming body structures and refining surface texture.

Deployment Observation and Ecological Assessment

The 'Karang Penyu' was deployed at this area, 2'50'34"N 104'09'29"E based on the factors outlined below:

I. Availability of ample up-cycled materials and natural resources, such as pebbles and rocks.
II. Firm sandy sea-bed and depth between 15-20 m, provides the most stable foundation for sculpture placement.
III. Clear water allows easy visibility for observation and monitoring, aiding coral growth.

Figure 7. The Deployment Processes

		
Transferring the site-specific installation to the shore for deployment process.	Development process at the depth of 4 metre.	The Site -specifc now located at 2'50'34"N 104'09'29"E

The 'Karang Penyu' project is also not exempt from the challenges posed by global weather impacts, and according to Center for Science Education, ocean temperatures are expected to rise due to global warming: The Current global ocean temperatures vary by region, but the average **sea surface temperature** is approximately **16.1°C (61°F)**

By 2030 (5 years)	Expected increase of 0.2–0.5°C depending on emissions scenarios.
By 2040 (10 years)	Projected rise of 0.5–1.0°C. By 2050 (20 years): Could reach 1.0–1.5°C above current levels.
By 2075 (50 years)	Worst-case scenario suggests an increase of 2.0–3.5°C.

Note: These projections depend on greenhouse gas emissions and climate policies. If emissions are reduced significantly, warming could be limited to the lower end of these estimates.

This predicted warming of ocean waters due to climate change directly influences the calcification process in corals, which is a key factor in the success of artificial reef systems like 'Karang Penyu'. Increased ocean temperatures may trigger coral bleaching, weaken skeletal structures, and slow reef development, threatening the installation's sustainability over time.

Recognizing the projected temperature increases, 'Karang Penyu' integrates ecologically resilient materials such as pH-neutral cement to support coral colonization. This approach ensures that the structure can withstand environmental fluctuations while fostering biodiversity.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, this artistic research created an integration between art and technology and raised awareness of the importance of marine species and environmental issues where they interact with nature, humans, and aquatic species. Using recycled and locally sourced materials such as cockle shells, river pebbles and sand, and pH-neutral cement demonstrates their dual function as both ecologically supportive and aesthetically compelling components in artificial reef construction.

'Karang Penyu' has nurtured and connected my heart and soul to the universe. It broadened my understanding and instilled in me a deeper awareness of nature's perpetual process of renewal and resilience.

Moving forward, 'Karang Penyu' is likely to progress and evolve beyond a singular artistic endeavor into a collaborative platform for ecological restoration. To me personally, the 'Karang Penyu' project transformed from an environmental conservation project to one that will also serve as a storytelling or a poetic reciprocation weaving art, ecology, and cultural memory and creating a theme about themes of regeneration, coexistence, and transformation. This system is essential and must be instilled to ensure the continuity of life.

Climate change poses an existential threat to coral reef ecosystems globally. Rising sea surface temperatures disrupt the symbiotic relationship between coral polyps and zooxanthellae (photosynthetic algae), which provide up to 90% of the host's metabolic energy through photosynthesis (Hoegh-Guldberg, 1999). Under thermal stress, corals expel these algae, leading to coral bleaching, a To evaluate the success of the 'Karang Penyu' installation. Regular site monitoring, including a photographic documentation survey, will be conducted every three months using an underwater camera and marine biodiversity assessments on the sculpture's surface, which would ensure its continued ecological contribution while generating valuable research on artificial reef formations. Physiological response that, if prolonged, results in widespread mortality (Hughes et al., 2018).

Reflective Statement

The ‘Karang Penyu’ project emerged from a deep concern for the environmental degradation of coral reefs and a desire to explore how art can serve as both a poetic and practical response to ecological crises. As an artist and researcher, I sought to create a site-specific installation that not only engages with the aesthetics of nature but also contributes meaningfully to marine restoration. This reflective statement outlines the motivations, challenges, and insights that shaped my creative process.

My initial inspiration came from observing the fragility of marine ecosystems and the urgent need for sustainable interventions. I was drawn to the idea of using art as a bridge between disciplines, particularly between environmental science and contemporary sculpture. The project was grounded in a desire to work with natural and recycled materials, echoing the philosophies of artists like Robert Smithson, whose concept of entropy challenged traditional notions of permanence, and the ‘Arte Povera’ movement, which emphasized the poetic potential of humble, everyday materials.

Throughout the development of ‘Karang Penyu’, I encountered both technical and emotional challenges. One of the most difficult moments was when the original structure broke during relocation. This failure forced me to confront my expectations about scale, success, and artistic value. It was a humbling experience that taught me to embrace imperfection and to see failure not as an endpoint but as a catalyst for growth. I began to appreciate the beauty of smallness, the power of subtle gestures, and the importance of adaptability both in art and in life.

The process of designing and constructing the installation was deeply immersive. I conducted site visits, engaged with local communities, and experimented with materials such as cockle shells, river pebbles, and pH-neutral cement. A commitment to ecological sensitivity and cultural relevance guided each decision. The turtle-shaped structure, inspired by local symbolism and marine biology, was designed to support coral growth and marine life colonization, transforming waste into a living reef.

This project has profoundly shaped my understanding of what it means to be an artist in the Anthropocene. I have come to see art not only as a form of expression but also as a form of stewardship, a way to care for the world and to imagine new possibilities for coexistence. ‘Karang Penyu’ is more than an artwork; it is a living system, a collaborative platform, and a poetic response to the rhythms of nature.

Looking ahead, I plan to expand this work into a broader initiative that involves scientists, artists, and local communities in co-creating ecological art. I am committed to continuing this journey of learning, making, reflecting and being guided by the belief that art can inspire change, foster empathy, and nurture resilience in both ecosystems and ourselves.

From Hopscotch to Diversity: The Creative Journey Behind the Dance Video Installation 'Step, Step, Hops at The Peninsula Bangkok

Sirithorn Srichalakom

Abstract

This initiative integrates art into hospitality, demonstrating how it can improve cultural experiences and support the local economy. The Peninsula Bangkok Artist in Residence Programme connects artists with the public to foster relationships and inspire future art. It examines the potential of artist residencies in hotels, emphasizing creativity and community engagement. The primary aim is to offer an environment where artists can innovate and create works while interacting with guests. Sirithorn Srichalakom has been invited to participate in this residency program from May to August 2023, to conceptualize and produce a Dance Video Installation. Research and creation will occur within The Peninsula Bangkok. The process began with researching and observing the hotel's atmosphere and guests. This included exploring hotel spaces to identify opportunities for the main concept. The project involved defining the presentation format with the curator, finalizing details about the method and location of the presentation, the creative process, budget considerations, and coordinating with various hotel departments for installation and promotion. The exhibition "Step, Step, Hops!" features two Dance Video Installations inspired by Hopscotch, highlighting the diversity of movement by feet and fingers within The Peninsula Bangkok from July 18 to August 15, 2023. Participants shared their creative journeys with the audience through collaboration. The exhibition resulted in a series of dance videos that enhanced the hotel's aesthetic value and facilitated cultural exchange within the hotel's guest, art lover, dance social, and broader community.

Keywords: Dance Video, Video Installation, Artist in Residence, Hotel Arts, The Peninsula Bangkok

Introduction

In an era increasingly characterized by experiential consumerism, the role of art within the hospitality sector had transcended mere ornamental function. It emerged as a strategic imperative, shaping brand identity, fostering profound cultural dialogue, and significantly enriching guest engagement. Lodgings, traditionally conceived as transient accommodations, were then reimagined as dynamic cultural epicentres, offering curated artistic encounters intended to leave indelible impressions upon their patrons. Central to this paradigm shift was the burgeoning proliferation of artist-in-residence (AIR) programmes, which uniquely embedded the creative process directly within the hotel environment, thereby transforming it into a living exhibition space and a nexus of active co-creation. The Peninsula Hotels, through its distinguished "Art in Resonance" initiative, stood at the vanguard of this transformative movement, demonstrating a profound commitment to nurturing contemporary artistic expression and bridging the chasm between innovative artistry and luxury hospitality (Assouline, 2025).

This article undertakes an in-depth exploration of the developmental trajectory and conceptual underpinnings of "Step, Step, Hops!", a seminal dance video installation realized within the esteemed framework of The Peninsula Bangkok's Artist in Residence Programme. Spearheaded by the author, Sirithorn Srichalakom, from May to July and the artwork exhibited from July to August 2023, this project epitomized how a luxury hotel could become a crucible

for artistic innovation and community interaction. The primary aim of such residencies extended beyond the mere exhibition of completed artworks; rather, it sought to cultivate an environment conducive to artistic freedom, enabling creators to innovate and produce new works while concurrently engaging directly with hotel guests and the wider community, thereby transforming passive observation into active participation and meaningful cultural exchange.

"Step, Step, Hops!" drew its imaginative roots from the deceptively simple game of hopscotch, reinterpreting its foundational elements of movement and playful interaction through the sophisticated idiom of video installation. By exploring the diverse "steps" of feet and "hops" of fingers within the elegant confines of The Peninsula Bangkok, the project sought to highlight the hidden rhythms and varied expressions of human movement inherent in daily life, transforming familiar spaces into unexpected platforms for artistic discovery. The collaborative nature of its creation, involving interactions with various hotel departments and the sharing of creative journeys with the audience, further underscored the symbiotic relationship between art and hospitality.

This article discusses the conceptualization and production of "Step, Step, Hops!", showing how a site-specific dance video installation, developed within a hotel artist-in-residence programme, was presented. It examines how such initiatives enhanced the hotel's aesthetic value, promoted cultural exchange among hotel guests, art enthusiasts, the dance community, and the broader public, and positioned the hotel as a contributor to the contemporary art scene. The following sections explore the theoretical foundations that guided the project, detail the research and creative processes involved, analyze the installation's reception and impact, and consider the broader implications for the future of art in hospitality.

Literature Review: Artist-in-Residence Programs in Hotels

The integration of art within the hospitality industry underwent a significant transformation, evolving from a purely ornamental feature to a strategic element fundamental to enhancing guest experience and fostering distinct brand identities (IPaintMyMind.org, Artzfolio.com). This evolution gave rise to a discernible trend: the establishment of artist-in-residence (AIR) programs within hotel settings. Such initiatives positioned hotels not merely as temporary lodging facilities but as dynamic cultural venues, actively contributing to and engaging with the contemporary art ecosystem (Ziman, 2021).

Artist-in-residence programs in hotels were distinguished from traditional gallery or museum residencies by their unique contextual framework. They typically involved artists living and working within the hotel for a designated period, often in a dedicated studio space, with the explicit aim of creating new works inspired by the environment or local culture. This co-location facilitated a symbiotic relationship, offering artists invaluable time, space, and resources for creative production, often unavailable in their usual working environments (Dergipark; Gatelytė, 2018). For the artists, these residencies provided unparalleled exposure, networking opportunities with a diverse international audience, and a platform to showcase their work in a highly visible and accessible setting (Artistcloseup.com).

For the host hotels, the benefits of implementing an AIR program were multi-faceted and strategically significant. Firstly, these programs profoundly enhanced the guest experience, offering unique, immersive, and culturally enriching encounters that transcended conventional luxury amenities. Guests gained the rare opportunity to observe artists at work, participate in interactive workshops, and engage in direct dialogue with creators, thereby fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the artistic process (Kiwi Collection; BANC Magazine, 2024; ezeeart). This direct interaction transformed the hotel into a "living gallery," providing continuously evolving artistic content that encouraged repeat visits and left a memorable impression (Jumeirah Creekside Hotel cited by BANC Magazine, 2024).

Secondly, AIR programs served as powerful tools for brand differentiation and identity formation within an increasingly competitive hospitality market. By curating unique artistic narratives and supporting emerging or mid-career artists, hotels cultivated a distinctive cultural persona, positioning themselves as innovators and cultural arbiters rather than passive venues (Fresco, 2018; Artzfolio.com). This deliberate integration of art contributed directly to increased guest satisfaction and loyalty, as patrons increasingly sought authentic and meaningful travel experiences that connected them with local culture and artistic endeavors (IPaintMyMind.org).

Furthermore, the presence of artists and their creative output could positively impact the emotional and psychological well-being of guests, contributing to a more comfortable and stimulating atmosphere (LS Art Consulting; EHL Business News, 2020). Many hotel AIR initiatives also prioritized engagement with the local community and talent, thereby supporting regional arts ecosystems and fostering cultural exchange between global travelers and the local populace (Research-Archive.org; Business Traveller, 2025). This reciprocal relationship between the artist and the hotel environment, coupled with direct public engagement, marked a contemporary paradigm in how hospitality venues could meaningfully contribute to and shape the broader cultural landscape.

The Peninsula Bangkok's Artist-in-Residence Programme

Building upon the broader discourse concerning artist-in-residence programs within the hospitality sector, this section meticulously examines The Peninsula Hotels' distinctive approach to art integration, specifically through its global "Art in Resonance" initiative and its localized embodiment at The Peninsula Bangkok. Launched in 2019, the "Art in Resonance" program signified a profound strategic commitment by The Peninsula Hotels to transcend conventional art display, positioning the brand as an active patron and facilitator of contemporary artistic innovation (Assouline, 2025). The core objectives of this overarching program were multi-faceted: primarily, it aimed to champion the work of important emerging and mid-career artists by furnishing them with essential funding, comprehensive curatorial support, and prominent exhibition spaces. This robust backing enabled the production of significant new public artworks that might otherwise lack a platform for widespread visibility (Jing Daily Culture, 2024; PR Newswire, 2024). Furthermore, "Art in Resonance" was meticulously designed to offer deeply immersive artistic experiences to hotel guests and visitors, thereby fostering a dynamic dialogue between groundbreaking art and the luxurious hospitality environment (PR Newswire Asia, 2025a).

The methodological approach of the "Art in Resonance" program distinguished itself through its emphasis on commissioned, often site-specific, installations. These artworks were frequently designed to travel across various Peninsula properties worldwide, ensuring extensive audience reach and sustained engagement with the showcased pieces. The installations were strategically integrated into highly visible public areas, including hotel lobbies, facades, and dining venues, effectively transforming the hotel's architectural elements into canvases for contemporary artistic expression (PR Newswire Asia, 2025a; Whitewall.art, 2025). This deliberate integration underscored the program's objective to move beyond passive display towards active artistic patronage, cultivating meaningful cultural dialogues by featuring artists from diverse backgrounds and establishing partnerships with prestigious cultural institutions, such as the Victoria and Albert Museum (PR Newswire, 2025a).

A salient manifestation of The Peninsula's commitment to localized art engagement was observed in the dedicated Artist-in-Residence Programme at The Peninsula Bangkok. This specific initiative exemplified how the global "Art in Resonance" vision was translated into a tangible, interactive guest experience at a property level. The primary objectives of The Peninsula Bangkok's program were threefold: to redefine the guest experience through intimate

artist engagement, to foster a deeper cultural immersion, and to actively contribute to the local arts ecosystem. This was achieved by inviting both Thai and international artists to reside and create within a purpose-built studio located directly on the hotel premises. Guests were afforded unparalleled opportunities for direct cultural interaction, including observing artists at work during scheduled studio visits, participating in interactive workshops, and engaging in direct discourse regarding the artistic process and its underlying inspirations (The Peninsula Bangkok Newsroom, 2019). The program further aimed to nurture local talent and to showcase artworks that resonated with Thailand's rich cultural heritage and contemporary artistic landscape, thereby establishing the hotel as a significant cultural contributor within its community. It was within this supportive environment that the author, Sirithorn Srichalakom, an artist whose practice was often characterized by the exploration of movement and its reinterpretation through digital media, was extended an invitation to participate in this residency. The inaugural artist for The Peninsula Bangkok's Artist-in-Residence Programme was the acclaimed Thai performing artist, Kawita Vatanajyankur, who presented "A Continuation of Performing Textiles" in 2019, an impactful work exploring themes of female labor and feminism within the textile sector (The Peninsula Bangkok Newsroom, 2019). This established a precedent for the program's commitment to showcasing thought-provoking and culturally relevant contemporary art.

Methodology and Creative Processes

The methodological framework and creative processes underpinning the "Step, Step, Hops!" project were intricately linked to the author's extensive background in both academic and artistic practice. As an established academic and Dance Performance Artist, the author, Sirithorn Srichalakom, possessed a distinguished history of creating site-specific works for various global platforms, including traditional theatrical settings and contemporary galleries. Her expertise was particularly pronounced in media design and projection mapping for live performances, a skill honed through her significant contributions as a projection designer for the renowned Patravadi Theatre. This included designing projections for numerous theatrical productions and performances for National Artist Patravadi Mejudhon.

This extensive practical experience, coupled with her academic role as a permanent lecturer in the Department of Dance and within the Master of Arts in Curatorial Practice program at the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University, led to her initial engagement with The Peninsula Bangkok. Her involvement began as a curatorial consultant for the hotel's "Art in Resonance" program. In this capacity, she facilitated educational visits for her students to examine the works of participating artists. Notably, the author was instrumental in introducing the recycled art artist Wishulada Panthanuvong for her 2020 residency and subsequently provided crucial consultation for the installation of the "Take Your Seat" photographic exhibition by Randy and Spencer VanDerStarren in 2023, which featured the studio projection and sound design. This sustained collaborative relationship with The Peninsula Bangkok culminated in a formal invitation for the author to participate in The Peninsula Bangkok Artist in Residence Program as a featured artist from May to August 2023. This trajectory from academic and consultative involvement to direct artistic residency provided a unique foundation for the "Step, Step, Hops!" project, embedding it within a rich context of institutional collaboration and a deep understanding of the hotel's cultural initiatives.

Initial Parameters and Agreement

The initial phase of the "Step, Step, Hops!" project commenced with a crucial collaborative meeting between the author and key representatives from The Peninsula Bangkok, Khemwanta Tangon, Director of Brand Marketing and Digital Marketing, and Kawintra Wongsawasdi, Brand Marketing Manager and the project's assigned Curator. The primary objective of this

deliberation was to ascertain the specific parameters and mutual agreements pertaining to this artist-in-residence program. These parameters encompassed several critical provisions, outlining the operational framework for the artistic endeavor:

1. **Accommodation and Sustenance:** The hotel committed to providing comprehensive accommodation and sustenance for the author throughout the entire duration of the residency program for 3 months.
2. **Access to Creative Space:** Dedicated areas within the hotel premises were designated for the creation and subsequent exhibition of artistic works, with specific access granted for the final month of the residency period to facilitate installation and display.
3. **Resource Allocation:** The program included partial financial support allocated for the project's execution. Furthermore, the author was granted access to existing hotel materials, alongside the specialized services of carpentry, technical staff, and general hotel personnel for assistance as required.
4. **Collaborative Review:** The proposed format of artistic presentation, the intricate creative methodologies, the designated spatial utilization, and all associated logistical provisions were subject to joint review and mutual agreement between the hotel administration and the author, ensuring a harmonious integration with the hotel environment.
5. **Thematic Mandate:** The overarching thematic focus for the creative output was explicitly defined as "Diversity," a concept that resonated with and reflected a key strategic emphasis for the hotel at the time of the residency.

Upon thorough comprehension and acceptance of these preliminary conditions and parameters, the author proceeded to the subsequent stages of project development and artistic execution.

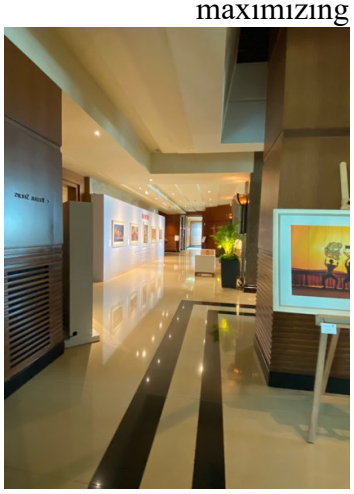
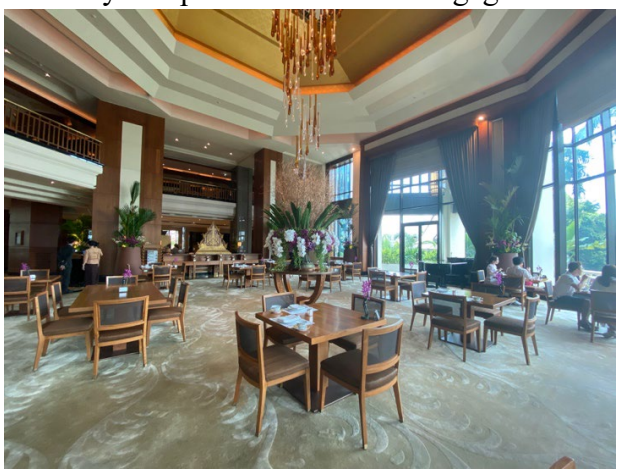
Data Gathering and Design

The methodological phase of the "Step, Step, Hops!" project continued with a comprehensive approach to data gathering and design, structured into three principal stages. Crucially, this phase was profoundly influenced by the author's prior engagement as a curatorial consultant and an astute observer within preceding Artist-in-Residence Programs at The Peninsula Bangkok. This provided an invaluable foundation for understanding the intricate dynamics, inherent advantages, and contextual challenges from diverse artistic perspectives within the unique hotel environment, thereby shaping the subsequent creative interventions.

1. **Audience Profiling:** The author initiated research by conducting systematic observations of hotel patrons throughout May 2023, aiming to delineate the demographic composition of the prospective audience. This observational study revealed three distinct guest segments: (a) international attendees participating in conferences and seminars held within the hotel; (b) tourists, predominantly European families traveling with children during the academic recess; and (c) non-resident guests frequenting the hotel's acclaimed culinary establishments, specifically the renowned Afternoon Tea service, which garnered reservations from dedicated groups, and other on-site restaurants. This preliminary audience analysis served as a foundational element informing subsequent design and conceptualization efforts.
2. **Spatial Suitability Assessment:** Concurrently, a rigorous evaluation of potential exhibition venues within the hotel was undertaken. Due to the prevailing rainy season, all outdoor areas were immediately deemed unsuitable for artistic installations. Furthermore, a thorough assessment of all restaurant spaces concluded their impracticality for prolonged display, primarily owing to the hotel's operational requirements for full seating capacity and the frequent spatial reconfigurations necessitated by special events and banquets. These factors posed significant

impediments to the stable installation of artworks for the stipulated one-month duration. Consequently, two optimal indoor locations were identified:

- **Lobby Corridors:** This area was deemed highly suitable due to its unobtrusive nature, allowing for artistic integration without disrupting the hotel's regular operational flow. The presence of existing architectural boards, previously utilized for art presentations by preceding artists, provided a readily available foundation for display, complemented by pre-existing lighting infrastructure.
- **Lobby Centerpiece (Afternoon Tea Area):** This location, characterized by its prominent floral centerpiece, was identified as exceptionally suitable. Positioned within the main lobby, it served as a central thoroughfare for all hotel guests, a meeting point, and a primary dining area for the celebrated Afternoon Tea. Crucially, the centerpiece itself remained static, offering a stable installation point, and functioned as a focal point for the entire lobby, thereby maximizing visibility and potential audience engagement for the artwork.

Figures 1-2: Lobby Corridors and Lobby of The Peninsula Bangkok
Source: Photos taken by author

3. **Presentation Format Deliberation:** Discussions with the project's Curator led to an initial proposal for the author to create a Performing Art piece. However, constrained by budget limitations that precluded a sustained, long-duration live performance, the author opted for the Dance Video format. This choice was informed by the author's expertise in the medium, its inherent flexibility for continuous display without temporal restrictions, and its alignment with the allocated production budget.

In conceptualizing the artistic direction, the author concurrently addressed the Curator's mandate for the work to embody the theme of "Diversity" and facilitate interactive engagement with hotel guests. Given the observed prevalence of families with children among the hotel's clientele during May 2023, the classic children's game of Hopscotch emerged as a highly pertinent conceptual foundation. Hopscotch, a widely recognized international children's game, involved players hopping through a pattern of squares drawn on the ground, combining physical movement with rules-based play (IPA, n.d.). Its Thai equivalent, “Tang Te”, shared similar characteristics, emphasizing patterned movement, balance, and playful interaction, deeply rooted in local cultural memory. This universal yet culturally specific game provided a rich metaphorical framework for exploring diversity through varied forms of movement and engagement.

Creative Concept and Thematic Framework

The exhibition was formally segmented into **three distinct installations**, each exploring aspects of this overarching concept:

1. "Step, Step, Hops!" This primary section of the exhibition delved into the kinetic diversity inherent in human movement. Departing from the singular hop or jump characteristic of traditional hopscotch, this project incorporated a diverse lexicon of dance styles, ranging from classical forms such as Khon (Thai classical mask dance) and Ballet, to more contemporary expressions including Thai folk dance, Modern dance, Street dance, Theatre, Latin dance, and Belly dance. Each style contributed a unique vocabulary of "steps" and "hops," which were then mapped onto various distinctive locations within The Peninsula Bangkok. This site-specific approach visually articulated the multifaceted nature of movement and the rich tapestry of human expression across different cultural and physical landscapes. The realization of this segment was significantly facilitated by the collaborative participation of The Peninsula's dedicated staff, whose engagement underscored the project's integrative ethos. The installation was presented through five vertical video screens, featuring edited footage of 26 performers of diverse ages and genders, including children aged 2 and 4, hotel housekeepers, and security guards. The participation of hotel housekeepers, notably those who regularly maintained the author's room, was particularly significant. They were invited to engage with the choreography, demonstrating the inherent diversity of everyday movement and contributing an authentic dimension to the installation. This inclusion, approved by hotel management prior to filming, exemplified the seamless collaboration and integrated approach of the project.



Figures 3-7: Five distinct locations within The Peninsula Bangkok served as filming sites for the "Step, Step, Hops!" dance video series, showcasing the diverse architectural and functional environments of the hotel
Source: Photos taken by author

The video content on these five screens was Precisely orchestrated, capturing performances across five distinct locations within The Peninsula Bangkok, thereby narrating the journey of each performer as they traversed the hotel's spaces with diverse rhythms and methods. These specific locations included: (1) the hotel's inclined entrance ramp; (2) the walkway situated directly in front of the hotel's main entrance; (3) the corridor leading to the author's personal accommodation on the 21st floor; (4) the pathway from the riverside leading into the main hotel building; and (5) the area of the riverside restaurant, which served as the breakfast venue.

Notably, the video installations featured no added sound design, primarily due to the existing ambient auditory environment of the installation spaces. Instead, the authentic sounds captured during filming were retained, allowing viewers to perceive the distinctive acoustics of footsteps resonating on various hotel surfaces, the diverse sounds of different types of footwear, and the vibrant laughter emanating from children and hotel housekeepers, all contributing to a rich, authentic sonic landscape. Each performer independently designed their specific stepping and hopping patterns based on a numbered grid provided by the author. The author additionally prescribed the color palette for the performers' attire, which they were requested to wear during the video recording process.

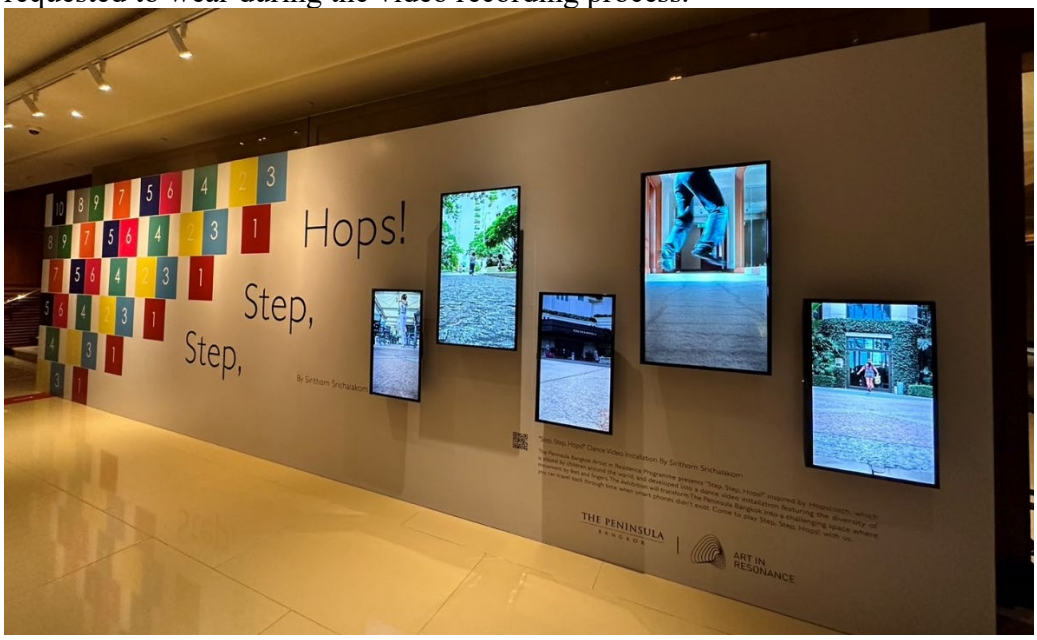


Figure 8: "Step, Step, Hops!" Dance Video Installation
Source: Photos taken by author

2. "Finger Hop" The second section extended the exploration of kineticism to a more nuanced, micro-level perspective, specifically focusing on the movements of the fingers. This video installation was designed for display on a configuration of eight small screens (ranging from 8, 10, 11, to 15 inches in size), strategically positioned on stands around the central floral centerpiece within the hotel's lobby, where the renowned Afternoon Tea service was held. The decision to focus on finger movements, rather than full bodily motion, was a deliberate artistic choice, acknowledging the diverse cultural backgrounds and beliefs of the hotel's international clientele, for whom direct depictions of feet might carry varied connotations.

This metaphorical approach, utilizing fingers as symbolic "legs," proved both engaging and culturally sensitive. The author developed a unique concept involving finger puppets adorned with miniature floral skirts and ribbons bearing The Peninsula's insignia. These puppets wore high heels that ingeniously resembled traditional Thai classical dance fingernails. The performers then precisely choreographed "stepping" and "hopping" sequences using these

finger-as-legs puppets, visually "visited" and "explored" the vibrantly colored and appealing pastries offered during the Afternoon Tea. This segment posited that even seemingly small, everyday actions like finger movements possessed a distinct rhythm and grace, capable of conveying narrative and contributing to an immersive sensory experience. It metaphorically suggested that the human body's capacity for dance and expressive movement extended beyond grand gestures to the most subtle articulations.



Figure 9: Setting of "Finger Hops" Dance Video Installation
Source: Photos taken by author



Figures 10-11: Production of the 'Finger Hop' dance video within the author's residency accommodation at The Peninsula Bangkok. The image captures the meticulous setup involving finger puppets, miniature props, and controlled lighting, demonstrating the intimate scale of this segment's creation. Source: Photos taken by author



Figures 12: A representative frame from the completed 'Finger Hop' dance video, meticulously highlighting the intricate detail of the finger puppets and their dynamic interaction with the vibrant Afternoon Tea pastries.
Source: Photos taken by author

3. Interactive Installation: "Hopscotch Challenge" The third distinct component of the exhibition was an interactive installation designed to directly engage hotel guests and passersby. This element featured physical hopscotch grids strategically placed within various public areas of the hotel. These installations served as an invitation for individuals to actively participate by attempting to step and hop through the designated numerical patterns, successfully completing each "level" of the challenge. This direct physical interaction embodied the project's objective of promoting increased bodily engagement and fostering a playful rediscovery of movement in an unexpected context.



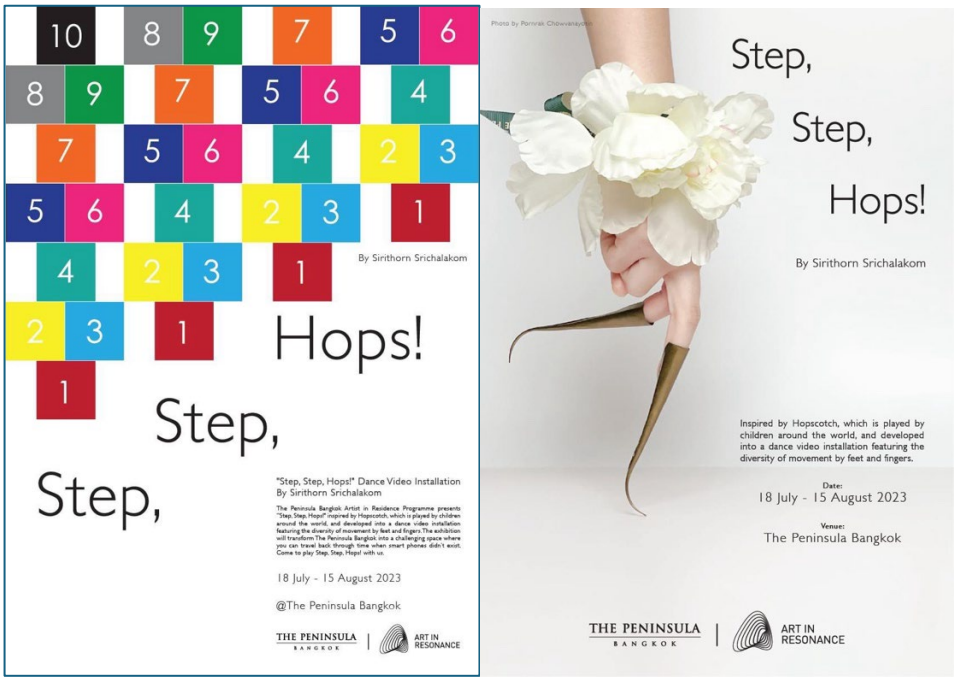
Figures 13-15: Interactive Installations "Hopscotch Challenge"
Source: Photos taken by author

The entirety of this Dance Video Installation was conceived, recorded, and edited as an in-house production within the hotel premises over a month, which demonstrated the project's deep integration into the residency environment. A core artistic objective was to cultivate an immersive environment within the hotel's lobby and walkways, subtly encouraging guests to disengage from their digital devices and re-engage with the tangible, physical world around them, thereby fostering a heightened sense of presence and appreciation for their immediate environment.

The selection of a two-set Dance Video Installation format was strategically driven by operational considerations, given the month-long display period required by the hotel from July 18 to August 15, 2023. Utilizing video screens facilitated aesthetic cable management and simplified installation procedures. Furthermore, this format allowed hotel staff to easily power the displays on and off for routine maintenance, such as during the 1 AM to 5 AM interval, and to promptly address any technical malfunctions, as each screen operated directly from a flash drive or internal file storage. This approach also accommodated the hotel's bi-weekly schedule for changing and watering the flowers at the Lobby Centerpiece, enabling the florists to conveniently arrange the displays around the screens' strategic positioning. Moreover, the collaborative spirit of the project extended to the hotel's operational and marketing teams, who seamlessly integrated the exhibition's thematic elements and key visuals into the design of accompanying infographics (with Graphic Design Adviser: Werapon Chiemvisudhi) and the aesthetic presentation of the Afternoon Tea set throughout the display period.



Figures 16-17: The exhibition's thematic elements and key visuals were strategically applied to the hotel's tabletop decor, the curated presentation of the Afternoon Tea service, and bespoke promotional materials, ensuring a cohesive and immersive narrative for guests of The Peninsula Bangkok throughout the display period.
Source: Photos taken by author



Figures 18-19: The exhibition Posters
Source: Photos taken by author

Project Realization and Public Engagement

The exhibition culminated in an opening event that convened a diverse audience, including representatives from the academic art community, artists from various disciplines, and members of the press. During this event, the author presented an introduction to the artworks. Notably, a new live Dance Performance titled 'Step, Step, Hops!!!' was specifically choreographed and performed by the author for this occasion. The choreography featured stepping and hopping movements designed to evoke the universal joy and playful spirit accessible to both children and adults, set to original music composed by Saowakhon Chotikaseth.

A crucial aspect of pre-exhibition collaboration involved a comprehensive meeting with staff from various hotel departments. During this session, the author presented the exhibition's details and conceptual framework, fostering a shared understanding among all personnel. Hotel staff demonstrated remarkable enthusiasm, actively engaging with questions and diligently taking notes to accurately convey information to guests throughout the exhibition period.

The exhibition was held from July 18 to August 15, 2023. Observations by both hotel staff and the author indicated a significant level of interest from hotel guests, evidenced by their active participation and inquiries for additional details about the artworks. The hotel's lobby restaurant staff notably provided comprehensive information and assistance, further enhancing guest engagement with the exhibition.

Viewer reception and engagement were diverse and highly encouraging. The exhibition notably generated considerable social media activity, with numerous guests sharing posts and checking in. Qualitative feedback highlighted the unexpected depth derived from a seemingly simple game, with comments such as the astonishment that "such an ordinary game could be presented in this manner," and appreciation for "art being created from relatable, everyday concepts." The 'Finger Hop' installation, in particular, elicited varied interpretations from viewers, who described the finger puppets as "women's legs in high heels," "feet wearing pointe shoes," or "flowers as ballet skirts," and even "sexy legs in short skirts walking in a garden." Lobby restaurant staff reported observing numerous guests attempting to mimic the finger

movements from the videos, and questions frequently arose regarding the meaning of the traditional Thai classical dance fingernails featured. For the author, these diverse and engaged reactions were particularly impressive and rewarding.

The interactive 'Hopscotch Challenge' component proved highly successful in achieving its objective. Many guests were observed encouraging their children or companions to hop through the grids, and there were frequent inquiries about the locations of additional hopscotch patterns throughout the hotel. This widespread, active participation clearly validated the success of the interactive design.

Post-Exhibition Status and Legacy

The intellectual property rights of the "Step, Step, Hops!" installation, including all video files and creative concepts, were retained solely by the author. The hotel does not possess commercial or re-exhibition rights to the work. The author intends to submit "Finger Hop" for presentation at future international dance video festivals.

Project Conclusion

The "Step, Step, Hops!" project successfully demonstrated the transformative potential of integrating contemporary art within a luxury hospitality setting. By reinterpreting the universal game of Hopscotch through diverse dance video installations and interactive elements, the exhibition effectively conveyed its core theme of diversity and encouraged active participation from a broad spectrum of hotel guests. The strategic consideration of operational logistics, audience demographics, and cultural sensitivities during the conceptualization and implementation phases proved crucial to the project's seamless integration and positive reception. This initiative not only enhanced the aesthetic appeal and cultural value of The Peninsula Bangkok but also fostered meaningful engagement between the hotel's environment, its diverse clientele, and the artistic community. The collaborative efforts with hotel staff and departments underscored a synergistic model where artistic creation and hospitality operations mutually benefited, contributing to a truly immersive and memorable experience. Ultimately, the project achieved its primary objectives by providing an environment where innovative artistic works were created and shared, simultaneously enhancing cultural experiences for guests and supporting the local creative economy, as outlined in the article's abstract.

Recommendations

Based on the insights gleaned from the "Step, Step, Hops!" project, the following recommendations are proposed for fostering a more vibrant and accessible artistic landscape within public-facing institutions:

1. **Cultivating Expanded Artistic Opportunities:** The profound value of integrating creative art initiatives, such as artist-in-residence programs and interactive exhibitions, within hospitality environments and other public venues was clearly demonstrated by this project. Such platforms offer invaluable opportunities for artists to develop works that are deeply informed by audience interaction and contextual relevance, thereby enriching the cultural landscape. It is respectfully suggested that public-facing institutions, including hotels and other large venues, consider exploring and expanding avenues that support artistic creation and display. This would ensure ongoing opportunities for artists to innovate and to develop new perspectives that resonate with diverse audiences, encouraging them to think creatively while also considering audience engagement. The success of past programs, such as the Artist-in-Residence at

The Peninsula Bangkok, despite its temporary hiatus due to management transitions, serves as a testament to the positive impact such initiatives can have, and it is hoped that similar opportunities will continue to emerge for new generations of artists.

2. **Sustained Collaborative Integration:** Future art initiatives should continue to foster deep collaboration between artists and the operational/marketing teams of host institutions from the outset. This symbiotic relationship ensures not only logistical feasibility but also cohesive thematic integration across all public touchpoints, including ambient displays and bespoke offerings, maximizing the project's impact and reach.
3. **Targeted Audience Engagement Strategies:** Building upon the success of interactive elements and culturally sensitive conceptualization demonstrated in "Step, Step, Hops!", future projects could explore more diverse forms of direct audience participation. This might include incorporating advanced digital interactive components or multi-sensory experiences that extend beyond physical presence, further enriching the immersive encounter.
4. **Long-Term Impact Assessment:** To further quantify the value and broader implications of such artistic endeavors, a more formal assessment of their long-term impact on audience satisfaction, institutional perception, and cultural enrichment would be beneficial. This could involve comprehensive surveys, qualitative interviews, or tracking patterns of public engagement.
5. **Documentation and Dissemination:** Prioritizing comprehensive documentation of the creative process, logistical considerations, and audience reception is crucial. This not only facilitates knowledge transfer for subsequent projects but also provides valuable academic material for wider dissemination within both the art and hospitality fields, serving as a testament to the institutions' commitment to cultural enrichment.

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Dancing the Identity of Mat Weavers in Sa Kaeo, Thailand: A Case Study of the Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern Project

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to (1) Study the identity of the Ban Phra Phloeng Mat Weaving and Processing community enterprise group to design and create performance called Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern. (2) Study the importance of the cultural values of the community in this performance. (3) Study the methods of using such performances to promote community tourism. This research is a participatory action research, by qualitative research methods and creative methods in the focus groups using information received from the community to jointly design and create dance moves, creating awareness with a focus on communities as key players, creative thinking, creative styles and cultural lifestyle symbol theory. The "Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern" dance which means a performance that conveys the art of mat weaving and the mat patterns that the weavers design themselves, which can generate income for the community. It has 17 dance moves and has creative forms: (1) Script (2) Performance style (3) Costume (4) Music and (5) Actors. The importance and the value of this performance to the community as follows: (1) Physical importance (2) Importance to the brain, memory system (3) Importance to the mind and (4) The importance of the spirit. (5) Social value (6) Cultural values (7) The Identity value (8) Educational value and (9) Aesthetic value. The methods of using such performances to promote community tourism as follows: (1) Community participation (2) Stimulate community awareness of values (3) Community members learn to respect themselves and others (4) Promote cultural tourism through public relations and dissemination through cooperation between researchers, communities, and the Phra Phloeng Subdistrict Administrative Organization

Keywords: Dancing the Identity,Mat Weavers,Fon Chak, Soi Roi Ngern

Purpose

Sa Kaeo Province is located in the eastern region of Thailand. It has 9 districts, 59 sub-districts, 731 villages. The researcher selected the target area, namely Phra Phloeng Subdistrict, Khao Chakan District, because the researcher has been developing the economy, society and culture since 2021 to 2024.

Phra Phloeng Subdistrict has many tourist attractions, such as Khao Chan Temple and Bueng Phra Ram Temple. There are also annual traditions and festivals, such as the Songkran Festival, the Long Boat Race Festival, the Kwan Khao Festival (Mae Phosop, Thai goddess of rice) and the Bun Bang Fai Rocket Festival. There are many local experts in traditional medicine, organic farming, Thai massage and handicrafts.

There are 19 villages with more than 5,000 households. The population has various occupations, including agriculture trading and general employment. Various occupational

groups were established, including agriculture, livestock and handicrafts. The most prominent occupational group in Phra Phloeng Subdistrict is the Ban Phra Phloeng Mat Weaving and Processing Community Enterprise Group, chaired by Mrs.Wanthana Phongphang, with 40 members who are housewives and elderly people.

The Ban Phra Phloeng Mat Weaving and Processing Community Enterprise Group aims to generate income, reduce unemployment and maximize the use of local resources. The group's products are mats that the weavers design their own patterns are inspired by local identities, which are unique to the community. There are guaranteed awards as follows: In 2022, we received the Community Product Standards Mark (MPS) from the Sa Kaeo Provincial Industrial Office, received a 4-star OTOP (One Tambol One Product) certificate and received support from the Community Development Department at both the district and provincial levels.

In 2023, it was registered as a community enterprise for the Ban Phra Phloeng Mat Weaving and Processing Industry. In 2024, the researcher wanted to carry out activities that emphasized society and culture, as mat weavers already enjoyed singing and dancing. For the reason, there is a training activity to apply the lifestyle of the Ban Phra Phloeng Mat Weaving and Processing Community Enterprise Group and the community's identity to the design of dance moves, which are related to the mat weaving process and mat patterns. The name of this performance is "Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern," which means a performance that conveys the art of mat weaving and the mat patterns that the weavers design themselves, which can generate income for the community.

The purpose of this research was to

(1) Study the identity of the Ban Phra Phloeng Mat Weaving and Processing community enterprise group to design and create performance called Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern.

(2) Study the importance of the cultural values of the community in this performance.

(3) Study the methods of using such performances to promote community tourism.

Approach

The researcher used qualitative research methodology and creative design method of performing arts. The specific study area is the Ban Phra Phloeng Mat Weaving and Processing Community Enterprise Group, Phra Phloeng Subdistrict, Khao Chakan District, Sa Kaeo Province. This research is a participatory action research between the researcher and the community. The target group is people in the community area of Village No. 1 - Village No. 7 and Village No. 12, approximately 20 households. Data collection, both primary and secondary data, was carried out using the following processes:

1. Field study using observation and data collection using focus group interviews. The researcher selected important people to provide information, including Mrs.Wanthana Phongphang, president of the Ban Phra Phloeng Mat Weaving and Processing Community Enterprise Group, the designer of various mat patterns and the mat weavers. The researcher has used information from the mat weaving process and mat patterns to design dances and performances in collaboration with the community, resulting in this group having a unique performance.

2. Design and create dance moves for the Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern dance using symbol theory. The dance moves are designed to reflect the group's way of life and mat weaving process, including the group's unique mat patterns.

3. Study documents, collect and analyze information about community management, cultural management, social and cultural values, spiritual values, academic values and aesthetic values to tell about the benefits of the Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern dance to the community.

4. Create awareness about the performance of the Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern dance, focusing primarily on the community, to see the value and importance, including the benefits that the community receives from the performance.

5. The study results were summarized using an inductive approach and the data were categorized for analysis using relevant concepts and theories as references. Some data cannot be referenced using theory; the researcher must rely on their own common sense or experience. The presentation will be in a discussion format with illustrations to meet the stated objectives.

Results

The results of this research are to

1. The identity of the Ban Phra Phloeng Mat Weaving and Processing Community Enterprise Group is to design and create performance called Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern.

The identity of the Ban Phra Phloeng Mat Weaving and Processing Community Enterprise Group is that the mat weavers design their own mat patterns in line with the community's identity.

The performance "Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern" was created in collaboration with the community and showcases the mat weaving process and mat patterns designed by the mat weavers. The dance moves for this performance explain the mat weaving process and the mat patterns designed by the mat weavers.

"Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern" has dance moves that show the art of mat weaving and the mat patterns designed by the mat weavers and the community lifestyle of the mat weaving group as follows:

Table 1 Name of dance move and identity to design and create dance move.

No.	Name of dance move	Identity to design and create dance move
1.	Salutation Posture	It is a gesture of greeting because people in the community are relatives and therefore respect each other.
2.	Walking Posture	It is a walking posture towards the reeds.
3.	Sedge Posture	It is a pose that shows the sedge growing from the rhizome in the soil until it becomes a green sedge. The group leader and other members have planted sedge together in their home area to reduce production costs.
4.	Sedge Cutting Posture	It is a pose that shows the use of scissors to cut a large, fat reed and hen cut it into a mat.
5.	Sedge Squeezing Posture	It is a pose shown when the reed is cut open.

6.	Sedge Drying Posture	This is a posture shoeing how to dry the reeds to prevent mold.
7.	Sedge Dyeing Posture	This is a pose that shows the process of dyeing the sedge and then drying it again.
8.	Mat Sitting Weaving Posture	It is a sitting position for weaving a mat.
9.	Selling Mat Posture	It is a pose that shows carrying mats to sell in the market and attracting customers.
10.	Sleeping Bat – Flying Bat Posture	This pose represents bats sleeping in caves during the day and flying out in the evening. Since Phra Phloeng Subdistrict has many caves, bats live there. When evening falls, the bats fly out of the caves.
11.	Elephant Swinging Trunk Posture	It is a pose that represents an elephant with tusks and a trunk. Phra Phloeng Subdistrict has many wild elephants living and hiding in the mountains because it is close to the pristine natural forest and there are no houses.
12.	Bird Heart Posture	This was a pattern that the mat weaver had designed, but it was small, so he combined the two patterns to create this new pattern.
13.	Nemo Fish Posture	This pose is in the shape of a fish. The mat weaver wanted to design a more modern pattern and saw his grandchildren watching the cartoon Nemo, so she designed this pattern.
14.	Butterfly Posture	It is a pose that represents the flight of a butterfly (a small winged animal). Because Phra Phloeng Subdistrict has a complete natural forest, there are butterflies flying on the grass.
15.	Bright Star Posture	This pose represents the stars shining on a dark moonless night. It is a new pattern that the mat weavers designed during times when they were feeling down, but when they saw the light of the stars shining brightly, they felt inspired.
16.	Double Swan Posture	It is a pose that shows two swans playing in the water designed a floating duck pattern, but the researcher saw that the neck was long and the beck was not wide open, so he suggested that a swan would be better, which the members agreed with.
17.	Counting Money Posture	It is a pose that shoes counting money after selling mats.

The “Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern” dance has a form of performance that is a local dance of the Northeast. Because most of the population immigrated from the Northeast, they mainly use the Northeastern language.



Figure 1 Sedge Posture
Note. Researcher



Figure 2 Sedge Cutting Posture
Note. Researcher



Figure 3 Sedge Dyeing Posture
Note. Researcher



Figure 4 Mat Sitting Weaving Posture and Selling Mat Posture
Note. Researcher

Table 2 Principles of design for the "Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern" dance.

No.	Principles of design	Description
1.	Performance style	The performance is a dance performed by walking to the beat of the music. The actors stand in four rows.
2.	Music	The songs used do not have a specific melody. They can be played with any song, but use an Isan melody with a medium tempo. In this case, the researcher used the song "Maeng Phu Tom Dok" because the music has a moderate rhythm and the elderly can dance to it.
3.	Script	This performance tells the story of the mat weaving process and the mat patterns designed by the mat weavers.
4.	Actors	The actors are mat weavers.
5.	Costume	Clothing and accessories are not fixed, it depends on what you decide to wear.

2. The importance of the cultural values of the community in this performance.

"Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern" It is a performance that conveys the dance moves of the mat-weaving process, starting from the Salutation Posture to Counting Money Posture that is unique to this occupational group. This performance is important to the community in terms of body, mind and spirit, and has spiritual, social and cultural, academic and aesthetic value to the community.

Table 3 The importance of this performance to the community.

The importance	Description
Physical importance	Mat weavers move their bodies to the rhythm of the music, exercising with dance moves. This helps with balance, increases muscle strength due to the continuous movement, and stimulates blood circulation.
Importance to the brain, memory system	Mat weavers practice their memory, sequencing the steps of the mat production process, dance moves, counting rhythms and control moving their bodies in time with the music.
Importance to the mind	Mat weavers are happy to dancing. After doing their daily routines each day, meeting, talking and this activity makes them happy.
Importance of the spirit	This activity creates love and unity among the mat weavers in doing activities together and leads to helping each other.

Table 4 The value of performance to the community.

The value	Description
Social value	It was a collaboration between every village and every occupational group in Phra Phloeng Subdistrict to learn and put into practice. It was a small activity that linked the regular activities of the people in Pra Phloeng Subdistrict. Create collaborative learning within occupational groups, housewives, the elderly and the community by using dance as a medium to disseminate knowledge about the mat weaving process and mat designs created by mat weavers.
Cultural value	It is a community performance that can be performed at every festival. It is an activity that people in the community perform together.
The Identity value	It promotes unity because everyone has a shared identity. It is the foundation for preserving and developing culture in its own way. It creates pride and connection among people in the community. It attracts tourists to build the local economy.
Educational value	It is an exchange of knowledge between researcher and the community, communities themselves and tourist and the community.
Aesthetic value	Enhances community image and pride. When performance reflect local culture, people in the community gain inspiration or new perspectives on life. Audiences gain pleasure, knowledge and relaxation when watching performances.

3. The methods of using such performances to promote community tourism.

The "Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern" dance can be used to promote learning resources and tourist attractions in Phra Phloeng Subdistrict. The performance began at the home of the president of the Ban Phra Phloeng Mat Weaving and Processing Community Enterprise Group, where interested groups came to learn about the mat weaving process.

Table 5 Audience response to the "Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern" dance performance.

No.	Fictitious Name	Sex	Age	Strength	Defect
1.	Audience A	F	48	- Cute	- The actors perform out of sync.
2.	Audience B	F	43	- Admire the performance	- The actors perform out of sync. - There should be a pamphlet to introduce the dance moves. - Should be taught to students.
3.	Audience C	F	52	- Like	- The actors perform out of sync.
4.	Audience D	F	54	- Like	- The actors perform out of sync.
5.	Audience E	F	47	- Like	- The actors perform out of sync. - There should be a pamphlet to introduce the dance moves.

From Table 5 Audience response to the “Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern” dance performance, it can be concluded that most viewers like it and there are some shortcomings that researcher need to go back and fix, namely: The actors perform out of sync. There should be a pamphlet to introduce the dance moves. Should be taught to students.



Figure 5 Actors of performance “Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern”
Note. Research

Conclusion

The conclusion of this research was to

1. The identity of the Ban Phra Phloeng Mat Weaving and Processing Community Enterprise Group is to design and create performance called Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern.

The identity of the Ban Phra Phloeng Mat Weaving and Processing Community Enterprise Group is that the mat weavers design their own mat patters, and the patterns are unique, sharp, and cute. This can be considered a selling point of this group, which is consistent with the concept of Thanon (2022) Identity means something that is a unique characteristic of a person or something that makes them stand out or different from others. The mat pattern that the mat weavers designed and which is known in the trade market as belonging to this group is the bat pattern, elephant patterns and butterfly patterns.

This is a symbol that expresses the identity of the group, which is in line with the concept of Bokham (2022) and Phunwoon (2019) Symbols are things that represent a group's identity. and is an expression of cultural distinctiveness.

The researcher has therefore created another form of identity for this community by combining the lifestyle, handicrafts and performing arts, resulting in the performance of the “Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern” dance, which is consistent with the concept of Janngam (2021) Creating a community identity must take into account (1) community lifestyle (2) history (3) multicultural communities (4) architecture (5) literature (6) handicrafts (7) home economics and (8) performing arts.

The researcher uses the theory of beauty in creation, using imagination as a creative dimension, using diversity in creating performing arts, aiming to transmit and develop further, which is consistent with the concept of Pidokrat (2019) The theory of artistic creation presents

the philosophy of the field of aesthetics, which has two principles: (1) The principle of creative dimensions, which arises from human actions, imagination, research, and initiative, until it becomes a national art property and is then passed on. (2) The principle of creative diversity has 5 characteristics: (a) Cultural processes that are related to artistic creation. (b) Internal factors in artistic creation. (c) External factors such as science, technology, innovation in artistic creation. (d) Knowledge accumulation, initiation, transmission and further development, and (e) The value of creative works, knowledge and experiences of viewers.

The performance of the "Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern" dance has the following creative forms: (1) Script (2) Performance style (3) Costume (4) Music and (5) Actors, which are in line with the concept of Narapong Charassri (Kosonhemmanee, 2013)

The "Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern" dance which means a performance that conveys the art of mat weaving and the mat patterns that the weavers design themselves, which can generate income for the community. It has 17 dance moves. The performance is a dance performed by walking to the beat of the music. The actors stand in four rows. The songs used do not have a specific melody. They can be played with any song, but use an Isan melody with a medium tempo. In this case, the researcher used the song "Maeng Phu Tom Dok" because the music has a moderate rhythm and the elderly can dance to it. This performance tells the story of the mat weaving process and the mat patterns designed by the mat weavers. The actors are mat weavers. Clothing and accessories are not fixed, it depends on what you decide to wear.

2. The importance of the cultural values of the community in this performance.

The performance of the "Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern" dance is a form of culture that is related and has a relationship between society, community, wisdom and performing arts, which is consistent with the concept of Praichanchit (2007) Culture is about the relationship between society, community and ethnicity. There are two main mechanisms that drive cultural processes: wisdom and expressive culture.

This performance is a management of cultural resources that must show the value and importance of what researcher and communities have jointly created, continued and developed their own society, which is in line the concept of Lertchanrit (2011) Cultural Resource Management It is necessary to take into account the value, importance and meaning. It is related to human culture because humans are the ones who create culture. Culture refers to everything that humans make, create, and invent in order to survive, continue, and develop their own society. Its basic characteristics are: (1) it is an idea and value that members of society share; (2) it is something that humans learn; (3) it uses symbols; (4) it is an integrated body of knowledge and wisdom; (5) it is never stagnant, it is developed and expanded upon.

The importance of this performance to the community as follows: (1) Physical importance
(2) Importance to the brain, memory system (3) Importance to the mind and (4) The importance of the spirit

The value of this performance to the community as follows: (1) Social value (2) Cultural values (3) The Identity value (4) Educational value and (5) Aesthetic value

3. The methods of using such performances to promote community tourism.

Guidelines for promoting cultural tourism based on the identity of the Ban Phra Phloeng Mat Weaving and Processing Community Enterprise Group have organized this activity with students of Ban Phra Phloeng School. The activity included learning content about mat pattern

design, mat weaving, and the BCG project, which is related to the concept of Janngam (2023) Guidelines for promoting cultural tourism based on community identity can be analyzed into 3 issues: (1) Knowledge transfer (2) Cooperation between educational institutions and agencies within the community and (3) Public relations. And the plan for further development and extension of the Fon Chak Soi Roi Ngern dance performance is to bring the dance postures designed by the group members to the school, possibly by making it a set of contemporary performances.

Guidelines for managing community cultural tourism, which is related to the concept of Thongpheng (2011) Cultural tourism consists of (1) Tourism that studies and researches the importance and value of history, background, and cultural resources in the tourist destination. (2) Tourism that creates or promotes community members to participate in the development or management of their own local resources. (3) Tourism that provides knowledge and understanding of culture and stimulates awareness in preserving cultural resources to remain sustainable. (4) Tourism that respects the culture of the community and Phosuwan (2012) Promotion of cultural tourism is the creation and dissemination of an image, public relations to create an image and confidence among tourists, and the dissemination and communication of tourism images to be widespread through all channels. Organizing activities to create awareness and recognition of the importance of image, creating consciousness and values are:

(1) The community has participated in the development and development of many groups.

(2) Stimulate the community to be aware that their community is valuable and worth learning about the occupations that are the wisdom of the elderly.

(3) People in the community know how to respect themselves and others.

(4) There is promotion of cultural tourism through public relations and dissemination through the collaboration of researchers, communities and the Phra Phloeng Subdistrict Administrative Organization.

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Developing A Choral Singing Project To Enhance Psychological Well-Being In Thai Elderly

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ABSTRACT

A researcher initiated a study on the psychological well-being of elderly participants in the choral singing project in 2020. Researchers found that the six aspects of Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing correlate with skills in choral singing activities. The researcher employed the findings to establish a choral singing project aimed at examining the relationship between psychological well-being and singing among Thai elderly people once more in 2024. This research seeks to create a choral singing program for the elderly, emphasizing skills that enhance psychological well-being. Findings suggested that the psychological well-being of elderly people who engaged in choral singing for at least four months, as per the project specifications, improved. The choral singing project is structured around six aspects of psychological well-being, including (a) Autonomy: Self-directed learning and evaluation conducted via Google Forms; (b) Environmental mastery: Recording your understanding of reading musical notation and the approach for vocalizing songs using symbols and language during practice sessions; (c) Personal growth: Accountability for training to improve vocal skills until mastery of the songs is attained; (d) Positive relations with others: The ability to engage in collaborative singing practice within the same vocal group, providing mutual support. (e) Purpose in life: The commitment to personal growth for effective teamwork; and (f) Self-acceptance: Recognizing personal errors and exhibiting openness to advice from the conductor and fellow singers for self-enhancement. Prior data indicates that understanding the relationship between musical activities and psychological well-being facilitates the creation and implementation of musical projects for the long-term advantage of individuals in society.

Keywords: choral singing, choral singing in elderly, psychological well-being

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The project to promote the psychological well-being of the elderly is a public policy that is organized in the current society, and it is organized widely around the world, including in Thailand. The project aims to improve the quality of life and the psychological well-being of elderly people nationwide without limiting any particular group. Music to promote psychological well-being in the elderly is one of the widely accepted projects, because music can help to improve mood and help the elderly feel more self-worth after participating in musical activities. Therefore, most psychomusicology scholars and researchers focus on studying the effects of music on the psychological well-being of the elderly. For example, Laukkana (2007) presented research results stating that "listening to music is a leisure activity and a source of positive emotions that often occurs among elderly people." Gridley et al. (2011) presented research findings indicating that the questionnaire results rated music and singing activities as providing greater happiness than working or shopping, while community group singing activities made participants feel safe and included in the community. Creech et al. (2013) presented the research results that "the increased psychological well-being was found in the group of music activity participants who had more developed musical skills, creative expression, freedom in participating in musical activities, social acceptance, pride, and opportunities for positive reinforcement," etc.

The author conducted the first choir project for the elderly in June 2019. The author found that the choir project had a positive impact on the elderly. The author then conducted

research on the psychological well-being of the elderly in the second choir project, between November 2019 - August 2020. The research topic is "Trends in the psychological well-being of participants in choir activities for the elderly." The research found that skills in choir activities, which include basic practice of choral singing, interpretation and expression for singing, choral singing in Thai popular songs and international songs, and planning and working together for stage performances, had a positive impact on the psychological well-being of elderly participants. The mean psychological well-being of the elderly after they participated in the overall project increased and was at a high level (before: mean = 4.70, S.D. = 1.04, and after: mean = 4.93, S.D. = 0.94). The item with the highest mean score was 'personal growth,' with a high mean score (before: mean = 5.04, S.D. = 1.05 and after: mean = 5.30, S.D. = 0.99). The item with the lowest mean score was 'autonomy,' with a medium to fairly high mean score (pre: mean = 4.17, S.D. = 1.01 and post: mean = 4.17, S.D. = 1.03). (Inkhong & Romphochuen, 2563; Ruangchante et al., 2022, pp. 127-142)

Because psychological well-being is important for elderly people, it creates a positive perspective on life, a strong body, the ability to help themselves and others, optimism, the readiness to always develop themselves, the ability to manage problems or control difficult situations, and new goals in life. (Chaisang et al., 2020, pp. 306-318; Ruangchante et al., 2022, pp. 127-142) In addition, data from the psychological well-being test can be analyzed to plan for improving psychological well-being in the elderly. (Ryff, 2014, pp. 10-28) The author therefore uses the research results from 2020 as a guideline for the development of a choral singing project to enhance psychological well-being among Thai elderly people in 2024. This project is part of the research titled "Level of Singing Accuracy to Lead Improving Long-Term Memory in the Elderly: An Electroencephalogram Study." Thailand Science Research and Innovation provided funding for this research. The research results indicated that elderly participants who engaged in the choral program for at least four months as scheduled experienced an increase in average psychological well-being, which was consistent with the development of improved choral skills.

Therefore, this article presents the concept of developing a choral singing project aimed at enhancing psychological well-being among elderly individuals in Thailand. The concept shows the connection of three pieces of data: the concept of psychological well-being (Ryff, 2014, pp. 10-28), the specific skills required for the choral singing and the musical skills, and the behavioral and cognitive data of the choral singing participants from the research on "Trends in the change of the psychological well-being of the choral singing participants for the elderly." (Inkhong & Romphochuen, 2020; Ruangchante et al., 2022, pp. 127-142). Furthermore, this article supports the idea that choral singing projects are one of the most popular musical practices for elderly communities in today's society. Choral singing is a musical activity that elderly individuals can easily access and practice, allowing them to clearly see the positive impact on their psychological well-being.

METHODOLOGY

The choral singing project for Thai elderly in 2024 is part of the research titled "Level of Singing Accuracy to Lead Improving Long-Term Memory in the Elderly: An Electroencephalogram Study." The Human Research Ethics Committee of the School of Liberal Arts at Metharath University approved this research, as evidenced by the exemption review form and certificate number 2023016. The research used a mixed-methods approach grounded in psychology and musicology. One objective of this research was to analyze the relationship between the development of choral singing skills and the psychological well-being of the elderly. The participants in the research project were 40 elderly people aged 55 years and over who participated in the research project between March and June 2024. This project is divided into two parts: (1) group practice sessions at a prepared venue; the number

of practice sessions is 15; each session lasts 2 hours; and (2) self-practice with video clips of exercises via Google Forms at the participants' homes. The researcher assigned participants to practice daily. The practice took approximately 15 minutes. After participants practiced, they had to self-assess. Skills of choral singing are divided into four parts: (1) understanding the rhythm of the music, (2) breathing and articulation for singing, (3) pronouncing the words correctly and clearly, and (4) singing the song. The project was created based on the idea of improving psychological well-being by combining the specific skills needed for choral singing with the musical abilities and the thoughts and behaviors of the participants from the study on how choral singing affects the psychological well-being of older adults. Data collection consisted of (1) a pre- and post-project psychological well-being test; (2) self-assessment data via Google Forms; and (3) in-depth interviews with 10 research participants. The researchers then synthesized the data to assess the relationship between psychological well-being and the development of choral singing skills, in order to evaluate how effectively choral singing enhances psychological well-being in the Thai elderly project.

RESULTS

Developing a choral singing project to enhance psychological well-being in Thai elderly

In 2024, researchers began developing a choral singing project aimed at enhancing the psychological well-being of elderly individuals in Thailand by synthesizing three pieces of data to identify their connections. The data consists of three parts: the concept of psychological well-being, the necessary skills specific to choral singing and musical abilities, and the behaviors and thoughts of participants from the research titled “Trends of Change in the Psychological Well-Being of Choral Singing for Elderly Participants.” The details are as follows:

Psychological well-being refers to a positive mental state in life related to life events or experiences (Ryff, 1989, pp. 1069-1081). Psychological well-being, according to Ryff's 42-item PWB scale, is divided into 6 dimensions: (1) Autonomy: The ability to direct one's own thinking and behavior, to evaluate oneself according to personal standards, and to be free from societal pressures; (2) Environmental mastery: The ability to deal with difficult matters in a way that suits one's own needs and values and to effectively take advantage of the opportunities around oneself; (3) Personal growth: People who know, realize, and continually develop their own behaviors and potential with an open attitude to new experiences. Until these behaviors and thoughts lead to changes that reflect greater self-knowledge and effectiveness, (4) Positive relations with others: People who have trust, love, compassion, intimacy, and understanding in giving and receiving good and satisfying relationships with themselves and others; (5) Purpose in life: who has a clear sense and understanding of past and present goals and values in life and who is able to set goals and purposes for his or her life; and (6) Self-acceptance: who has a positive attitude toward himself or herself, can recognize and accept both his or her strengths and weaknesses, and feels good about his or her life (Ryff, 2014, pp. 10-28; Ryff’s Psychological Well-Being Scales (PWB), 42 Item version., n.d.; Dierendonck et al., 2007, pp. 473-479).

Specific skills required for choral singing and the musical skills: Good singing comes from specific essential singing skills and musical skills that meet accepted assessment criteria (Jorden, 2014). The essential skills specific to choral singing include (1) The fundamental singing skills, including breathing, vocal positioning, and correct pronunciation; (2) Pitches and intonation, including pitch matching, enhancing intonation skills, and the ability to blend voices; (3) Sight-reading is the reading of notes when given a new piece of music. If a practitioner can read notes, it makes learning and performing new music much faster; (4) Rhythmic accuracy is the relationship between note proportions and consistent

beats; (5) Musical expression is the presentation of different emotions in a piece of music to communicate its musicality and artistry, including the skills of orchestration and collaboration; (6) Blending and balance is the mixing and balancing of sounds, which are important skills of choral singing; (7) Listening skills are hearing and responding to different sounds, including listening to other singers while they are singing; (8) Teamwork is working together among singers to achieve a shared musical success; and (9) Confidence and stage performance are singing on stage with a sense of comfort and giving your all on stage. (Williams, 2023; MusicPandit, 2023(a); MusicPadit, 2023(b); Archibeque, n.d.; Butts, 2018; Schreyer, 2014) Conversely, musical skills encompass both theoretical and practical abilities governed by the musical system and its rules, which include playing musical instruments, analyzing musical structures, distinguishing musical sounds, and participating in music; these competencies can be categorized into rhythm, basic movement, melody, and harmony. Additionally, musical skills must encompass both musical perception (NAEP, Vanneman, 1998) and listening skills (Jorden, 2014), while soft skills should include personal skills, social skills, communication skills, international skills, and process skills (Knaus et al., 2020). These are the essential skills that lead to excellent choral singing.

The behaviors and thoughts of the choral singing participants are part of the results of the research on "Trends in the change of the psychological well-being of the choral singing participants for the elderly." They reflect the relationship with the psychological well-being of the elderly, which is divided into 6 dimensions as follows:

Table 1 The relationship between the psychological well-being of elderly and the behaviors and thoughts of research participants (Inkhong & Romphochuen, 2020; Ruangchante et al., 2022, pp. 127-142)

Items	PWB for Elderly	Behaviors and thoughts of research participants
1.	Autonomy	- Practice on your own to be able to sing correctly and in unison with others.
2.	Environmental mastery	- Adapting and trying to use technology during the COVID-19 situation, such as using the Zoom application to practice singing, using a mobile phone to record singing practice videos, sending homework video clips via the LINE application, etc. - Controlling feelings of excitement and anxiety during stage performances - Trying to memorize lyrics in a foreign language by writing them in Thai spelling.
3.	Personal growth	- Developing pronunciation skills by practicing singing with the piano for accuracy - The success of a stage performance depends on preparation of one's singing skills, physical condition, and mental condition. - Pride, self-worth, and self-esteem after participating in a committed choral activity
4.	Positive relations with others	- Tolerance to group work with a positive attitude - Accepting the opinions of others - Communicating with a smiling face and compassion - Mutual encouragement - Sharing audio files and video clips during practice in LINE groups - Sharing a petition printed in large letters

		- Sharing drinks and snacks
5.	Purpose in life	- Planning self-directed training to develop personal skills - Preparing for the stage performance
6.	Self-acceptance	- Evaluating and improving your singing voice during self-practice training - Evaluating your singing voice and adjusting your voice to blend with the others' voices while singing together.

After the researcher synthesized the connections between the above 3 data, the researcher designed activities for the choral singing project to promote the psychological well-being of Thai elderly in 2024 by using the skills of choral singing, which were defined as the important musical skill content of this project, as the basis of the design idea. Skills of choral singing include (1) understanding musical rhythm, (2) breathing and articulation for singing, (3) pronouncing words correctly and clearly, and (4) singing the song. Details of the activities are as follows:

Table 2 Activities for the choral singing project to promote the psychological well-being of Thai elderly in 2024

Items	PWB for Elderly	Activities
1.	Autonomy	**Self-learning and assessment via Google Forms** 1. The conductor designed a daily singing practice and self-assessment for the participants via a Google Form. The practice was divided into two parts: solfeggio practice in scales and songs and singing the lyrics of the songs. 2. Participants practice following the video clips and independently evaluate themselves.
2.	Environmental mastery	**Solfeggio singing** 1. The conductor uses the solfège system to practice pronunciation on the scales and melodies of the songs assigned to the project. 2. Participants understood and practiced solfeggio singing. However, since solfeggio singing was new to almost all participants, they recorded the note names of the melody in Thai or English spelling.
		Using symbols to guide the singing of melodies 1. The conductor introduced and gave examples of how to use symbols to guide the singing of the melody. 2. Participants learn to sing each pitch of the melody and identify their symbols to remind them of the correct way to pronounce the sound according to the conductor's direction. For instance, the conductor designates symbols for neumatic singing, which involves pronouncing two tones in a single syllable, melismatic singing, which involves pronouncing more than two tones in a single syllable, and rising/falling intonation, among others.

		Use Thai spelling to guide the pronunciation of lyrics according to pitch. 1. The conductor introduced and gave examples of using Thai spelling to guide the pronunciation of the lyrics according to the pitch. 2. Participants understand the pronunciation of each syllable in the request and independently determine the corresponding Thai spelling to help them pronounce the request according to the pitch. For example, writing Thai spelling in foreign songs, writing Thai spelling according to the tone that matches the pitch of the melody, which does not match the Thai words according to the grammar of writing.
3.	Personal growth	**Self-learning and assessment via Google Forms** (Details in autonomy)
		Memorizing lyrics and melodies is essential for performing on stage. 1. The conductor requires the participants to memorize the lyrics and melody without looking at the music notes while singing. 2. Participants try to memorize the lyrics and melody and be able to sing the song together with others without looking at the music notes while singing.
		Physical preparation for performing on stage 1. The conductor advised on maintaining physical fitness, controlling nervousness, and taking care of the vocal organs. 2. Participants follow the conductor's instructions and try to control themselves from becoming too anxious or excited.
4.	Positive relations with others	**Subgrouping for training** 1. The conductor divides the group into small groups for practice, including monophonic groups and small groups of 2-4 people. The group members are rotated so that the same person does not overlap. 2. Participants can practice singing with others in the same vocal group and in small groups of 2-4 people.
5.	Purpose in life	**Self-learning and assessment via Google Forms** (Details in autonomy)
		Memorizing lyrics and melodies is essential for performing on stage. (Details is personal growth)
		Physical preparation for performing on stage (Details is personal growth)
6.	Self-acceptance	**Self-learning and assessment via Google Forms** (Details in autonomy)
		The skill of listening to music and one's own voice

		1. The conductor guides you through the practice of listening to the melody, the accompaniment, and your voice while singing. 2. Participants practice listening to the melody, the accompaniment, and their own voice while singing to adjust their voice to match the music and blend with the others' voices.

CONCLUSION

The aforementioned activities pertain to the specific skills necessary for choral singing and musical proficiency. Thus, the project's activities are vital to showing the reasons and factors that lead to the development of skills related to choral singing activities that are important for increasing the positive impact on the psychological well-being of the research participants. The details are summarized as follows.

(1) Autonomy: Self-learning and assessment via Google Forms every day for participants as part of activities leading to the success of choral singing practice. Self-assessment is a process that allows participants to assess their own strengths and weaknesses in order to promote and improve their singing accuracy and precision in pitch and melody. Self-assessment requires the use of listening skills and analysis of the harmony of the singing and music. This process is therefore part of developing the perception and understanding of musical pitch and rhythm (Vanneman, 1998, pp. 1-6; Persky et al., 1998), and compare the quality pronunciations (Knaus et al., n.d.). Thus, self-learning is a skill that demonstrates autonomy because the participant must control himself without being coerced by others (Ryff, 2014, p. 12).

(2) Environmental mastery: Participants understand and practice solfeggio singing by recording note names of melody in Thai or English spelling while practicing it. Participants can handle this tricky situation by defining their symbols to remind them how to pronounce the melody pitch correctly, as well as spelling Thai in foreign songs and pronouncing syllables in lyrics that do not match Thai grammar. They demonstrate an awareness that solfeggio singing is essential for memorizing the pitch of notes in the scale that appear in the song (Skoove, 2022). Because the solfège system affects the music auditory perceptions, especially pitch and melody training (Lin, 2015). In addition, the solfège system helps with pitch memory. It acts like text and integrates sound patterns into a certain level of memory (Reifinger, 2012, pp. 26-42). Thus, the participants' attempts to manage problems or obstacles during the singing practice demonstrate the ability to appropriately master the environmental needs for the benefit of effective choral singing skill development (Ryff, 2014, p. 12).

(3) Personal growth: Personal growth is reflected through efforts to develop pronunciation skills by practicing singing with the piano, self-learning and assessment via Google Forms, memorizing lyrics and melodies, and physical and mental preparation. Participants demonstrate their responsibility in practicing various aspects to develop their singing ability until they become proficient in performing songs. Ultimately, they gain a sense of pride, self-worth, and self-esteem after successfully participating in a choir activity. Self-growth is not only the continuous development of one's own behavior and potential but also reflects the participant's increasingly effective knowledge of themselves (Ryff, 2014, p. 12).

(4) Positive relations with others: Participants can practice singing with others in the same vocal group. Those who can sing the correct melody will guide others with intention and kindness. On the other hand, practitioners demonstrate determination and persistence in following instructions even though such practice requires a lot of time for success. Such activity changes the group members between being advisers and being followers. This change depends on each person's different understanding and skills. Such behaviors demonstrate

mutual support among participants through a process of trust, empathy, understanding of the give and take of positive relationships, and satisfaction between oneself and others (Ryff, 2014, p. 12).

(5) Purpose in life: Planning for rehearsals and preparing for stage performances by yourself demonstrates a commitment to self-development for effective collaboration. In choral singing, listening to each other is crucial for achieving blending and balance. Although all participants are elders, they all still have new goals in life, especially the desire to succeed in their choral performances on stage after deciding to join the choral activity. Thus, these behaviors reflect the identities of those who have a clear sense of purpose and values in life, and they are all able to set goals in their participation in activities (Ryff, 2014, p. 12).

(6) Self-acceptance: Participants train themselves to be able to accept their mistakes through self-learning and assessment via Google Forms. If they find that their singing skills are not as expected, they will rehearse until they self-assess and find that they can sing correctly. On the other side of the onsite practice, participants receive guidance from the conductor and other members. Their behavior shows that they are aware of and accept their own shortcomings, and they try to improve and develop their singing skills. These are the important processes of musical practice, which include listening skills and musical perception skills to evaluate and improve singing performance, combined with teamwork skills, social skills, and communication skills, etc. Therefore, those who can recognize and accept both their strengths and weaknesses will have a positive attitude and feel good about their lives (Ryff, 2014, p. 12).

Developing a choral singing project to enhance psychological well-being in Thai elderly is an approach to organizing musical activities for sustainable benefits for the elderly community. Because participating in the choir project is not only about practicing singing skills but also about promoting the psychological well-being of the elderly. In addition, if the elderly who participated in the project realized the relationship between the designed activities, the development of choral singing skills, and an increase in their psychological well-being, they would be able to use choral singing as a sustainable part of their lives.

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Habitus: The Naturalness of the Balletic Body

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Abstract

Ballet is a distinctive dance form that merges elegance with technical precision. Although rooted in Western performing arts traditions, a central question remains: how can dancers from different cultural backgrounds meaningfully access and embody ballet? This study explores how the *"Naturalness"* of the *Balletic Body* can be developed within culturally specific contexts, using Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *Habitus* as the theoretical foundation.
The research employs document analysis alongside narrative interviews with three experienced Thai ballet teachers. The findings identify four key dimensions of *Habitus* that shape the *Balletic Body*: (1) *Everyday Life Habitus*, (2) *Cultural Habitus*, (3) *Practising Habitus*, and (4) *Stage Presence Habitus*. These interconnected dimensions illustrate how dancers internalise ballet not only through technique, but also through cultural values, daily behaviours, and performance attitudes.

This study contributes a new conceptual framework for understanding how the *Balletic Body* can emerge naturally in non-Western dancers. Its insights are valuable for ballet practitioners, educators, and researchers seeking to adapt ballet training across diverse cultural settings while preserving artistic and technical integrity.

Keyword: Habitus, Balletic Body

Introduction

Ballet is a unique performance art form celebrated for its aesthetic beauty and technical precision. Beyond its artistic expression, ballet is deeply embedded in social and cultural structures, shaped by the beliefs, behaviours, and traditions of specific subcultural groups (Gelder, 2005). Its codification began in the 17th century under the patronage of King Louis XIV at the French royal court, where it became more than performance; it evolved into a system of bodily discipline and symbolic power, tightly connected to class and *Cultural Capital* (Au, 2002; Homans, 2010). As such, ballet is not merely a dance form; it is a cultural artefact that encodes ideologies, norms, and hierarchies through the disciplined Body (Orlandi et al., 2020). The defining characteristic of ballet lies in its rigorous technique, requiring dancers to train intensively from a young age to master specific codified movements (Schlaich & DuPont, 1993). Unlike sports, ballet is judged not only on physical capability but also on the aesthetic configuration and comportment of the body. Teachers play a crucial role in transmitting the correct posture, gesture, and form, each deeply inscribed with cultural meaning. Thus, ballet training is not solely about acquiring movement; it involves the formation of a *"Balletic Body",* a body that moves, holds, and signifies according to the expectations of a historically situated artistic tradition. This includes how the dancer presents themselves both on and off stage,

embodying a particular Habitus through repeated discipline, spatial awareness, emotional control, and adherence to hierarchical norms (Wulff, 1998; Foster, 2003).

When ballet is transplanted into culturally distinct contexts such as Thailand, it encounters complex challenges. The Thai Body, embedded in a different somatic tradition, aesthetic norm, and educational structure, must negotiate with the Eurocentric ideals implicit in ballet training. Despite ballet's global diffusion, the internalisation of its embodied values, what Pierre Bourdieu stated as *"Habitus",* remains uneven. Bourdieu (1977). Conceptualised *Habitus* as a system of durable dispositions shaped by one's social conditions and accumulated experiences, which govern perceptions, practices, and embodied expressions. In dance, *Habitus* refers to the sedimentation of physical knowledge and social behaviour that becomes *"Second Nature"* through repetition and regulation (Desmond, 1997; Sklar, 2001).

In the Thai context, although ballet training has proliferated in private institutions and public programs, many learners face difficulties in fully embodying the *Balletic Habitus*. As one experienced ballet teacher in Thailand reflected, "*You can tell she has done ballet for years just by watching her walk… her back is straight, her hands do not swing, it is already in her*" (Wanaruedee Hansomboon, personal communication, May 13, 2025). This observation illustrates that *Habitus* manifests not only during performance but also in everyday movement and self-presentation.

This study seeks to contribute to the understanding of ballet pedagogy in culturally diverse contexts by focusing on how *Habitus* is formed among Thai ballet learners. It addresses two central research questions: (1) What cultural factors shape the development of *Balletic Body Habitus* in learners from different cultural backgrounds? Moreover, (2) How can ballet pedagogy be designed to support the embodied acquisition of *balletic Habitus* across cultures? Through a combination of document analysis, textbook reviews, technical observation, and in-depth interviews with experienced ballet teachers, this research investigates how sociocultural and emotional structures mediate the internalisation of Habitus, aligning with Bourdieu's view that embodiment is always relational to broader social fields (Bourdieu, 1977; Crossley, 2001). By situating the study within embodiment theory and cross-cultural dance pedagogy, this research contributes to emerging scholarship that interrogates the transmission of bodily knowledge across cultural boundaries (Foster, 2003; Wulff, 1998). It offers pedagogical insights relevant to both scholars and practitioners seeking to foster inclusive, reflective, and culturally aware ballet education.

Purpose

To study and analyse Habitus: The *Naturalness* of The *Balletic Body*.

Approach

The study and analysis *Habitus*: The Naturalness of The *Balletic Body*. I used a qualitative research method that was broken down into the following steps:

1. Data Collection

1.1 Document Study: A comprehensive review of books, ballet textbooks, research articles, and academic publications was conducted to map existing theories and pedagogical frameworks related to ballet technique, embodiment, and the construction of the *Balletic Body*.

This helped establish a foundational understanding of how ballet technique is systematised and transmitted across generations and cultures.

1.2 Narrative Interview: To complement the literature review, narrative interviews were conducted with a purposively selected group of experienced ballet instructors. The interviews aimed to gather in-depth insights into their teaching methods, perceptions of the naturalness of the *Balletic Body*, and the processes through which Thai dancers internalise ballet's aesthetic and disciplinary values.

2. Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was used to identify and recruit key informants with extensive and relevant experience. The study focused on three Thai female ballet teachers, each of whom met the following criteria: (1) Aged 35 or older (2) Completed the Advanced II level of the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) syllabus (3) Possess a minimum of 30 years of experience in ballet as both dancers and educators (4) Currently active in teaching ballet in Thailand and willing to reflect critically on their practices.

These participants were selected based on their embodied expertise and long-term engagement with ballet pedagogy in a Thai context. Their perspectives were expected to provide rich, situated knowledge of how ballet Habitus is formed, adapted, and transmitted.

3. Research tool

I used a semi-structured interview, which came from a few fundamental ideas: (1) The naturalness of the ballet body, (2) What makes a body ideal and how it relates to culture and society (Foster, 2003), and 3) The idea of making a practice model.

4. Data Validation

4.1 Internal validity was strengthened by triangulating data from document analysis and narrative interviews, as well as conducting member checking to confirm the accuracy of participants' responses.

4.2 External Validity, Transferability was supported by providing rich, detailed descriptions that allow readers to assess the relevance of findings in other cultural or pedagogical contexts. Although generalizability was not the aim, the study offers context-sensitive insights applicable to similar settings.

5. Data Analysis

I employed content analysis to examine documentary sources and thematic analysis to interpret interview data, aiming to gain in-depth insights into the phenomenon. To ensure alignment with the research objectives, I also utilised analytic induction to refine emerging patterns and construct meaningful interpretations.

Literature Review

1. Dancing body

Foster (2003) talks about the "*Body of Idea*" that includes the unique traits built into the dancer's posture and movement. She connects this idea to Foucault's (1977) discourse theory, which posits that *"Docile Bodies*" are constructed through discipline, spatial organisation, and practice, thereby rendering the body the "body of Idea" that the dancer can see and move systematically. Foster (2003) divides bodies into two groups: (1) the perceivable and palpable Body (the body that moves and is conscious of the grammatical motions) and (2) the ideal

aesthetic Body (the movement that is tied to society and culture). Desmond (1997) also said that dancing practices make bodies that show off a culture's aesthetic perspective.

Blanken (2011) builds on Foster's (2003) idea of the *"Body of Idea"* in the following ways: the "*Hired Body"* shows how the physical form of dancers changes in an industrialised society. There are three types of bodies: (1) the *Balletic Body*, which focuses on geometric shapes, flexibility, and lines developed through training; (2) the *Industrial Body*, which focuses on increasing strength and muscle; and (3) the *Released Body*, which strives to heal the body and alleviate tension. Since the Académie Royale de Danse was founded in 1661, ballet training has had stringent rules about form and technique (Blanken, 2011). Pierre Beauchamps oversaw the school then (Utrecht, 1988). For instance, when the legs are turned outward, the *Turnout* is an unusual position that was once considered beautiful. According to Utrecht (1988), this unnaturalness was slowly retrained until it became "The ideal balletic body."

According to Foster (2003), the *Balletic Body* is designed to aid in studying and performing choreography. Challis (cited in Hecht, 2007, p.23) states that this practice creates the body and perpetuates dance teaching traditions, values and systems. According to Lawson (1980), the *"skilled and expressive body"* comes from the experiences and culture that dancers get in the school. The *Balletic Body* is the body of a dancer who has practised so much that it becomes *"Second Nature"* to them (Foster, 2003). It has two primary parts: (1) the *Real Body* and (2) the *Ideal Body of Beauty*, which differs significantly from the industrial body. *The Ballet Body* also reveals *"Habitus,"* which is the dancer's body position, gestures, and charisma. This does not just mean the shape or size of the body. However, it implies the body that fits the dance culture the dancer has learnt and passed down.

2. *Habitus*

Bourdieu (1977) said that *Habitus* is a set of dispositions in how people think, feel, and act that comes from learning and social experiences through cultural refining and socialisation until they become deeply ingrained in the person (Bourdieu, 1977, p.72). *Habitus* does not just happen; it comes from how culture is cultivated and embodied in a tangible way by different institutions, including family, school, and society (Bourdieu, 1977).

According to Bourdieu's concept of *Cultural Capital*, *Habitus* shows the cultures connected to the living situations of each class, such as education, media exposure, economics, and culture. These things make class distinctions. Bourdieu (1977) further connected *Habitus* to the idea of *"Second Nature"* in that *Habitus* is a behaviour that becomes natural after learning and doing it repeatedly (Bourdieu, 1977, p.72).

Pickard (2013) said that *Habitus* is a set of ideas, skills, and motivations that affect how dancers act and think in ballet. After much practice, it acquires a *"feel for the game"* (Bronhurst et al., 2001). This means that the person understands the rules, regulations, and aesthetics that are part of dance culture.

Lastly, Bourdieu (1990) said *Habitus* is like the *"Field",* where people compete for knowledge, culture, and power. In the *Field*, people learn the rules and values of that *Field* and change their behaviour to fit in with the social structure (Bourdieu, 1990). This study uses *Habitus* as a framework to look at how dancers train and practice their bodies repeatedly until it becomes *"Second Nature"* for them to do in the ballet world.

Results

Habitus: The Naturalness of the *Balletic Body* can be broken down into four issues:

1. *Everyday life Habitus*

Everyday Life Habitus represents the synthesis of all habitual practices cultivated by a ballet dancer, where years of disciplined training shape not only the dancer's body but also her way of being in the world, making gracefulness an embodied, everyday expression of *Habitus*. A ballet dancer's habit is not just about learning how to move gracefully or hold her body correctly. It is also about building her bodily capital through years of hard work and training. The *"Ballet Muscle"* trait signifies a dancer's *Habitus*. It comes from training repeatedly until the body develops long, lean muscles that can be controlled. This is different from the muscles of regular people, which are usually thick and do not have clear lines.

Habitus is evident in the importance of maintaining a balanced and graceful body in daily life, achieved by aligning posture and engaging the core. A good ballet dancer can be seen from the moment she walks into the classroom, "*because even merely walking shows how deeply ingrained the ballet dancer's Habitus is.*"

So, a ballet dancer's *Habitus* is not just the physical skills she shows on stage or in the classroom. The deep-seated structure of her body and mind (embodied structure) keeps her graceful even in everyday life. For example, she walks gracefully, opens her shoulders and chest (using Sternum), sits up straight, stands firmly, and walks with Turnout or slightly opens her toes. Ballet dancers who often examine themselves in the mirror exhibit behaviours such as walking, running, and jumping, which require them to plant their feet lightly and gracefully. They can also articulate the feet, press the top of the legs, and make a motion emphasising *"Grounding"*, something most individuals cannot accomplish because they do not utilise those muscles very often.

Ballet dancers have educated themselves to think about how to use their bodies in a way that is different from how most people do. This is something that is not natural for most people. It has become a unique physical trait that may be leveraged to navigate the ballet world, encompassing technique, art, and interactions with teachers and spectators. All this results from how ballet dancers build Habitus, an essential part of their lives. Until it becomes a part of who they are and what they do.

2. *Cultural Habitus*

Ballet training is not just about learning to move or act on stage. It is also about creating *Habitus*, which is how ballet dancers' inner postures, thoughts, and feelings are shaped by cultural norms and power dynamics in the ballet world. The interview data show that gracefulness, orderliness, and obedience are crucial in ballet culture. These values come from the history of the French royal court, where beauty and power were combined. For example, wearing tight-fitting dresses to force graceful walking postures, exposing the front of the body, broadening the chest (Open chest), and walking with the toes open (*Turnout*) are all examples of how to act and look when wearing long skirts with a lot layers of crinoline that drag on the floor, wearing decorations like crowns or necklaces, following courtly etiquette like spreading hands, using women's honour, bowing, standing, using eyes, and looking graciously all made arching the back very important. The utilisation of ample space, the elongation line, or the *"Long arms, Long Legs"* are all things that show where the royal court came from.

Ballet is not just a beautiful dance style; it also has elements of the culture and atmosphere of different periods, like the Baroque, Romantic, and Classical periods. Each of these periods has its unique ballet style, such as the light and floating movements in the *"Ballon"* movement or the grounded movements that support the weight of the beautiful costumes.

Ballet dancers must now learn and remember ballet terms for these movements, such as *arabesque, pirouette, plié, couru,* and *pas de bourrée*. Dancers with well-trained *Habitus* can interpret these movements naturally in a way that meets the expected beauty standards. This involves being able to use dynamics and execution, which make ballet different from other styles of dance, such as jumping, spinning, and so on.

The shape of the music is also crucial for ballet dancers to express themselves because music is more than just an accompaniment. It also shows the cultural identity that ballet dancers must show through their bodies. Ballet dancers with high artistic technique would automatically be able to dance to different types of music, like *Mazurka, Waltz, Tango, Polka, Minuet*, etc.

Ballet teachers are like *"gatekeepers"* who set criteria for beauty and correct postures and movements, such as *Turnout*, stretching, and memorising the names of different postures. Ballet dancers must learn and rigorously observe these technical terms. So, the *Habitus* includes accepting the teacher's authority and the teaching method that stresses hierarchy.

Bourdieu (1977) said that *Habitus* results from doing something repeatedly until it becomes "Second Nature". This creates profoundly ingrained patterns of thinking, moving, and seeing. On the other hand, if we look at the competitive system, *Habitus* may be misread as something other than cultural beauty, focusing on technical show-offs like how high kicks are, how fast they spin, or how accurate their postures are. These mechanisms demonstrate the reward and motivation that drive ballet dancers to work on their bodies, preparing them for competition by enhancing their form, flexibility, and posture management. In other words, the interactions between teachers and ballet dancers, as well as the workings of the ballet competition, have shaped the dancers' *Habitus*. This *Habitus* shapes their bodies and thoughts to fit what teachers, audiences, and the competition arena anticipate. So, to be successful in ballet, dancers must learn how to adapt, practise, and make these principles a part of who they are.

3. *Practising Habitus*

The ballet dancer's behaviour in class is also a sign of how deeply social conditioning has affected her. The training in the classroom does not just focus on practising techniques like kicking, spinning, or transitions. It also teaches ballet dancers to develop physical and mental discipline, enabling them to move naturally and automatically.

One behaviour that is easy to see in the ballet classroom is standing in the front row, which shows the Learner is excited, ready, and confident. *"If she can stand in the front row, she often sees the teaching closely and gets direct feedback from the teacher, which speeds up his technical development,"* (Nutnaree Pipit-Suksun, personal communication, May 16, 2025). This indicates that being in the front row is not only a choice of where to stand in the classroom but also a way to signal to the teacher that you are dedicated and want to learn.

Sarawanee Tanatanit (personal communication, May 29, 2025) also discussed how ballet dancers act, such as paying close attention to the teacher, remembering what they were told to

do, and doing it just as they were told. Teachers often notice this trait in ballet dancers and consider it a sign of a talented dancer. She said that kids who listen and follow directions well will be able to connect poses smoothly and have a natural flow of movement.

The *Habitus* is built into the ballet dancer's body through repeated practice until it becomes *"Second Nature"*. As Bourdieu's (1977) concept suggests, these actions originate from *Habitus* and are continually developed through training and repetition, until the ballet dancer's postures, thoughts, and gestures become "*Second Nature"*. Ballet dancers gain more than physical abilities when standing in the front row of class, paying close attention to the teacher, or practising hard. These are also social investments that allow them to grow and be recognised by the teacher. In the dance world, these actions are also key to getting ahead in the competition for higher jobs.

The ballet dancers can stand out from their peers by trying to be seen by the teacher, such as practising hard, questioning the teacher in class, or demonstrating effort. This fits with Bourdieu's concept of negotiation between the ballet dancers' *Habitus* and the competitive ballet culture, where teachers and classmates always watch these behaviours. So, the ballet teacher is not only responsible for teaching technique but also for directing the *Habitus*. They build learners' confidence through intense practice, detailed posture corrections, and constant feedback, all showing the power dynamics that teachers and learners must navigate in ballet.

4. *Stage Presence Habitus*

Stage presence is when a ballet dancer must put together her technique, artistry, and self in a way that the audience can see as soon as she steps on stage. This way of performing does not just happen; it is the outcome of creating Habitus via classroom learning and regular practice. Bourdieu (1977) says Habitus is more than just physical talents; it also encompasses feelings, confidence, and ways of communicating that are firmly ingrained in the dancer. Wanaruedee Hansomboon (personal communication, May 13, 2025) brought up this point innovatively: *"A ballet dancer with good Habitus will be able to perform on stage with naturalness and gracefulness without looking forced or stiff".*

This illustrates that if ballet dancers practise and absorb Habitus until it becomes second nature, they can project strength and confidence on stage. A notable *Habitus* must have a lot of different skills, such as:

1) Using breath to guide posture helps the movement connect with rhythm and feeling. It is a fundamental feature of ballet that dancers learn and apply these skills in class, which then become part of their daily lives. Breath is more than simply a way to stay alive; it connects the body to the rhythm and feel of the movement, which makes the dance flow and look real. Breath helps produce rhythm in ballet by using inhalation, which is typically employed in the rhythm of extension, jumping, or raising the arms to make the posture look light and graceful. Exhalation, on the other hand, helps the posture relax more (release), such as when the foot lands, gets ready to rotate or ends the posture to look more balanced and natural.

2) The pathway of the arm, to make elegant, flowing lines like in ballet, the back muscles will move the arm in a circular movement because of the elegance of ballet.

3) Each position must have a purpose, not just moving back and forth, doing the poses right, or showing off. Dancers should know that every step they take, every time they move their feet, and every time they go up or down, they must be careful, planned, and purposeful, like how to leap and land without leaving it up to chance.

4) Making eye contact. Part of the *Habitus* connecting ballet dancers with the audience is looking at them, talking to them, gazing at other dancers, or using their eyes to tell stories through dance motions. Dancers will use their eyes to focus on different things to change directions, including strolling, running, and turning. If they look away from anything, the movement can have *"Lack of focus, Lack of communication"* (Nutnaree Pipit-Suksun, personal communication, May 16, 2025).

5) How to walk. A highlight of the dancers' look will be when they turn their bodies back. This idea originates from the Proscenium theatre, where the audience was required to see the front of the dancer's body. It is not common to reveal the back of the body, except in specific roles. This process is explored in depth when learning and comprehending ballet's directions, such as *en face, éfacé,* and *croisé,* in the classroom. Also, the way the dancers run when they are dancing is frequently not by turning their bodies suddenly but by running in front of them to turn (like a car making a U-turn).

6) The dancers can vary *"Movement Phrases"* into different types of music, such as *Waltz, Tango,* or *Mazurka*, which have different forms, emphases, speeds, and moods. Also, they need to pay attention to how emotions and personality traits are shown in a way that fits the plot. For instance, as Princess Aurora in Sleeping Beauty, the ballet dancer must show the grace, youth, and freshness of a 16-year-old through her face, eyes, and gestures. This means dancing the proper steps and thoroughly embodying the part.

According to the above, the *Habitus* is formed through much practice in the classroom until it becomes *"Second Nature"* for the dancer on stage. So, ballet is not just "performing" but really "being" the character you are playing. Graceful stage presence comes from investing in bodily and *Cultural Capital* by learning under the teacher's watchful eye and negotiating in a ballet *Field* of competition and strict aesthetic standards. Stage presence is not only a technical term; *Habitus* is formed via training, cultural conditioning, and adapting to the idealised concept of beauty.

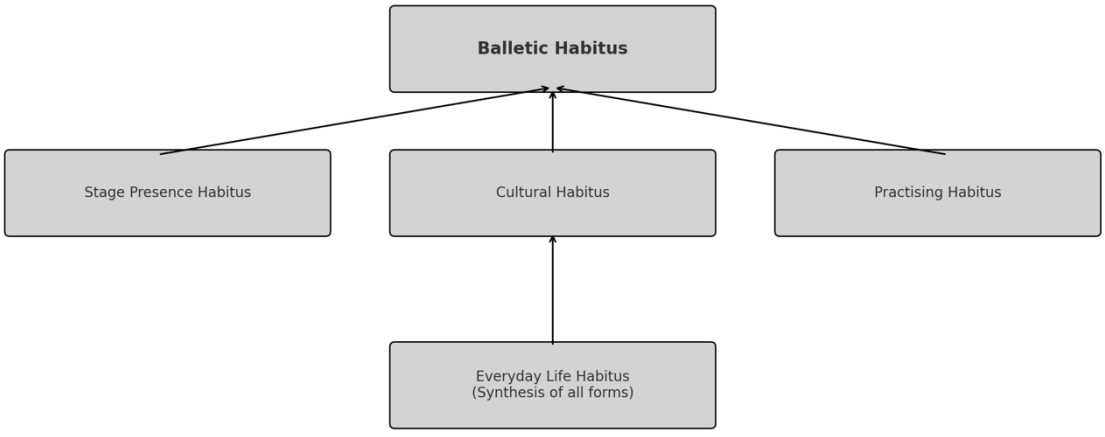


Figure 1. A *balletic Habitus* diagram

Conclusion and Discussion

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1977) concept of *Habitus* as a system of durable dispositions shaped by social and cultural conditions, this study explored how Thai ballet teachers cultivate *Balletic Body Habitus* among learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. *Habitus* in this context is not merely a result of technical training but a deeply embodied structure that integrates physical, social, and symbolic dimensions of ballet practice.

Through interviews with experienced Thai ballet instructors, the study identified four interrelated dimensions of *Habitus* in ballet dancers:

1. *Everyday Life Habitus* reflects the internalisation of ballet's physical norms through long-term training, resulting in visible traits such as the development of "Ballet Muscles," upright posture, turnout in walking, and the seamless incorporation of ballet mannerisms into daily movement.

2. *Cultural Habitus* connects the physicality of ballet to its historical origins in the French royal court, where elegance, symmetry, and codified beauty standards were institutionalised. Thai teachers continue to reproduce these aesthetic ideals through training, often positioning themselves as cultural gatekeepers who define what is considered "proper" ballet form.

3. *Practising Habitus* emerges within the classroom as a performance of discipline, attentiveness, and ambition. Learners embody this through strategic behaviours such as standing in front, mimicking teachers closely, and working to gain visibility and approval, a reflection of the competitive ballet *Field*.

4. *Stage Presence Habitus* synthesises physical technique with expressive intention. It involves breath control, nuanced movement, eye contact, and the ability to embody character, thereby projecting elegance and naturalness that audiences perceive as effortless.

These findings resonate with existing scholarship on embodiment in dance training (Foster, 1997; Sklar, 2001), which highlights how technical training is inseparable from the cultural meanings inscribed in the *Dancing Body*. Ballet, as this study shows, is not simply learned; it is lived, disciplined, and displayed according to aesthetic codes that are historically and culturally situated.

Crucially, the study exposes the power relations embedded in the teacher–student dynamic. Teachers act not only as instructors but also as mediators of ballet's *Cultural Capital*, reinforcing ideals of beauty and correctness that learners must internalise to gain legitimacy in the *Field* (Bourdieu, 1984). In the Thai context, where ballet is both an imported form and a marker of social aspiration, dancers must navigate the tension between individual expression and the imperative to conform to an externally defined standard.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the research contributes to ongoing conversations about inclusive and culturally responsive dance education. The process of cultivating *Habitus* among learners from diverse cultural contexts calls for teaching methods that move beyond rote technique. Teachers must foster not only physical training but also critical awareness of ballet's historical, aesthetic, and cultural frameworks. This dual focus enables learners to embody ballet's grace while also engaging with its embedded values consciously.

In practical terms, the study suggests that effective ballet pedagogy should integrate:

- Explicit instruction in the cultural and historical foundations of ballet.

- Habitus-aware strategies that guide learners to internalise postures and aesthetics without alienating their cultural identities.
- Reflexive teaching that recognises the sociocultural negotiation learners engage in when adapting to ballet's norms.

By illuminating how *Habitus* is built, displayed, and contested in Thai ballet education, this research offers valuable insights for dance educators seeking to balance the preservation of ballet's traditions with the cultivation of inclusive learning environments. It underscores the importance of understanding *Habitus* not merely as repetition of movement, but as a complex, embodied negotiation between discipline, culture, and identity.

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Hortus Ăpertus

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Abstract

In today's urban environments the connection between humans and the natural world has become increasingly fragile. This disconnection, intensified by technological saturation, fast-paced lifestyles and a loss of traditional knowledge, can have significant consequences in terms of mental and physical well-being.

In an attempt to rekindle this bond this paper presents Hortus Ăpertus—an ongoing project able to take different shapes depending on the city in which it is conceived and established. In accordance with the principle of a community garden, the developing project Hortus Ăpertus: Brno proposes an artistic return to tradition and a new way of living the community installed in the Moravian city of Brno, Czech Republic.

The artwork is not only an artistic installation but also a method of research that involves community-based learning, ecological awareness, and the healing potential of plants.

At the heart of this initiative is an exploration of how urban communities, particularly younger generations, can re-establish a deeper bond with the land while learning from elders and local experts, in a process that bridges generations.

Community gardens have been encouraging connections between citizens and nature for years—bringing history, tradition, and care into social gatherings; envisioning a space where people might engage in plant cultivation as intergenerational learning.

Keywords: Medicinal plants, Reconnection, Feminism, Environment, Traditions, Intergenerational learning

Hortus Ăpertus
A Living Archive

Hortus Ăpertus is not only a garden to be seen, but a garden to be shared and remembered. Central to the project is a collection of medicinal plants, each selected for its healing properties, symbolic meaning, and historical connection to women's knowledge systems. These plants are alive collaborators, working alongside recipes, community and rituals. Together, they form a small living archive of feminist expertises, traditions and personal memories—an archive that can be passed on and kept alive across different places and generations.

Shaped gradually by my own experience as well as the everyday pressures of life in a rapidly evolving digital era, the project emerged over time. What started as a individual sense of disconnection from the natural world developed into a shared space for anyone who harbour a desire to learn from the living species that surrounds them, thereby cultivating a deeper connection with it.

Paying care to this I proposed Hortus Ăpertus: Brno, which emerged from a blend of personal longing, intellectual interests and emotional reflection, particularly a need of reconnection I experienced as a student while living abroad in an urban setting.

Like many others, I found myself surrounded by fast-paced routines and constant digital stimulation which often left little space for contemplation, relax and interaction with the nature. The accelerated rhythms of capitalism made me feel alienated and estranged from

a living universe I was deeply tied to. These conditions, while not universal, reflect a broader phenomenon in contemporary society: a perception of time that is increasingly fragmented, and a concomitant loss of contact with seasonal rhythms and traditional practices. Inspired by this backdrop, this project offers an alternative pace, inviting to slow down and cultivate a more grounded relationship to the environment.

With this project I attempt to challenge the binary distinction between nature and the human world—a divide that positions nature as "non-human". In doing so, the project follows a post-humanist approach, seeking to reimagine interspecies relationships and knowledge practices that move beyond anthropocentric thinking.

Hortus Ăpertus: Brno is a medicinal herb garden, cultivated within a wooden spiral-shaped



Figure 1: Initial ideas of the structure

structure designed specifically for this purpose. The installation is presented through a participatory workshop accompanied by a live reading performance. At the end, a text will be made available for everyone containing an entire description of each plant, its properties, brief history of its symbolic or magical significance, and a recipe that can be replicated at home.

The garden aims to strengthen the community, remembering traditions and learning about the healing plants world, while rebuilding ties between people and nature, through shared experiences. A process not just about acquiring knowledge, but that also encourages a deeper sensitivity to the environment through hands-on care and shared activities. Participants will learn how to tend to these herbs and utilise them, but at the same time they will recollect the

histories they carry and honour the properties embedded in these practices. In doing so, people help to complete the artwork by creating a generational bridge between past and present,



Figure 2: People consulting the sketchbook, workshop 28 May 2025



Figure 3: Performative reading, workshop 28 May 2025

offering a way to navigate across time, while ease rituals coming back to life.

The desire of preserving memories and pass on traditions is spread from the ideal of connecting generations as well as rooted in personal experience.

As a child, I spent my summers at my grandparents, with occasional visits during the winter months. It was during these outdoor days that I developed a deep awareness of the nature's rhythms: of how light shifts, how plants bloom and rest, how time smells. I was sharing this connection with my grandmother who was teaching me how to live in harmony with the nature by whom we were surrounded. Over time, as these visits became less frequent, I lost that closeness; until one day, I asked for strawberries and was told the season had ended weeks ago. In that moment, I realised how disconnected I had become—from time, from place, from the alive world that once felt so familiar.

This project emerges from that moment of recognition, developing an outcome that could re-establish this enduring link for city residents, whose opportunities to get closer to natural cycles are often remote, and particularly for myself.

To further anchor the project to my childhood reminiscence, I brought several of the plants from Italy, some of them directly from my grandmother's garden. They travelled by car, train, and bus, surviving the physical displacement and the different climate conditions. Their journey echoes a metaphorical transmission from one place and generation to another: the relocation becomes a gesture that embodies a quiet ritual of memory connecting time and space. Equally central to the project are the properties and symbolicity of plants. I chose to include exclusively medicinal herbs as a way to honour a lineage of women's knowledge, often preserved through oral tradition and passed down through everyday domestic life. Being the keepers of such expertise, most of it centred on herbal medicine, became a burden during the witch hunts of the 16th and 17th century where was precisely women who suffer the most. These practices have long been undervalued, and in many cases violently suppressed, since they were seen as threats to dominant power structures.

The ensuing list aims to draw attention to their oftentimes disregarded value:

- Aloe Arborescens
- Iberis Sempervirens
- Iberis Amara
- Echinacea Purpurea
- Salvia Officinalis
- Thymus Vulgaris
- Borago Officinalis
- Rosmarinus Angustifolius
- Cichoria Endivia
- Calendula Officinalis
- Hyssopus Officinialis
- Matricaria Chamomilla
- Malva Officinalis
- Melissa Officinalis
- Valeriana Officinali
- Polypodium Vulgare
- Polystichum Setiferum

It is to keep in mind, as Silvia Federici underlines, the interest of the women so called 'witches' was far from being malevolent since healers and herbalists used their knowledge to care for others and earn a living. By choosing these plants, the project affirms the value of feminist ancient and domestic traditions so often excluded from dominant narratives.

Hortus Ăpertus: Brno is developed in the garden of the Faculty of Fine Arts (FFA) of Brno University of Technology. The decision to place it there was both practical and symbolic: I collaborated with Pavel Dvořák, who runs the university's wood workshop, wanting to root the project within the natural surroundings that are shaping my academic experience. The structure is designed to be durable and to blend quietly into the environment and landscape, reflecting the look and feel of a homemade herb garden.

The university setting also create a symbolic connection between the reality of myself, as an international student and the Czech panorama I am immersed in—particularly through its connection to the university's vegan canteen, Vegýna by Martin Žák, currently a PhD researcher at FFA. Vegýna is designed to be a log-term sustainable space not just for eating

but also for gathering and having workshops. I invited the students who work there to use the herbs in their cooking, further extending the garden's role as a shared resource.

During the summer, the structure will be relocated to the university's new campus, where it will remain accessible day and night to both students and the public. Like Martin's project, this space is meant to be at the students' disposal, offering a means of utilise the plants and the opportunity to tend and nurture them.

By engaging students I hope to cultivate a sense of community rooted in care and shared learning, drawing from expertise within my own family, including my aunt, who is an herbalist. The garden is a communal space and a quiet encounter for another way of apprentice: it is a place where knowledge is not extracted, but exchanged. We take care, and in doing so, are taken care of.

This work is deeply connected to the thesis I wrote I wrote for my bachelor's degree, Altra Visione: risveglio della coscienza attraverso arte e attivismo (Another Vision: Awakening of the Consciousness through Art and Activism), which include dedicated chapters on feminism and environmental ethics. The research has provided a foundation for the present studies, and this project is one of the many ways in which I continue to explore the potential of art to function as a means for activism and a method for awake the consciousness broader aims of the project: to invite others into a personal relationship with the natural



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 4 - 6: Plants preparation for the workshop

world, encouraging a sense of agency in cultivating one's own.

Moreover, the plants were also selected for their historical and cultural significance—particularly their roles in women's domestic healing practices. These species, passed down through oral tradition and often silenced, carry with them a lineage of embodied knowledge, rooted resistance, and care.

As Silvia Federici underlines in *Caliban and the Witch*, the persecution of so-called 'witches' during the early modern period was a significant loss for feminist power: "with the persecution of the folk healer, woman were expropriated from a patrimony of empirical knowledge, regarding herbs and healing remedies, that they had accumulated and transmitted from generation to generation".These practices were violently suppressed as part of the broader shift toward a capitalist, medicalised, and patriarchal order, and women's expertise with herbs was reframed as dangerous or superstitious.

Carolyn Merchant, in *The Death of Nature*, similarly identifies this historical moment as a changing paradigm in how nature and women were conceptualised. The Scientific Revolution introduced a mechanistic view of the world, replacing the earlier organic, relational models that saw the earth, the soil and the body as interconnected nourishers. In this shift, nature and women were increasingly seen as something to be extracted from, as "disposable resources," rather than active participants in systems of care and regeneration. Both universes are to be perceived as dismissive and marginalised voices. At the time women began to acquire knowledge, they were increasingly regarded as a menace to the hierarchical society, dominated by patriarchy. Indeed one of the main reasons for the witch hunt was, according to Federici, "the need of the European elites to eradicate an entire mode of existence which, by the late Middle Ages, was threatening their political and economic power".

By centring the project on medicinal herbs traditionally associated with women's healing roles, I seek to honour these suppressed inheritances of care and resistance. The garden becomes a feminist space not only in its subject matter, but also in its method: privileging lived experience, collective memory, and embodied forms of knowledge. Donna Haraway, as well as other feminist theorists, remind us that the ways of knowing are never neutral. This project aligns with epistemologies that are often marginalised: those rooted in oral tradition, domestic labour, and embodied practice—forms of knowledge cultivated outside formal institutions, laboratories, or written archives. It is a way of literally rooting feminist ideals into the soil, allowing memory to be nurtured and to grow in people's minds as the plants grow in the earth.

To move toward a more sustainable future, we must shift away from the ideology of individualism and towards modes of collective existence. As Donna Haraway outlines through her concept of *sympoiesis*, this means embracing interdependence and recognising that life is always an act of co-creation. *Sympoiesis* stands in contrast to *autopoiesis*, the Western myth of the self-sufficient individual. Instead, Haraway argues that ecological life is inherently collaborative; formed in relation *with* and *through* others.

In this sense, *Hortus Ăpertus: Brno* is not merely an installation, but an evolving system, an ongoing process of relational creation: between myself, the plants and their histories, the audience, and the places they inhabit.

The project is not intended as a fixed manual of knowledge, but as a living and evolving expression of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). Drawing from the legacy of postcolonial traditions and engaging deeply with feminist perspectives, this knowledge is not held in formal theory. Conversely, it is rooted in spiritual and ecological relationships with the environment, carried in bodies and rituals; passed down over generations, as it was to me, by my grandmother. Her practices shaped my earliest understanding of how to live in harmony with the natural world. In this way, the cultural framework encourages an early understanding

of how to live in harmony with the land, reminding us no one is a master over nature but we are all participants within it.

This resonates deeply with my artistic approach, as TEK is inherently adaptive and dynamic, unlike dominant Western scientific traditions that often pursue fixed and universal truths. Instead, it evolves through observation, reciprocity, and contextual knowledge holding the potential to reshape and inform sustainability and environmental governance.

The plants I brought from Italy physically and symbolically connect the Brno structure to my grandmother's garden, and further, to the ancient lineages of witches, healers, and herbalists. These were the forgotten experts of a different worldview: one in which memory is held in the soil, healing in the leaves, and wisdom in the hands that care for them.

Built to connect

After I chose the plants, I had to think about a way to present them. I was looking for a structure that would give them the whole amount of sun and that was easily movable because of the summer relocation. Throughout this process, I consulted with Martin Žák and the painter, curator and lecturer Barbora Lungova who are conducting research on environmental topics. The spiral shape originated from these conversations which enriched both the groundwork and the layout of the structure. It stands one metre and sixty centimetres high and half a metre wide, chosen for both its visual aesthetic and practical function: the spiral composition allows each plant to receive the specific amount of space and light it requires while maintaining an accessible design. The top section, measuring fifty centimetres in diameter, accommodates sun-loving plants, while the four lower and smaller pots (thirty centimetres of diameter)—arranged along the spiral—create increasing shade.

This allows for more delicate and shade-tolerant been carefully considered to ensure

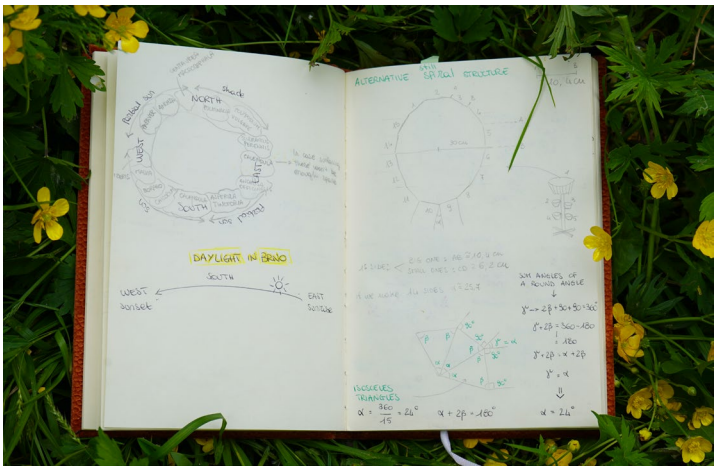


Figure 7: Technicalities of the structure

species, such as *Polypodium Vulgare*, to be positioned in less exposed areas. Each detail has



Figure 8: Engraved labels

that the plants can thrive in harmony with their placement and the sunlight position of Brno.

I chose wood as the main construction material because of its natural durability and its capacity to blend into the landscape, but also for its symbolic alignment with tradition, craft, and sustainability. Since the medicinal garden is installed on the grounds, must therefore withstand all weather conditions, so it is varnished with a lacquer to make it waterproof and UV-resistant. In particular, I used the Everwood Bio Varnish by Ecobeton, a company specialised in sustainable construction materials since 1993. The non-toxic layer will guarantee safety to the plants, the surrounding environment, and everyone who will work around it. Each label is also made of wood and covered with the same protective varnish.

While this personal story forms the basis of the project, it also gestures towards a wider, more collective experience that extends beyond the individual. To achieve this goal, I involved local schools in the learning process around medicinal plants, particularly starting a collaboration with the International School of Brno (ISOB). Working alongside the teacher Sara Akbari, the aim is the creation of a *Biodiversity Garden*, where children will be encouraged to take care of plants and reflect on the importance of respecting nature, just as She takes care of us. Far from being a Leopardian nature, the project proposes a utopian future where humans can live in harmony with their surroundings without giving up the comforts of modern life. The workshop takes a practical form on the 14th of June, where Sara Akbari and I will lead the children and their parents through the sowing and planting of the first garden bed, consisting of flowers and vegetables.

As Alexander Kelu reflects, “I’ve never known where I’m supposed to belong and instinctively turned to nature. […] It accepted me when others wouldn’t. It healed me.” Encouraging children to live in harmony with the environment, especially in cities, helps break down prejudices and insecurities that often develop at a young age, while providing an interactive way to engage with the living world—one often underestimated.

Workshop

This section gathers a selection of recipes developed through personal research, and the outcome of the performance held during the workshop that took place on 28 May. The performative act, further representing my artistic approach to the garden, consisted of a reading aloud of the recipes while shaping the audience’s position around the structure, according to the specific needs or symbolic qualities associated with each plant.

Each recipe is inspired by a combination of home traditions, healing properties of the plants, and its symbolic or magical significance. They are enriched with material drawn from books, herbal manuals, oral histories, and conversations within my own family. They reflect not only the practical use of the plant, but also its narrative: what it has meant to people across time, and how it might continue to be important today. Many of the texts are grounded in real herbal practices, however, others are intentionally invented or embellished aiming to provoke

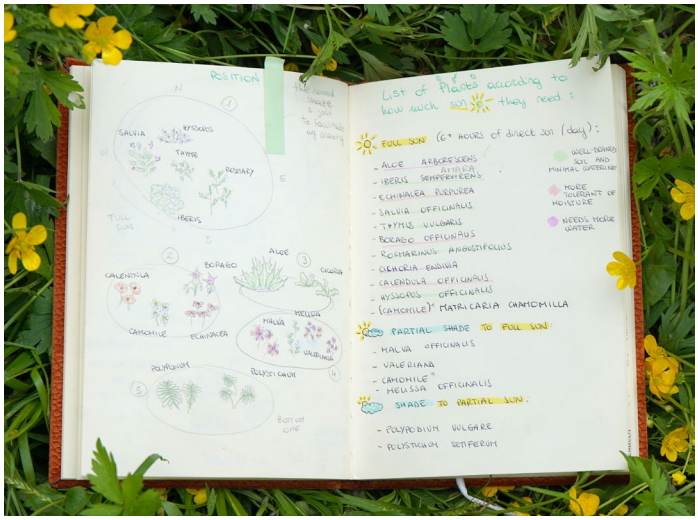


Figure 9: List of the plants and their position in the structure



Figure 10: Presentation, 28 May 2025

reflection on how knowledge is constructed. Challenging also how easily—especially during the witch hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries—beliefs were manipulated to control and marginalise those, especially women, who held traditional expertise. Since some spells require specific conditions such as sunlight, silence, or physical gestures, the performance becomes a space where practical knowledge and imagination intertwine, offering a shared moment of learning that blurs lines between fiction and ritual.

Rather than striving for scientific precision or aiming to resemble a formal herbal manual, this archive embraces subjectivity, symbolism, and sensory engagement. It follows a feminist understanding of knowledge as embodied, shared, and often excluded from dominant systems. These texts invite readers or participants not only to learn about plants, but to enter into a relationship *with* them—through physical gestures, energy flow, and ritualised care.

The performance took place on the morning of May 28, in the garden of the Faculty of Fine Arts, with some members of the Environment Studio, which I have participated in during this semester. The forecast predicted heavy rainfall later in the day, which created concern, as the wooden structure was not yet varnished, therefore not waterproof. To avoid weather damage, I assembled the spiral earlier that morning, arranging each plant according to the layout I had developed based on climate research for Brno presented in my sketches. Each pot was labelled with the scientific name of the plant to allow them to be clearly identified: this facilitated the understanding and made the project accessible to everyone.
The forty-minute presentation began with a short introduction to the project, followed by the performance of the first recipe: *How to Heal Small Wounds with Aloe Vera*.

1. Choose a mature Aloe vera leaf (thick and among the lowers)
2. Warn the plant that you are about to cut a leaf and thank her for her generosity
3. Drain the yellow latex: Place the leaf upright in a cup for 10–15 minutes to let the yellow sap (aloin) drain out, since it's laxative and irritating
4. Slice the leaf open lengthwise and scoop out the clear gel. Avoid including the green rind or yellow sap
5. Apply a thin layer of Aloe gel on the small wound. (Cover small cuts or scrapes; for burns, leave the skin exposed) and pronunce the formula: vulnus lenire, dolorem meum audire
   - 5.1. You may say it aloud or silently, both are effective, but sound can sometimes accelerate the healing

6. Reapply 2–3 times daily with fresh gel each time. The leftover gel can be stored in a sealed container in the fridge for up to 3–5 days.

Aloe vera is renowned for its wide range of healing properties and has long been considered a magical plant. In Ancient Egypt, it was associated with immortality and used by important women such as Queen Cleopatra.

During the performance, the audience was invited to stand in a circular formation around the structure while I read, allowing the energy to flow. This spatial arrangement was tailored to each recipe or spell, reinforcing the idea that healing is both relational and contextual.

The performance represents a vital extension of the project: it completes the garden as a space intended not just for viewing, but for collective experience. The spoken word allows feminist voices, those often historically silenced, to be heard again.

Following the presentation, participants shared feedback during an informal discussion. Some noted the unfinished state of the structure and expressed a preference for the plants to be embedded directly into the ground rather than placed in individual pots. Their comments have further convinced me to present the project as a work in progress, and that next year's



Figure 11: Gathering around the structure and reading aloud performance, workshop 28 May 2025

development will require deeper engagement.

An Ongoing Conversation

The primary inspiration for this project was a combination of my intrinsic activism and a personal longing to feel closer to my childhood and my motherland while living abroad. Over time, it has evolved into a multi-layered practice; one that blends personal memory with broader reflections. Hortus Ăpertus: Brno now exists like a personal and collective gesture: bridging places such as Italy and the Czech Republic, past and present, and generations linking my own experience with my grandmother's and the historical lineage of women's herbal knowledge.

In all its future forms, Hortus Ăpertus is intended to endure—not only physically, but as a gesture of memory. Its meaning is intended to extend beyond its initial creation continuing as a space for learning, healing, and inspiration long after my graduation. In the end, is this not what most artists hope for their work? That it may live on, be transformed, and keep growing?

The garden's form as a 'living archive' allows it to be replicated and adapted elsewhere. My intention is to give the project multiple forms by creating other gardens in different cities, including Bangkok (Hortus Ăpertus: Bangkok), which would be designed according to the city's climate and historical context.

While the specific plants, climate, and stories may differ, the core methodology remains the same: research into local medicinal species and their healing properties, combined with an investigation of their historical and symbolic significance alongside the rituals around them. The guiding intention would also remain unchanged—to cultivate a space where local ecological knowledge and social histories are remembered, honoured, and shared. In contexts where this heritage has been marginalised, the archive may also serve as a quiet form of resistance, to bring it back to life.

In the coming year, I intend to continue developing both Hortus Ăpertus and the Biodiversity Garden at ISOB, since these projects are likely to form the foundation of my final thesis. Regarding Hortus Ăpertus: Brno, once the structure is moved to the university's new campus, I plan to fill each pot with soil and plant directly into it, so each herb will fully root. When they reach a certain size, I intend to transfer them directly into the ground, allowing them to thrive more freely and making room for new ones. This will enable the garden to grow in stages, offering students the chance to witness and care for each phase of the plants' lives, while also encouraging ongoing interaction.

Ultimately, Hortus Ăpertus is not an object, but a method—a feminist, ecological, and artistic approach to remembering, tending, and reimagining our relationship with the natural world. Its future depends on those who choose to care for it, becoming part of the archive too.

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Moist Maps: Reimagining the Mekong River Through the Materiality of Its River Weeds

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Abstract

Since 2023, I have participated in a series of collaborative and transdisciplinary research groups involving artists, activists, and local communities to explore the shifting landscape of the Mekong River in Thailand, impacted by upstream dam construction in China and Laos. The fieldwork included interviews, workshops, and sensory engagement with local women and men who harvest Kai, an endemic and ecologically vital river weed. Once central to the Mekong's life cycle and local economies, Kai now faces threats from erratic water levels and chemical pollution caused by dams. Drawing on Ala Plastica's definition of initiatives as artistic processes emerging through exchanges shaped by context and relationships, this research adopts a fluid, responsive approach. Handmade paper crafted from Mekong River weed became the foundation for a "moist map" that challenges conventional, neo-colonial mapping practices. Historically, maps of the Mekong served as instruments of power, reducing its complex ecosystems to static forms for control and resource extraction. In contrast, this counter-visualization highlights the river's inherent dynamism and the entangled relationships between human and non-human actors. The Moist Maps: Collaborative Map-Making Initiative brought together artists and activists, with Kai weed harvesters and local youth from Baan Had Krai (Chiang Khong) to co-create a series of maps using locally sourced Kai. This workshop fostered intergenerational knowledge transfer, amplifying micro-stories and diverse perspectives that shape the river's reality. Through embodied cartography, the research reimagines fieldwork as a relational, place-based method, advocating for alternative representations that resist extractive narratives while nurturing situated knowledge and ecological awareness.

Keywords : Mekong River, Kai Riverweed, Extractive Practices, Colonial History, Visualisation Techniques, Collaborative Map Making

Art Worms

In May 2023, I joined Art Worms a collaborative and transdisciplinary research group involving artists, activists, and local communities to explore the shifting landscape of the Mekong River in Thailand, impacted by upstream dam construction in China and Laos. The impacts of these infrastructures, promoted as a means of modernization and progress, have affected the river's sustainability. Alterations to the water flow disrupt fish migrations, affect sediment transport, and transform aquatic habitats. At the same time, these changes have also negatively impacted the social fabric and livelihoods of communities living along the water.

Our first journey took place in the Thai town of Pak Chom, where the Mekong defines the geographic border with Laos. Through a series of interviews and workshops conducted closely with the local community, we discovered how the effects of dams, particularly the frequent and unpredictable changes they bring to the river's water level, are influencing, among other things, the viability and quality of Cladophora– a green a green river weed that thrives in

clean, flowing waters – with direct consequences on the human and non-human ecology that vitally intertwines with the river.



Figure 1. “Kai” Mekong’s riverweed, 2024 © Pietro Lo Casto

The Mekong algae, called Kai in the local language, emerges in the river's waters during the summer months when the water level typically recedes. Besides being important for the river ecosystem's life cycle, it is consumed as a seasonal delicacy. Traditionally, the collection of these algae is entrusted to women. Gathered and cooked, it is consumed within families or sold in local markets, becoming over the years a seasonal economic income relied upon by communities living near the river. It represents, albeit partially, one of the many interconnections between humans and the environment on the Mekong, making the residents' lives so interconnected with the river as to be almost symbiotic.

Today, these weeds often contain sand, minerals, and chemicals resulting from dam construction, intensive agriculture and residential developments, among others, reducing its suitability for collection and consumption. In some areas, it no longer exists.

Fascinated by this endemic Mekong River weed, we decided to undertake another series of visits during the summer months when communities engage in collection, with the goal of exploring the physicality of this natural material with all five senses.



Figure 2. Kai harvester in Chiang Khong, 2024 © Pietro Lo Casto

To find it, we ventured into this great river, accompanied by some women from the community of Baan Had Krai in Chiang Kong. Upon arrival, we found ourselves waist-deep in water, listening to the algae buzzing between the surface and the riverbed. When collected, it feels silky to the touch, wet, and porous. At the same time, it can be rough as it ages. We discovered that its life cycle is fast, lasting two to three days; if not collected in time, it turns into a fungus before returning to its original liquid state.

It can be consumed fresh, cooked following a local recipe called "Laab Kai" as explained by a local woman: "Here we eat it by adding shellfish, fish, or clams. It's delicious. Like how we make mackerel sauce, but less oily, as the algae is quite watery. The weed is soft, mixing it with natural water cleans it and makes it ready for cooking."



Figure 3. Preparation of Laab Kai, 2024 © Pietro Lo Casto

Back in the village, we followed the preparation of this dish, focusing on the sensory aspects of the ingredients and cooking process, the algae boiling in water, the slow frying of river snails, the high-pitched voice of our cook only momentarily interrupted by a neighbouring young man's clumsy attempt to offer the group a glass of local whisky as an aperitif. Finally, we all enjoyed the dish together.

This research process was crucial for developing situated knowledge, building an emotional connection with the territory and its people, and understanding the manifold meanings of this material.

Fieldwork allowed us to understand how these border river landscapes are layered territories, where the past shaped by Western colonial influence has contributed to building a present and future narrative that sees them as places where ecological and cultural richness are overlooked in favour of resource extraction.

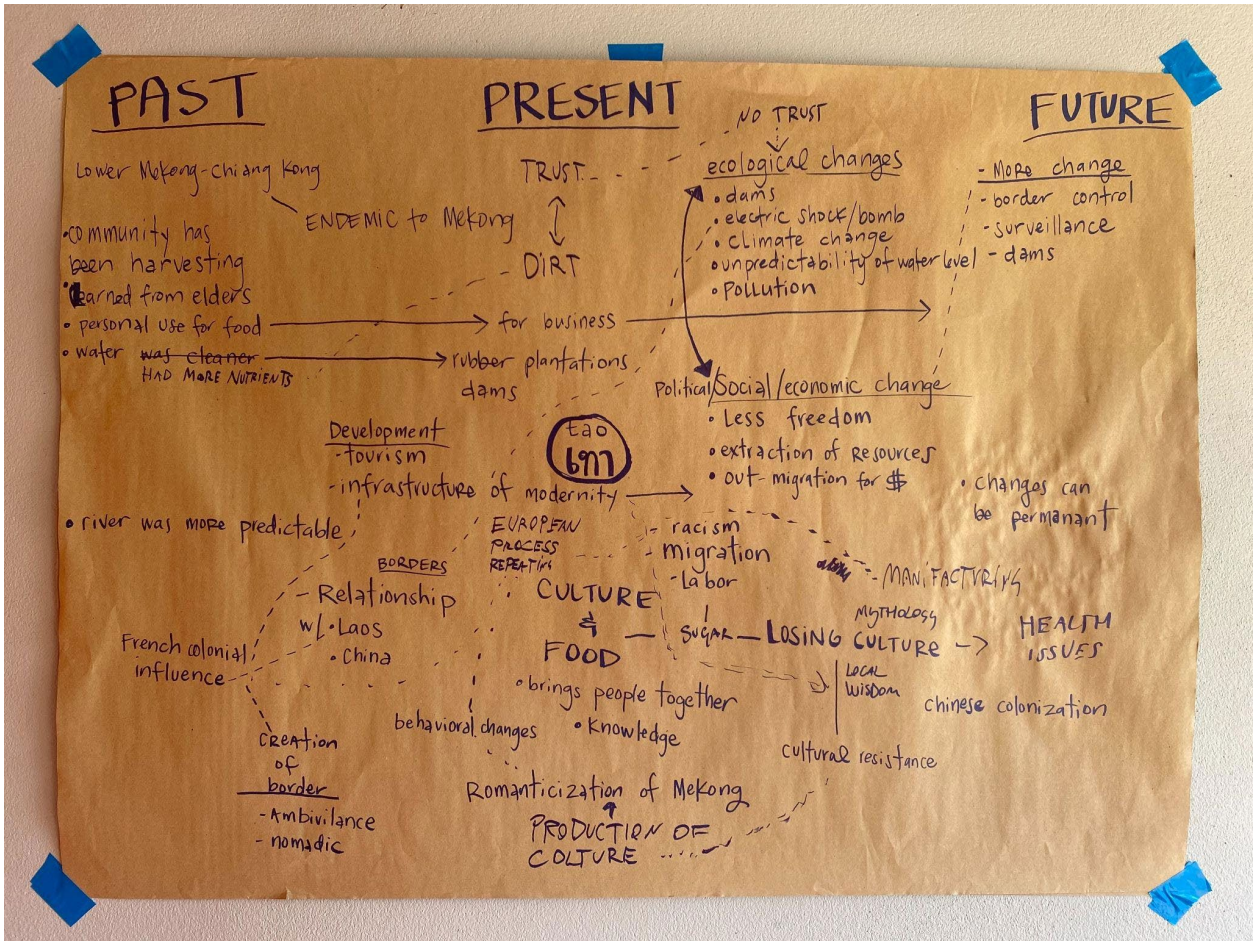


Figure 4. Collaborative Mapping, 2024 © Pietro Lo Casto

Before the end of the 19th century, the Mekong region in Southeast Asia was uncharted territory for Western cartographers, existing only in the realm of cartographic imagination. In the book "The Mekong: Turbulent Past, Uncertain Future" by Milton Osborne, the experiences of the first Mekong explorations by a French expedition group in the colonial era are detailed. The French exploration, starting in 1866 from Saigon in Vietnam downstream to Yunnan in China, lasted about two years and allowed for the mapping of geographic features of the river (Osborne, 2000). Through a combination of mapping techniques unsuitable for the situation, combined with deliberate errors, these maps were designed to increase colonial power and claims over what could be construed as land. Indeed, what is considered error in European cartography is often tied to the desire to own and exploit the complex and ever-changing land surface as property (Awan, 2023).

Traces of these pasts can still be found in the territory today. On some rocky islets, peculiar to the riverbed in the Pak Chom area, one can see imposing stone and concrete structures that, resembling stairs over 3 meters high, rise on top of boulders. They represent ancient navigation aids built under French orders more than a century ago. These artifacts served to signal direction to boats, allowing navigation of the river during the rainy season when water levels typically rise. Like gates to another temporal dimension, they reveal a past that still lives in the fabrics of the present. They narrate Western imperial ambitions, the transformation of the Mekong into a major trade route that would facilitate trade with China (Keay, 2005).

Throughout history, maps have been instrumentalized in colonization efforts, asserting specific worldviews and territorial claims as indisputable truths (Awan, 2023). However, what these colonial and capitalist perspective technologies constantly overlook in their simplified

representation of river ecosystems are the intricate and interconnected networks of relationships that cannot be reduced to Abstract data and that serve purposes beyond economic value production.



Figure 5. Ancient instruments of navigation, Pak Chom, 2024 © Pietro Lo Casto

This way of imagining the river continues to echo in the present, albeit in different forms, through the construction of modern dams. These projects, while claiming to pursue development goals, represent neo-colonial efforts of extraction that have widespread ecological impacts on the region's complex web of life (Sangkhamanee, 2009).

Thailand has so far been exempted from building dams on the Mekong, thanks to strong resistance from local communities and international NGOs. However, projects continue to be proposed, one of which involves building a dam near Pak Chom. Advanced visualization techniques, such as mapping and 3D representation of proposed new hydroelectric projects, support this process of commodifying the territory. However, what these colonial and capitalist

perspective technologies constantly overlook in their simplified representation of river ecosystems are the intricate and interconnected networks of relationships that cannot be reduced to Abstract data and that serve purposes beyond economic value production.

Material can allow you to see traces otherwise difficult to see. Riverweed in this sense can act as a witness to the territory, embodying the micro-stories, and the multiplicities of worlds – past, present, and future – that coexist and co-produce the river's reality. These are ways of understanding space that belong to relational, material, and more-than-human modes. These alternative views align with the cosmologies situated in these places, offering a perspective different from the Western way of thinking about the world, and that reveal the invisibilities of a system that seeks to frame this river as a place solely dedicated to resource extraction.

However, visibility and invisibility are matters of perspective and depend on the lens we equip ourselves with. Building my artistic practice in Southeast Asia over the past five years has put me in a position to initiate a process of disidentification from a predominantly Eurocentric view of the world and develop a critical perspective towards Western representation structures. In my artistic research, I am particularly interested in the role these visual techniques play in shaping our perception of the world, and how these power dynamics continue to manifest themselves between past, present, and future, changing shape but maintaining the same objectives.

As an artist, I began to be interested in the possibility of using Kai to subvert these power techniques, developing a way to counter-visualize the surface of the Mekong, a territory that is never a simple, flat, geometric, simplified, and exhaustive layer as maps want to represent.

So, I decided to lay the groundwork for the development of a counter-map. To create the surface, I followed a traditional paper making technique from northern Thailand. Traditional Thai paper is made from the bark of the Mulberry tree. Through a series of refining processes, the bark is transformed to produce a textured and delicate paper surface, called "Kaada saa". I had the opportunity to learn the production processes behind this ancient art at Farm Kaada Saa, a traditional paper factory based in Chiang Mai. To this ancient process, I added an additional layer of experimentation using a pulp made from a combination of Mekong algae and Mulberry tree bark, another natural element found in the riverine territory.



Figure 6. Artist’s studio experimentation, 2023 © Pietro Lo Casto

The result proposed a surface that resembles the reality of the Mekong River, in the sense that it cannot be easily pinpointed. The paper is layered, it is both clear and murky, soft but at the same time rough. It contains sediments and impurities; it incorporates the passing of time. It is moist, and like other natural elements, moisture eludes cartographic representation. At the same time, moisture destroys paper and electronic maps! (UNIDEE, 2023)

These characteristics allowed me to introduce an anomaly into the cartographic process. In the printing process, the machine encountered friction from a rough, moist, and porous surface, a resistance that technology could not calculate. In the process of creation, I was particularly interested in this moment of friction caused by the irregular materiality of the algae paper and the printer's inability to reproduce the desired image perfectly.



Figure 7. Moist Map, riverweed paper, archive material, laser cut print, 8x12 inches, Art Worms, KMITL University Gallery, Bangkok, 2024 © Pietro Lo Casto

We often understand technology when it doesn't work. Friction sometimes allows us to understand the structures and infrastructures present that often tend to be made invisible or arbitrary. This divergence turned into a strategy of resistance to dominant visualization techniques.

A wet, indefinable map—becomes a place of possibility, where one can begin to imagine alternative worlds beyond the totalizing view imposed by power systems on the environment.

Moist Maps: A Collaborative Map-Making Initiative

At this point, it became evident that any attempt at reimagining the Mekong River through the materiality of its river weed, must be collaborative, grounded in the knowledge of those who live in its presence. A relationship had formed between us—researchers and artists—and the community of Kai harvesters. There was a shared sense that more was possible.

Women who have collected Kai for generations carry an intimate understanding of its lifecycle, the shifting river currents, and the rhythms of the land. Yet, this traditional knowledge is at risk of disappearing. There is a need for intergenerational knowledge transfer to preserve the cultural and ecological significance of the Mekong River and Kai riverweed.

Moist Maps: A Collaborative Map-Making Initiativewas conceived in response to this urgency, drawing from artist collective Ala Plastica, which defines “initiatives”—not projects—those artistic practices that evolve through ongoing, context-driven exchanges rather than fixed plans (Kester, 2011). It brought together women from the Kai-harvesting community, local youth from Chiang Khong, artists, and activists to co-create a series of maps using locally sourced river weeds.

Collaborative map-making could allow us to envision the future as a shared present, amplifying the micro-stories and diverse perspectives that shape the river's reality, revealing a different ethic of mapping. As Nishant Awan notes, this approach neither aligns with the powerful and elite nor adopts an oppositional stance. Instead, it includes others in the mapping process, recognizes the mapmakers' positioning, and embraces the multiplicity of narratives within any space (Awan, 2023).

This initiative was made possible through the invaluable partnership with The Mekong School. For over 20 years, the school has nurtured a relationship with the community of Chiang Khong, serving as a platform to research environmental changes and the impacts of development in the Mekong River Basin. Their role was instrumental, both as co-facilitators and as bridges of trust within the community.



Figure 8. Group discussion at The Mekong School, 2025 © Kamonpan Tivawong

With their support, we assembled a participant group of six elderly women from the Kai harvesting community of Baan Had Krai and four high school students eager to learn about Kai and art.

The artist team was thoughtfully composed to expand my network of collaborators, bringing together Khetsin, a sound artist; Kamonpan, a photographer; Puvamin, a video maker; Anusorn, a sculptor; and Areeya, a geographer. These were both old and new collaborators whose ongoing research and practices I hoped would resonate with the fieldwork experience. I also envisioned this gathering sparking new lines of inquiry and possibilities for everyone involved.

The activities took place during the Chinese Lunar New Year—a deliberate choice. Pi Nop, who runs the Mekong School with his wife Max and a group of local and international activists, explained that dam operations upstream in Laos and China slow down during the holiday season, reducing the risk of sudden fluctuations in the Mekong's water level. There was also symbolic resonance in acting while the “system was sleeping”, as he exclaimed.

Moist Maps began in the early hours of a cool Saturday morning, as we got on a river boat to reach a mid-channel gravel bar or island called “Don”. Each Don has its name and has a different type of Kai. The women pointed out that, at Don, the water is cleaner and there is more Kai. Once they could simply walk to the edge by the river to collect it, but a newly built revetment made the riverbank too steep and too dangerous to stand.



Figure 9. Collaborative community research, Chiang Khong, 2025 © Kamonpan Tivawong

Guided by the expert hands of the women, we collected Kai, learning to distinguish the vibrant, fresh algae kept for community needs from the old, unusable strands we would repurpose for papermaking. As we moved along the river, human footprints pressed the muddy sediment along the edge where water meets land. Along the way, small footprints of at least three different types of birds were pressed on the same sediment. Were they also here to collect Kai?

We were shown how to clean the Kai using a method reminiscent of washing cloth—beating the river weed against the rocks. “Beat it harder and have fun with it,” one woman encouraged, laughing as she demonstrated. “Beating and picking Kai relaxes me. It helps me release tension,” she said with a smile. One artist asked the boat driver about Kai. He laughed and said he knew nothing about Kai. Ask the women. This points to kai's role as something that goes much deeper than being merely a consumable resource: It is women's knowledge, women's work, and an outlet to release stress.

On the Don we encountered a few bushes of Khrai (Hormona Riparia), a local plant once used to make soap, its white milky sap remembered for washing clothes on stones—a history preserved in the village’s name. The tiny young leaves of Khrai are astringent and delicious, to be eaten with Laarb.

As we looked closely at where Kai grows, we discovered that the weed needs to hold on to the river’s stones to develop. Admired for their smooth surfaces and unique patterns, Mekong River gravels are now sold in markets as prized objects for residential landscaping, another example of commodification and extraction in this contested landscape.

In the afternoon, under the shade of the Mekong School, we began the papermaking process. We mixed the old Kai with other locally sourced materials, which included rice straw from nearby organic farms and bamboo leaves, traditionally used in fishing, but also down

papers from books and reports during the flood that hit northern Thailand last September 2024.The increasing water level along the Mekong River was also used to help imagine the potential impacts of proposed new dams.



Figure 10. Pulp making process, Chiang Khong, 2025, © Kamonpan Tivawong

An unexpected moment of improvisation occurred when our electric tools, overwhelmed by the humidity and continuous use, stopped working. In the face of this setback, we turned to the age-old practice of grape stomping. In a spontaneous, playful dance, we began tip-tapping on the pulp mixture with our feet. Laughter filled the air, breaking down barriers between artists and community members.

When the mixture was finally ready, we carried our paper making frames down to the shores of the great Mekong River. The descent was slow and deliberate, the rocks slick underfoot, demanding our attention and care. As we reached the water's edge, the river lapped at our ankles, cool and grounding. We formed a loose circle, leaning in as we mixed the pulp into the frames, hands brushing against water, fingers moving in unison. We were careful not to disturb a nearby fisherman tending to his nets. His presence anchored us to the place, a reminder of the river's continuity and the lives she sustains.

We left the paper to dry in the sun by the concrete banks of the Mekong River, its surface textured with traces of Kai and river sediment—a material map of the landscape itself.



Figure 11. Paper Making process in the Mekong River, Chiang Khong, 2025 © Puvamin Indee



Figure 12. Riverweed based paper drying in the sun by the banks of the Mekong River, Chiang Khong, 2025 © Kamonpan Tivawong

The first day ended with a sharing session where the women spoke in greater depth about Kai. It was during this exchange that the youth truly began to learn about Kai and its significance. The youth did not accompany us on the boat in the Mekong River or participate in the Kai harvesting. Their school had prohibited them from entering the river.

The following day, map-making began under the shade of the Mekong School. We opened with a conversation on the pitfalls of traditional maps and the potential of collaborative cartography. Activities began with small interactions and reluctance, however as participants became looser and gathered into different age groups around large sheets of Kai paper, there was more willingness to take the initiative to help.

Using drawing, writing, and collaging with photographs and found objects from our first day in the river, they work collaboratively to share their experiences, memories, and local knowledge of the river and Kai harvesting. Here, the process became as significant as the outcome—the act of mapping as vital as the maps themselves.



Figure 13. Collaborative Map Making workshop, Chiang Khong, 2025 © Kamonpan Tivawong

The resulting Moist Maps delve into the notion of moisture beyond its wet, porous, and rough materiality. They are imbued with layers of memory, identity, and intimacy, reflecting intricate and interconnected networks of relationships. Born from place-based, collaborative methods, these maps remind us that dominating "technologies of power" can be learned and localized by the dominated as a form of empowerment (Laungaramsri, 2000).

They reveal a lineage of knowledge passed down through generations, preserving tradition and intimacy through shared practices. As the eldest of the women and community leader recalled: “Kai brings me back to when I was a little child, following my mother as she

harvested it using a stick made of Khrai. She would prepare soup by mixing Kai with other local greens to share with the family. Sometimes, she would steam it inside banana leaves or grill it over the fire, adding pig fat to enhance the flavour. I learned all of this by watching my parents."

The maps also illuminate the role of women as custodians of Kai, responsible for its harvesting, preparation, and preservation. Yet, they also expose shifting social dynamics, reflecting desires to redefine gender roles and share responsibilities more equitably. "In the past, if the food wasn't good enough, husbands would scold," one woman shared. "Now we form management groups. We decide how to harvest, preserve, and sell the Kai. Men no longer have control over women's decisions." These words echo the voices of women who, through their stewardship of Kai, assert independence and authority, subtly transforming traditional power structures.



Figure 14. Collaborative Map Making workshop, Chiang Khong, 2025 © Kamonpan Tivawong

Women traced the curves of the river with sweeping lines of green and blue, overlaying them with rocks and fishing nets, narrating stories of seasons when river weed was abundant and times when it was scarce. As they drew, they spoke of fluctuating water levels and the uncertainty they now face.

"Before, we could always count on the river," one woman explained, her fingers moving slowly over the paper. "But now, the water goes up and down without warning. It comes quickly and leaves just as fast, and the Kai doesn't have time to grow."

These changes are not merely natural cycles but are intimately linked to upstream dam operations. "When China releases water, it floods the rocks where Kai grows," another woman shared.

Amidst narratives of change and loss, the maps carry hope. They reflect the elders' wish for the youth to reconnect with Kai, to see its cultural and economic significance, and to understand the intimacy of working with nature rather than against it.

Yet, the youth voiced a detachment from the tradition of Kai harvesting. "I didn't think much about Kai before today," admitted one student. "I see it sold in stores, but I didn't know people here still go to the river to pick it."



Figure 15. Moist Maps, river weed based paper, mixed media, 110x80 cm, 4 pieces, installation view The Mekong School, Chiang Khong, Thailand, 2025 © Kamonpan Tivawong



Figure 16. Moist Maps, river weed based paper, mixed media, detail, 110x80 cm, 2025, © Kamonpan Tivawong

Despite this detachment, the mapping activity sparked curiosity and a newfound appreciation for the immense cultural and economic value of Kai. One woman confidently shared that she could earn hundreds of thousands of baht each season—more than some university graduates. This revelation excited the youth.

“I didn’t realize Kai was so important to our community,” one student reflected. “It’s more than food—it’s history.”

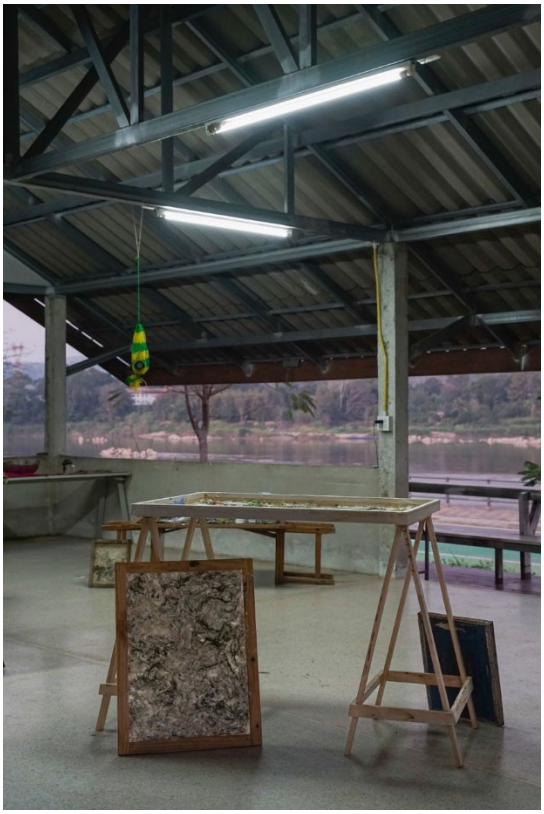


Figure 17. Moist Maps, river weed based paper, mixed media, 110x80 cm, 4 pieces, installation view The Mekong School, Chiang Khong, Thailand, 2025 © Kamonpan Tivawong

That evening, the maps were installed for exhibition at the Mekong School, accompanied by a sound piece by Khetsin that filled the room with layered sounds from our two days together. The public showcase welcomed villagers, local teachers, parents, and other family members. The participants had the opportunity to present their collaborative pieces once again, this time to a curious local audience.

Shortly after, a Kai-based dinner was served, prepared and delivered by the harvester community's restaurant. We shared dinner together, the atmosphere warm and intimate. A short film by Puvamin celebrated our time spent together, capturing the essence of the collaborative initiative.

The evening embodied the spirit of community, and the shared act of creating—reminding us of the possibilities of collaborative art practices. Through our time spent together we couldn't claim to provide specific solutions to the social, economic, and environmental dilemmas facing the Mekong River and the community of Baan Had Krai. But rather, what we sought was to give a chance to the specific potential that art has as a kind of knowledge: a way of perceiving, investigating and being in the world that counterbalances a world dominated by reason, as Ala Plastica suggests (Kester, 2011).

If culture is the product of relationships that are always changing according to what is taking place around it, then our communing on a shared site, our observations and our feelings, meant we became part of a new culture.

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Reimagining Communities: Poetic Spaces of Light, Movement, and Language in Collective Experience

Bin Youn

Abstract

This research explores how transdisciplinary artistic practices foster communal experiences through light, movement, and language in immersive installations. Examining four case studies: *Projective Verse of ㅇ* (2023), *ㅁ otherisland* (2022), *Abyss* (2022), and *Butterflying* (2023), the study demonstrates how installations function as transformative spaces encouraging collective engagement through embodied interaction. Projects incorporate Korean letters as visual anchors while extending beyond linguistic forms through light sculptures and collaborative structures. The research employs mixed methods combining practice-based research, participant observation, and digital ethnography, analyzing 179 Instagram stories. Drawing from Charles Olson's Projective Verse, Eastern concepts of qi (氣/기) and Wayu (臥遊/와유), and theorists including Sarah Bryant-Bertail and Homi Bhabha, this work situates artistic practice as spatial and temporal reconfiguration. The study introduces "qi-time" as a framework for understanding non-linear temporal experience in digitally-mediated art. Findings reveal how installations create temporary collective experiences through shared vocabularies, embodied documentation, and cross-cultural dialogue, though not sustained communities. The research contributes to understanding how contemporary artistic practices bridge physical and digital spaces, offering models for reimagining social connection in an era of technological mediation.

Keywords: immersive installation, projective verse, theatrical space, dematerialization, cultural translation, collective experience

Purpose

The contemporary art world increasingly recognizes the potential of immersive installations to create meaningful communal experiences that transcend traditional boundaries between artwork and audience. This research investigates how transdisciplinary artistic practices can reimagine community formation through the strategic integration of light, movement, and language in spatial installations. Specifically, this study asks: How do immersive installations create conditions for temporary collective experience, and how do these experiences extend into digital spaces through social media documentation?

The research emerges from four installation works that explore the intersection of Eastern artistic philosophy and Western installation practices. These works are deeply rooted in Eastern concepts such as Wayu (臥遊/와유), the practice of mental strolling in nature while the body remains still, and the understanding of qi (氣/기), the primordial continuous energy flux. Drawing from Korean abstract painter Yoo Youngkuk's philosophy that "the mountain is not in front of me but inside of me," these installations transform gallery spaces into environments where the mental spirit can move freely, illuminating planes of experience beyond physical boundaries.

The works engage with Guo Xi's (1020-1090) principle that a good picture should be one that viewers feel they could walk through, stop in, or live in - a concept that profoundly influenced East Asian artistic traditions. This philosophy of creating navigable, livable artistic spaces combines with Western concepts of installation art and minimalist theatricality to create

hybrid environments. By positioning installations as "poetic spaces," this study seeks to understand how embodied interaction with artistic environments can generate new forms of communal experience that extend beyond the gallery space into digital networks.

Methodology

This research employs a mixed-methods approach combining practice-based research, participant observation, and digital ethnography to examine four immersive installations created between 2022 and 2023.

Data Collection

Physical Space Observation: Systematic participant observation was conducted during gallery hours across all four installations using structured protocols adapted from Pink's (2015) sensory ethnography. Data collection focused on patterns of visitor movement, instances of collective viewing, bodily orientations, and duration of engagement.

Digital Data Collection: Instagram story data was collected through the artist's Instagram account when visitors engage and tag the artist in their stories. These tagged stories were saved as screenshots during the exhibition periods, creating an archive of immediate visitor responses. This method captures stories where visitors actively choose to connect their experience with the artist's account. Total sample: 179 Instagram stories across four installations.

Ethical Considerations: While formal IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval was not obtained for this artistic practice research, ethical guidelines were followed: no identifying information is included, only publicly shared content is analyzed, and focus is remained on aggregate patterns. The retrospective nature of this data collection, while presenting analytical limitations, ensured that visitor behavior was not influenced by knowledge of being researched, thus capturing more authentic responses.

Analytical Framework

Physical observations were coded for collective behavior patterns, temporal rhythms, and cross-cultural interactions. Instagram stories underwent quantitative mapping (sharing frequency, 24-hour viewable time constraint) and linguistic analysis using grounded-theory approach. The integration of Eastern philosophical concepts with digital ethnographic methods required developing hybrid analytical categories. Following Kozinets' (2019) netnographic approach, digital data was analyzed for both manifest content and latent cultural meanings.

Digital Documentation and Platform Specificity

Following Kozinets' (2019) netnographic principles, this research recognizes that digital platforms are not neutral channels but active shapers of cultural expression. Instagram's specific affordances – square format images, 24-hour story duration, tagging systems – fundamentally influence how visitors document and share art experiences. The platform's emphasis on visual over textual communication particularly suits installation art documentation, yet also privileges certain aesthetic choices over others.

The retrospective analysis approach, while presenting limitations, aligns with Pink's (2015) advocacy for "sensory ethnography" that attends to the multisensory nature of experience. The saved Instagram stories function as what Pink terms "sensory memories" – digital traces that preserve not just visual information but emotional and embodied responses to spatial encounters. The frequency of shadow documentation across installations, appearing in 11 of 57 shares for ㅁ otherisland, suggests visitors' intuitive understanding of their bodied presence as integral to the work.

Building on Warner's (2002) concept of "publics and counterpublics," the Instagram data reveals how temporary publics form around shared aesthetic experiences. The recurrence of specific descriptive terms – "magical," "serene," "peaceful" – across unconnected users suggests the emergence of what Warner might term a "discourse public," united not by pre-existing identity categories but by shared vocabulary arising from common experience. This finding supports the installations' capacity to create temporary linguistic communities that transcend individual interpretation.

Limitations and Reflexivity

Key limitations include: retrospective Instagram analysis capturing only saved content, sampling bias toward digitally active visitors, and the dual role as artist-researcher potentially limiting critical distance. These limitations are addressed through transparent reporting and careful claims-making.

Results

Case Study 1: *Projective Verse of ㅇ* (2023)

Projective Verse of ㅇ demonstrates how large-scale immersive environments create collective experiences through strategic deployment of light, space, and cultural translation. The installation employed 14 projectors and light sculptures across two galleries to create an expansive poetic landscape.

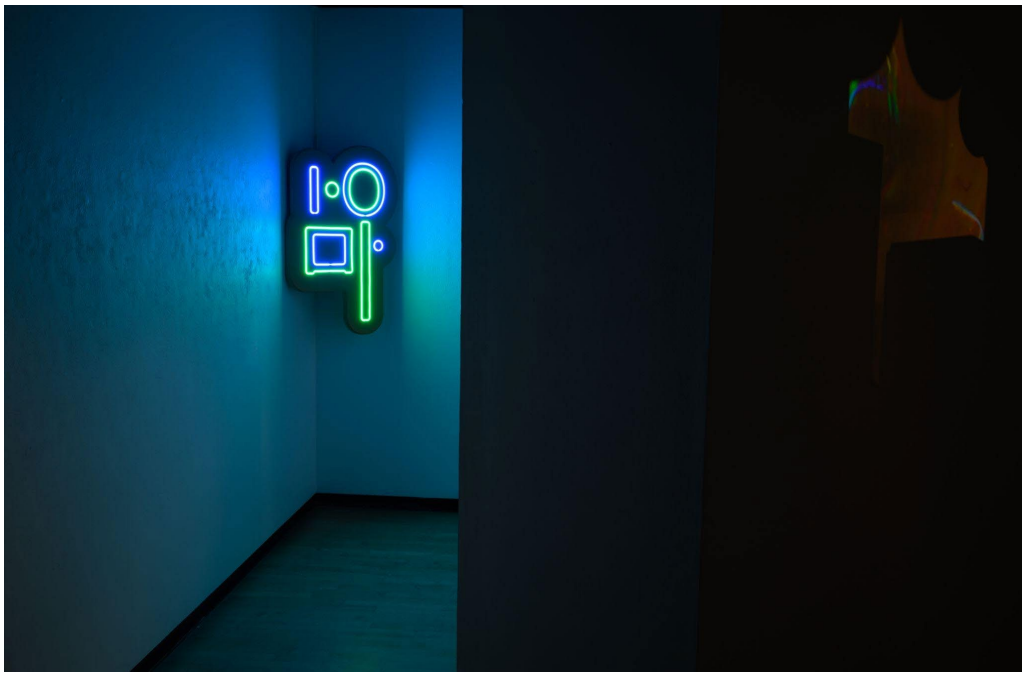


Figure 1: Installation view of *Projective Verse of ㅇ* showing neon work *The composition of mother with sky, soil, water and human* at East entrance, with Korean consonants and vowels signifying 엄마 (*eomma*, meaning mother). Photo: Bin Youn, January 2023.

Two 6.5-foot-tall spherical light sculptures, *Undulating: Inhale and Exhale*, were suspended from the ceiling, revolving at 1 RPM. Covered with 3M dichroic film, these transformed light into color effects that circled the space. At the East entrance, visitors encountered the neon sign work *The composition of mother with sky, soil, water and human*,

emitting blue and green light with Korean consonants and vowels signifying 엄마 (*eomma*, meaning Mother). A larger neon work, *W H O I S L A N D*, was placed at the center surrounded by reflective mylars, incorporating all letters from the mother composition. These neon works encoded layers of meaning through Korean letters, with ㅇ representing water and ㅁ representing soil in Korean cosmology.

The work references Charles Olson's Projective Verse (1962), which advocates for poetry as an open field where meaning emerges through dynamic interaction. This resonates with Eastern Wayu (臥遊/와유) philosophy - mental traveling while the body remains still. The Korean consonant ㅇ, with its circular shape representing the sound of water in Korean cosmology, serves as both a linguistic anchor and an elemental symbol. The vertical line in the vowel system represents the upright human as a neutral mediator between sky and earth.

Visitor observations revealed indirect collective engagement through shadow interactions and shared navigation patterns. While visitors moved through the space individually, they became aware of others through shadows cast by projections and reflections in the installation elements. For instance, one documented moment showed three visitors spontaneously aligning their shadows to create overlapping patterns on the gallery wall, leading to laughter and verbal exchange. Analysis of 65 Instagram stories showed consistent contemplative language: "magical" appearing multiple times across different users, along with "serene," "peaceful," "immersive," and notably "self-care." Significantly, 19 shares featured Korean linguistic elements, indicating strong cross-cultural engagement. The recurrence of these descriptive terms across multiple visitors suggests shared vocabulary emerging from collective experience.

The installation's temporal architecture deserves further analysis. The 1 RPM rotation of the light sculptures, *Undulating: Inhale and Exhale*, created "breathing rhythm" that subtly synchronized bodily awareness across the gallery space. This mechanical tempo, combined with the shifting projections, established multiple temporal layers that visitors could attune to or resist. Some Instagram stories specifically mentioned feeling "slowed down" or entering "gallery time," suggesting the installation successfully created alternative temporal experience.

The spatial choreography created by the triangular placement of speakers deserves specific attention. This configuration established what Cage (1961) might recognize as "purposeful purposelessness" - a structured environment that enables unstructured experience. Visitors naturally traced triangular paths between sound sources, creating informal processional routes that shifted throughout the day. This movement pattern appeared in several Instagram stories showing motion-blurred figures, suggesting visitors documented the kinetic experience as much as static visual elements.

The work's relationship to Judd's (1965) "specific objects" theory manifests through the wooden box structures, which function simultaneously as minimal sculptures and functional platforms. Unlike Judd's rejection of illusionism, however, these boxes served as stages for projection, embracing rather than refusing transformation through light. This hybrid approach - minimal form accepting maximal transformation - created what one Instagram post described as "solid things becoming liquid," suggesting successful integration of Eastern flux philosophy with Western object-based art. The documented interactions with these boxes - sitting, leaning, circumnavigating - demonstrate how minimal structures can encourage maximal engagement when positioned within immersive environments.

Case Study 2: ㅁ *otherisland* (2022)

ㅁ *otherisland* explores language, space, and collective identity through multi-channel video installation with reflective materials and interval-embedded sound. The title combines the

Korean consonant ㅁ, representing the sound of soil in Korean cosmology, with "motherisland," creating a hybrid linguistic form embodying navigation between cultures.



Figure 2: Detail shot of ㅁ *otherisland* showing reflective mylar sheets with visitor shadows and projected imagery, illustrating the interplay between physical presence and digital projection. Photo: Bin Youn, October 2022.

Seven projected moving images interact with 120 reflective mylar sheets and two 72-inch suspended balloons. Sound design included baby crying at intervals, creating moments of collective emotional attention. Visitors consistently paused and acknowledged each other during these sonic intervals, creating moments of collective emotional attention.

Instagram documentation (57 shares) revealed distinctive patterns: emphatic repetition with phrases like "so so so great" and "amazing" used three times in succession. Notably, 11 shares incorporated audience shadows, demonstrating visitors' understanding of themselves as integral to the work's composition. The emphatic, repetitive language indicates heightened emotional states that exceeds conventional description.

The materiality of the mylar sheets requires specific attention. These reflective surfaces created what could be termed "multiplication effects" - each viewer saw themselves fragmented and repeated throughout the space, visually reinforcing themes of cultural hybridity and split identity. The mylar's slight movement from air circulation added subtle animation, making the space feel alive and responsive.

The title's linguistic play - ㅁ otherisland versus motherland - emerged from the artist's own experience of linguistic slippage between Korean and English. This personal etymology resonated with viewers navigating their own linguistic boundaries. Several Instagram stories from Korean-American visitors specifically mentioned feeling "seen" by this linguistic hybridity, suggesting the installation successfully created spaces of recognition for bicultural experiences. The work thus functioned as what Bhabha might term a "third space" where hybrid identities could find reflection and validation.

The technical interplay between the seven video channels created what could be understood through Olson's (1962) concept of "composition by field." Rather than linear narrative, the videos operated as simultaneous fields of meaning that viewers navigated

individually while sharing collective space. The Instagram documentation revealed viewers' attempts to capture this multiplicity - several stories showed rapid panning between projections, trying to encompass the whole while inevitably fragmenting it.

Case Study 3: *Abyss* (2022)

Abyss, collaborated with Josh Zubkoff, explores collective experience through depth and reflection metaphors. A suspended kaleidoscope structure measuring 7 feet in diameter allows one person inside while remaining visible to gallery visitors, transforming individual contemplation into witnessed performance.



Figure 3: Single visitor inside the kaleidoscope structure of *Abyss* with other visitors visible outside, demonstrating the individual/collective dynamic and the performance aspect of participation. Photo: Bin Youn, September 2022.

Observation revealed multiple engagement modes: standing observers, floor sitting, individual lying, and groups of 3-4 lying together to view projections. This spontaneous collective floor viewing created informal horizontal communities.

Digital documentation (39 shares) showed philosophical reflection with terms like "infinite," "queasy," "inspired." Six selfie videos transformed an individual experience into performed documentation. The variety of documented bodily positions illustrates creative collective engagement despite individually focused design.

The kaleidoscope structure's material properties deserve further examination in relation to Grau's (2003) analysis of immersive environments. Grau argues that virtual immersion requires the dissolution of the image frame, yet Abyss maintains a highly visible structural frame while achieving immersive effects through reflection and multiplication. This suggests

an alternative immersive strategy that acknowledges rather than disguises its constructed nature.

The documented viewing positions – standing, sitting, lying individually and in groups – demonstrate what Bryant-Bertail (2000) might recognize as "theatrical use of space," where the audience's spatial choices become part of the performance. The horizontal viewing groups particularly evoke Bryant-Bertail's discussion of how Brechtian theater encourages collective rather than individual identification. By lying together to view the overhead projections, visitors literally aligned their perspectives, creating what Bryant-Bertail terms "communal viewing angles" that foster collective rather than private experience.

The six selfie videos among the 39 Instagram shares represent 15% of digital documentation focusing on self-representation within the work. This aligns with Baym's (2015) observations about social media's tendency toward "context collapse," where private experience becomes public performance. Yet rather than diminishing authentic engagement, these selfie videos might be understood as contemporary forms of bearing witness – inserting oneself into the artistic experience to validate and share its reality.

Case Study 4: *Butterflying* (2023)

Butterflying demonstrates how moving images and collaborative seating create extended communal experiences. Combining 33 butterfly sculptures with dichroic film, six-channel video projection, and three inflatable couches, the installation explicitly invites collective presence.

Photographic documentation shows visitors extensively using the inflatable seating, with groups naturally forming on couches, including strangers sitting together. The comfortable seating arrangement encouraged extended viewing periods. Instagram analysis showed a unique pattern: 18 shares captured wide installation views without descriptive text, suggesting experience transcending verbal articulation.

The inflatable furniture's material significance extends beyond comfort to conceptual meaning. As analyzed by Lippard (1973), the use of air as sculptural material represents ultimate dematerialization - form maintained by breath, echoing Olson's (1962) emphasis on breath in projective verse. The green color choice activated multiple associations documented in visitor responses: nature, growth, spring - all concepts aligned with the transformation theme embodied in "butterflying" as continuous action.



Figure 4: Multiple visitors seated on green inflatable couches engaging with suspended butterfly sculptures and video projections, showing extended collective viewing and discussion. Photo: Bin Youn, March 2023.

The dichroic film on butterfly sculptures created what Judd (1965) might term "specific phenomena" - optical effects that exist only in the intersection of material, light, and viewing angle. This contingency meant each visitor experienced unique color combinations based on their position and movement, yet the shared recognition of this variability created collective understanding. Several Instagram stories showed visitors directing each other to specific viewing spots to share particular color effects, demonstrating collaborative exploration of perceptual phenomena. This behavior suggests the installation successfully created what Pink (2015) terms "sensory sociality" - social bonds formed through shared sensory experience rather than verbal communication. The wordless Instagram documentation thus becomes particularly significant, representing not linguistic failure but recognition of sensory experience exceeding linguistic capture.

Analysis and Discussion

Theoretical Integration and Digital Extension

The case studies demonstrate the successful integration of Eastern and Western theoretical frameworks. Olson's projective verse concept finds resonance with Wayu (臥遊/와유) philosophy, creating installation spaces operating as both Western "open fields" and Eastern contemplative landscapes. The concept of qi (氣/기) as continuous energy flux provides the framework for understanding experience continuity across media platforms. Jung Soojin's (2022) analysis of qiyunshengdong (氣韻生動/기운생동) and its translation as "rhythmic vitality" offers crucial insight into how Eastern temporal concepts translate across cultures. This "life with rhythm" understanding helps theorize what I term "qi-time" -

temporal experience shaped by energy flow rather than chronological measurement. In installations, this manifests through multiple temporal rhythms: 1 RPM mechanical rotation, interval-based sound, and visitor-determined durations.

Bryant-Bertail's theatrical space-time gains a new dimension when combined with Eastern temporal concepts. The Instagram story data reveals how digital platforms constitute rather than merely document collective experiences. The interplay of light through neon works and dichroic reflections, movement via revolving sculptures and shadow play, and language in Korean consonants and hybrid titles creates what I term "qi-time", a temporal experience shaped by energy flow rather than chronological measurement.

In each case study, the dynamic interplay of light, movement, and language creates layered experiences: light through neon Korean characters and projections in *Projective Verse of* ㅇ, movement via shadow play and reflections in ㅂ *otherisland*, linguistic hybridity in titles and viewer responses across all works. These elements combine to generate what Jung Soojin (2022) might recognize as contemporary manifestations of qiyunshengdong - rhythmic vitality emerging through multimedia rather than traditional painting.

Extending Jung Soojin's Framework

Jung Soojin's (2022) examination of how "qiyunshengdong" was translated as "rhythmic vitality" provides a crucial precedent for understanding cross-cultural translation in artistic contexts. Jung traces how Western scholars' interpretation of qi (氣/ㄱ|) as "rhythm" fundamentally shaped subsequent understanding of East Asian aesthetics. This historical example illuminates how the installations under study engage in similar acts of cultural translation, though inverting the direction – using Western installation formats to express Eastern temporal concepts.

The "rhythmic vitality" that Jung identifies in traditional painting manifests in these installations through technological means: the 1 RPM rotation creates mechanical rhythm, the interval-based sounds establish sonic rhythm, and visitor movement generates social rhythm. This multiplication of rhythmic layers creates what could be understood as contemporary technological expressions of qiyunshengdong. Where traditional painting achieved rhythmic vitality through brushwork and composition, these installations achieve it through programmed movements and participatory choreographies.

Jung's attention to translation as transformation rather than mere linguistic conversion proves particularly relevant for analyzing the Korean linguistic elements in the installations. Just as "rhythmic vitality" both captures and transforms the meaning of qiyunshengdong, the visual presentation of ㅇ and ㅁ in the installations both preserves and reimagines their cosmological significance. The 19 Instagram shares featuring Korean elements from Projective Verse of ㅇ suggest viewers recognized these forms as meaningful even without linguistic comprehension, supporting Jung's argument that aesthetic concepts can communicate across linguistic barriers through formal qualities.

Furthermore, Jung's critique of how translation fixes fluid concepts into static definitions resonates with the installations' resistance to fixed interpretation. The wordless Instagram documentation of Butterflying might be understood as viewers' recognition that some experiences exceed available vocabulary – a phenomenon Jung identifies in the untranslatable aspects of aesthetic experience. This suggests the installations successfully create what Jung might recognize as spaces of productive untranslatability, where meaning emerges through encounter rather than explanation.

Collective Experience and Temporary Communities

Analysis reveals consistent patterns: light elements including neon Korean characters and projections prompted cross-cultural dialogue; movement through shadows, walking patterns, and prone viewing created spontaneous collective formations; language via Korean-English hybrids and shared digital vocabularies bridged cultural divides. The 24-hour ephemeral Instagram format added another layer of movement - digital circulation creating temporary but intense collective engagement.

Following Baym (2015) and Kozinets (2019), the Instagram data demonstrates how platform affordances shape collective meaning-making. The limited 24-hour format creates the urgency that intensifies engagement, while the visual nature of the platform privileges certain forms of documentation over others. These platform-specific factors must be considered when analyzing digital extensions of physical art experiences.

The silence in *Butterflying* documentation deserves attention. Following Grau's (2003) analysis of immersive environments, wordlessness might indicate experiences exceeding linguistic representation.

Critical Perspectives and Limitations

Not all collective experiences align with artistic intentions. Observations recorded confusion, crowding frustration, and cultural misunderstandings. Some found ㅁ *otherisland*'s sound intervals disturbing rather than synchronizing. These negative experiences, rarely captured in Instagram shares, remind us that collective experiences include discord.

The retrospective Instagram analysis captures only preserved stories, creating preservation bias. The lack of demographic data prevents analyzing of how different audiences engage. Instagram data over-represents younger, digitally active visitors. Silent visitors experiencing profound moments without documentation remain invisible in this analysis.

Theoretical Implications

This research contributes to several theoretical discussions within digital media and art studies. First, the concept of "qi-time" developed here extends Lippard's (1973) dematerialization thesis into the digital realm. Where Lippard identified art's movement away from object toward idea, this research identifies a further movement from idea toward energy flow. The Instagram stories, as twice ephemeral, temporary art documented through temporary media, represent what might be termed "digital dematerialization" – art experiences that exist primarily as energetic exchanges rather than stable forms.

Second, the findings challenge linear models of art reception that move from encounter to interpretation to response. Instead, the Instagram data suggests circular models where digital sharing generates return visits, creating feedback loops between online and offline experience. This aligns with Kozinets' (2019) understanding of digital spaces as active cultural sites rather than passive documentation channels.

Third, the successful integration of Wayu (臥遊/와유) philosophy with contemporary installation practice suggests possibilities for what might be termed "transcultural aesthetics" – not the superficial borrowing of cultural symbols but the deep integration of philosophical frameworks across cultural contexts. This moves beyond Bhabha's (1993) "third space" toward what could be conceptualized as "fluid space," where cultural elements maintain distinct identities while creating new hybrid meanings.

Finally, the research demonstrates how Bryant-Bertail's (2000) theatrical space-time operates in contemporary digital contexts. The installations create what she terms "epic time" – duration that encourages critical reflection rather than emotional absorption. Yet this epic

time now extends through digital platforms, creating new temporalities that Bryant-Bertail's pre-digital framework could not anticipate.

Conclusions

This research demonstrates that immersive installations incorporating light, movement, and language create meaningful temporary collective experiences extending into digital networks. The integration of Eastern philosophical frameworks with Western installation practices and digital media creates new possibilities for understanding collective experience in contemporary art.

The Instagram data provides empirical evidence that visitors actively construct collective meaning through digital sharing. The emergence of shared vocabularies, embodied documentation practices, and platform-specific communication strategies demonstrates social media extends rather than replaces gallery-based collective experience.

The findings suggest creating multiple engagement entry points - incorporating diverse temporal rhythms, and designing for both physical and digital interaction fostering richer collective experiences. For digital media scholars, integrating Eastern philosophical concepts with platform studies opens new theoretical territories.

Future research should address: longitudinal tracking of temporary experiences, demographic analysis of participation, and investigation of experiences resisting digital documentation. The significance lies in demonstrating how installations create conditions for temporary yet meaningful collective experiences, offering models for reimagining social connections across cultural and technological divides.

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Lanna Performing Arts and Natural Conservation: Exploring Pathways and Possibilities in the Digital Age

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Abstract

This research investigates the potential of Lanna performing arts as a medium for fostering environmental awareness and promoting community engagement. Drawing on artistic and practice-led research methodologies, it explores how traditional performance practices can convey ecological knowledge and respond to contemporary environmental concerns.

The study centers on two creative works rooted in Lanna traditions but differing in form and emphasis. Both integrate Lanna dance as a key expressive element. The first draws on beliefs in sacred forests, using bodily movement, traditional string instruments, and evocative silence to evoke the spirit of nature. The second presents local watershed knowledge through newly composed *phleng so* (Lanna poetic song), recorded community interviews, and images from Ban Ko village's creative process.

Comparative analysis reveals that Lanna performing arts can serve as a "language of nature"—a sensory, embodied form of storytelling rooted in rhythm, sound, memory, and cultural identity. These works demonstrate how art can function as a knowledge-making process grounded in lived experience, place-based practices, and cultural engagement.

The study also raises critical questions: Are digital platforms sufficient to generate meaningful impact? Can art become a sustainable tool for social transformation? While it offers no definitive conclusions, the research highlights how Lanna performance, when interwoven with local wisdom and digital innovation, can foster dialogue between humans, nature, and culture in the digital age.

Keywords: Lanna performing arts, Environmental Conservation, Artistic Research, Digital Media, Community Engagement

Introduction

Amid escalating environmental crises—such as climate change, deforestation, and water pollution—that threaten ecosystems, human well-being, and global biodiversity (IPCC, 2023), there is a pressing need for communication strategies that resonate deeply with people and inspire meaningful action. Art, as a powerful medium, has long served to reflect and respond to social, cultural, and environmental challenges. In Thailand's northern region, Lanna performing arts are deeply embedded in the lifestyle, beliefs, and spiritual worldview of the people (Damrhung, 2021). Integrating these cultural expressions with contemporary concerns presents a promising pathway for fostering ecological awareness and cultural continuity.

This research explores the potential of Lanna performing arts as a communication tool to promote environmental awareness and encourage community engagement. Drawing on Artistic Research and Practice-led Research methodologies, it investigates how performance can operate as both a creative and epistemological framework to address real-world environmental issues. While interest in eco-performance and arts-based sustainability research is growing globally, there remains a gap in studies that examine how regional performance traditions—particularly Lanna dance forms—can be meaningfully combined with community knowledge and digital technology to support environmental discourse and action.

The study centers on two original creative works. The first is a non-verbal dance performance integrating Fawn Lanna and traditional music to reflect the beliefs of local knowledge holders regarding the spirit of the forest. Through expressive movement and rhythmic composition, this piece invites audiences into an emotional and sensory experience that encourages reflection on human–nature relationships. The absence of spoken language creates an open interpretive space, allowing personal meaning-making to emerge through affect and embodiment.

The second piece adopts a participatory approach by weaving interviews and narratives from the Ban Ko community in Lamphun Province—a key site for watershed forest conservation—into the performance structure. These authentic voices are integrated with Lanna dance and music, transforming the stage into a dialogic space that highlights the interdependence between humans, forests, and water systems. The piece emphasizes local agency and illustrates how community-based ecological practices can be communicated through artistic form.

Beyond the performances themselves, this research critically explores how digital media can serve as a platform for dissemination and social impact. As Damrhung (2021) explains, "*performance research is a broad and fairly new set of approaches for doing artistic research in the field of performance*" (p. 375), especially effective in "*contemporary performing arts arenas that emerge in mixed and changing cultural contexts, and [that] encourage interdisciplinary vision and international involvement*" (p. 376). The fusion of traditional forms, local knowledge, and digital tools exemplifies this approach and reflects the evolving nature of Thai performance in a globalized world.

Moreover, Damrhung (2021) emphasizes that performance research seeks to "*create distinctive and viable spaces and embodied knowledge for contemporary Thai performance*" (p. 377). This study aligns with that aim by demonstrating how Lanna performing arts can become a conduit for community dialogue, environmental consciousness, and cultural resilience. It raises critical questions: *Is online dissemination alone sufficient to catalyze real change? How can performing arts evolve into sustainable tools for social transformation?* While experimental in scope, this research offers a model for integrating artistic practice, local ecological wisdom, and digital innovation to address pressing environmental and cultural issues in the digital age.

Definition of Key Terms

Forest Ordination: A Buddhist-influenced ritual common in Northern Thailand that symbolically ordains trees to protect forests from destruction. It reflects spiritual beliefs about the sanctity of nature and is often used as a cultural tool for conservation.

Watershed Management (Lanna context): Community-based strategies in Northern Thailand that integrate ecological knowledge, rituals, and sustainable practices to manage headwater forests and water sources.

Fawn Lanna (Lanna Dance): Traditional Northern Thai dance characterized by graceful movement and symbolic gestures, often embedded within ritual or communal contexts.

Practice-led Research: A methodology where artistic creation is central to the research process and contributes to the generation of new knowledge.

Purpose

3.1 To investigate how Lanna performing arts can serve as a medium for communicating environmental awareness and ecological wisdom through embodied and community-rooted practices.

3.2 To analyze two creative research works that recontextualize traditional Lanna performance in response to contemporary ecological issues, highlighting how artistic practices can contribute to knowledge-making in the digital age.

Literature Review

This article synthesizes insights from two distinct creative research projects, both exploring the capacity of Lanna performing arts to serve as a vital tool for environmental communication and natural resource conservation. Situated within the evolving fields of digital arts and environmental humanities, this study necessitates a comprehensive review of existing scholarship. The literature review is organized into five key thematic areas: (1) Concepts of Artistic Research and Practice-led Research; (2) Lanna Cultural Ecosystems and Traditional Performance; (3) Art as Environmental Communication; (4) Technology and Digital Media in Arts Dissemination; and (5) Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Conservation.

This study draws upon two original creative research projects. The first, The Creation of Contemporary Performing Arts Based on Forest Ordination Derived from Lanna's Belief is to Promote Forest Conservation, explores how ritual-based performance rooted in forest ordination ceremonies can promote ecological consciousness. The second, The Wisdom, Intelligence, and Creativity in Watershed Management of Lanna Community: The Media Presentation of Contemporary Lanna Performing Arts, focuses on translating local ecological wisdom into contemporary performance and multimedia forms. Together, these works serve as case studies that embody the intersection of traditional knowledge, artistic practice, and digital innovation in addressing contemporary environmental concerns.

This integrated review aims to build a robust theoretical foundation for analyzing these two artistic case studies and their potential to foster environmental awareness and social change in the digital age.

Artistic Research and Practice-led Research: Generating Embodied Knowledge

This article adopts a Practice-led Research methodology, emphasizing that profound knowledge can emerge directly from engagement in artistic practice. This approach is particularly relevant to Lanna traditional performing arts, which are intimately woven into local rituals and daily life. A core tenet of this methodology is that artistic practice itself generates unique forms of knowledge, distinct from those produced by conventional scientific

methods (Borgdorff, 2012; Mäkelä, 2007). As Pornrat Damrhung (2020) articulates, "Performance research is a broad and fairly new set of approaches for doing artistic research in the field of performance. … It seeks to produce 'embodied' and 'felt knowledge' through those performance practices" (p. 376). This perspective underscores how artistic works can function as instruments for creating knowledge that is physically and emotionally tangible, leading to deeper, more personal understanding (Klein, 2017).

This aligns with Robin Nelson's (2013) concept of Practice-as-Research, where the creative process is not merely a means to an end but a legitimate mode of inquiry, yielding novel insights. Arlander et al. (2018) further support this, viewing performance as a medium for artistic research that explores lived experiences and generates understanding through sensory and experiential engagement. The methodologies employed in this study—the creation and analysis of two distinct Lanna performance pieces—exemplify this practice-led approach, producing knowledge directly through the act of artistic creation and its subsequent analysis.

Lanna Cultural Ecosystems and Traditional Performance: Interwoven Heritage

The concept of cultural ecology, first advanced by Julian Steward (1955), offers a fundamental framework for understanding the intricate relationships between human societies, their cultures, and their natural environments. In Northern Thailand, particularly among the Lanna people, this ecological perspective is vividly reflected in their traditional performing arts. Ritual-based Lanna performances, such as *Fawn Phi Mod Phi Meng*—a ceremonial dance used to dispel misfortune and restore spiritual balance—transcend aesthetic expression. They are deeply embedded in cosmological beliefs and serve as vital components of community life, intertwining the spiritual and ecological dimensions of culture (Damrhung, 2020).

These dances often reflect the community's profound relationship with nature and unseen spiritual forces believed to inhabit forests, mountains, and rivers. In this way, traditional Lanna performance functions as a cultural repository, preserving local wisdom, belief systems, and historical experiences related to natural resources. Through their embodied symbolism and ritual function, performances like *Fawn Phi Mod Phi Meng* contribute to maintaining ecological awareness and spiritual resilience within the cultural-ecological landscape. This intrinsic connection highlights the significant potential of Lanna performing arts to articulate and strengthen messages of natural conservation.

Art as Environmental Communication: Engaging Beyond Data

In an era defined by urgent environmental crises, as highlighted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023), art's role in fostering public awareness and action has become increasingly vital. Art uniquely transcends purely scientific data or policy directives by engaging audiences on an emotional and experiential level, translating complex ecological issues into relatable human narratives and aesthetics. Suzi Gablik (1991) eloquently argues that art possesses transformative power, moving beyond mere aesthetic contemplation to actively engage with societal challenges and promote ethical responsibility towards the environment.

Performing arts, in particular, offer a potent means for environmental communication. Their embodied nature—even when adapted for digital platforms—can create a profound sense of presence and connection, inviting audiences to reflect deeply on their relationship with the natural world. By weaving environmental themes into culturally resonant expressions, art can bypass intellectual barriers and evoke empathy, inspiring critical thinking and encouraging active participation in conservation efforts. This approach aims to cultivate a

deeper understanding and appreciation for ecological issues that might be overlooked through conventional forms of communication.

Technology and Digital Media in Arts Dissemination: New Horizons, New Challenges

The advent of digital technologies has profoundly reshaped the landscape of artistic creation, dissemination, and reception, opening unprecedented avenues for performing arts to reach wider audiences. Lev Manovich (2001) posits that new media introduce fundamental changes in artistic forms, characterized by modularity, variability, and the convergence of different media types. This digital transformation enables the adaptation of live performances into various digital formats, facilitating their global reach and accessibility beyond traditional physical venues.

Furthermore, Marshall McLuhan's (1964) seminal concept, "the medium is the message," asserts that the form of media itself fundamentally influences how content is perceived and impacts society. In the context of Lanna performing arts and environmental conservation, digital platforms are not merely passive conduits; they actively shape the message's delivery and reception. While offering unprecedented reach and accessibility, digital dissemination also prompts critical questions about the depth of audience engagement, the capacity for "felt knowledge" to be generated in a virtual space, and whether online exposure alone suffices to instigate tangible social and behavioral change towards conservation. This study thus explores both the expanded possibilities and inherent challenges presented by digital media in transforming Lanna ecological performances into effective tools for public awareness.

Sacred Ecology and Hybrid Governance: Ritual, Community Rules, and Technology in Lanna Resource Management

This study highlights two complementary modes of ecological knowledge and resource governance within Lanna culture. The first case—centered on forest ordination ceremonies—reflects sacred ecology. These rituals symbolically ordain trees as monks, transforming the forest into a spiritually protected space. Rooted in Buddhist belief, this cultural strategy instills reverence and fear, thereby discouraging logging through moral authority and communal participation.

The second case from Ban Ko illustrates a hybrid system of ecological knowledge and governance. It combines traditional values with modern technologies—such as solar panels, artesian wells, and sustainable agriculture—and is reinforced by local community rules and national environmental law. Each village in the watershed network establishes its own codes of conduct regarding forest and water usage, creating a decentralized but coordinated structure of ecological stewardship. This model exemplifies how ancestral wisdom can coexist with innovation, resulting in a dynamic, adaptive system that addresses environmental challenges through both cultural continuity and institutional regulation.

Together, these cases broaden the framework of Traditional Ecological Knowledge by illustrating how sacred beliefs, community-based rules, and formal legal mechanisms can be integrated into a sustainable and culturally resonant form of natural resource management in the digital era.

Methodological Approach and Analytical Framework

This article adopts a qualitative and comparative analytical framework, synthesizing insights derived from two independent but thematically interconnected creative research projects. These include:

1. *The Creation of Contemporary Performing Arts Based on Forest Ordination Derived from Lanna's Belief*, which explores how spiritual forest ordination ceremonies can be reinterpreted as contemporary performance to promote ecological awareness; and
2. *The Wisdom Intelligence and Creativity in Watershed Management of Lanna Community: The Media Presentation of Contemporary Lanna Performing Arts*, which investigates how traditional community-based water management practices can be communicated through contemporary media and performing arts.

Each project employed distinct yet complementary methodologies. The first project was grounded in cultural beliefs and rituals, emphasizing embodied spiritual narratives through performance. The second project incorporated ethnographic methods—such as interviews, direct observation, and participatory engagement with community members—to document local ecological knowledge and its adaptation to contemporary practices. All community interactions in the second project were conducted with informed consent, adherence to data protection principles, and formal ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Chiang Mai University, ensuring that participants' rights, privacy, and dignity were fully respected.

This article does not reproduce the two projects in full, but rather analyzes them as case studies through the lens of practice-led research, cultural ecology, and artistic research. The aim is to examine how embodied knowledge and indigenous wisdom are generated, interpreted, and disseminated through Lanna performing arts in the digital age. This comparative synthesis offers new insights into how traditional and contemporary practices can coexist as tools for environmental education and cultural conservation.

The Creative Process: From Fieldwork to Artistic Production

This section outlines the creative processes behind the two performance-based research projects that form the core of this study. Each work followed a distinct but complementary trajectory, comprising three phases: pre-production, production, and post-production. These stages not only shaped the artistic outcomes but also served as epistemic spaces for generating embodied, cultural, and ecological knowledge.

Spirit of the Forest: A Non-Verbal Exploration of Sacred Ecology

Pre-Production:

This performance was conceptually grounded in traditional Lanna forest ordination rituals of Northern Thailand. The research process began with a literature review focused on spiritual ecology, animist beliefs, and ceremonial practices related to forest sanctification. These textual insights were supported by field visits to actual community forests within the Ban Pong Development Project area. Drawing on these sources, the researcher developed a five-scene performance that portrays the destruction of the forest, its spiritual consequences, and a ritual journey toward reconciliation and renewal. The choreography and dramatic structure were shaped through observation of the natural surroundings and adapted from traditional Lanna movement vocabularies to express emotional and symbolic layers of meaning.

Production:

The artistic process took place in a real forest setting under the Ban Pong Development Project. The choreography was created collaboratively, drawing on local dance idioms and natural environmental cues. Rehearsals were conducted on-site to immerse the performers in the ecological context. The performance was then recorded on video, with sound design integrating live instruments and ambient forest acoustics. This phase also included script refinement, staging decisions, and visual planning for later dissemination.

Post-Production:

The recorded performance was edited to emphasize the central message of the "living forest," highlighting both its spiritual essence and the consequences of deforestation. The video was then published on YouTube to reach a broader audience. Viewer feedback was gathered through brief interviews and questionnaires to assess how effectively the non-verbal performance conveyed ecological messages.



Figure 1. A ritual-inspired Lanna dance performed in front of the Reclining Buddha at Wat Doi Thaen Phra Phaluang, illustrating the spiritual connection between performer and sacred landscape.
Source: Author (Work 1)

Voices of Ban Ko: Community Knowledge in Performance

Pre-Production:

This second creative work was developed through ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Ban Ko village, Lamphun Province. The researcher engaged in in-depth interviews with local villagers and community leaders to document perspectives on water management practices, forest usage, and oral histories related to natural resource governance. These qualitative insights were analyzed and synthesized into a script structure and a newly composed *phleng so* (Lanna poetic song), reflecting local ecological wisdom in both form and content.

Production:

The performance was staged and filmed at real community locations such as Chammathewi Shrine, reservoirs, and communal halls. Drawing from traditional Lanna dance vocabularies, the choreography was interwoven with live narration, *phleng so*, and symbolic gestures derived from everyday rural practices. Local voices and ambient sounds were recorded and integrated into the performance, with sound design emphasizing the lived experience and agency of the community as co-creators of the work.

Post-Production:

The final video was constructed through the layering of real-time footage, environmental soundscapes, and digital illustrations of watershed systems, with careful editing to preserve the authenticity and rhythm of the original performance. Dissemination took place via community screenings and online platforms, encouraging dialogue around

environmental sustainability. Informal feedback was collected to evaluate how effectively the work communicated local knowledge and resonated with audiences inside and outside the community.



Figure 2. A Lanna dancer performing a gesture of reverence in front of the statue of Queen Chammathewi at Chammathewi Shrine, Ban Ko. The performance reflects the intertwining of ritual, memory, and ecological storytelling.
Source: Author (Work 2)

Together, these processes reflect how Lanna performing arts, as a form of community-rooted traditional expression grounded in specific cultural and geographic contexts, can serve as an embodied, participatory research method. This work demonstrates that when adapted through creative media, traditional Lanna performance can articulate environmental concerns and amplify community voices in powerful and meaningful ways.

Resulte and Discussion

The two creative works discussed in this article share a common objective: to communicate messages of environmental conservation through Lanna performing arts. While unified in purpose, they differ significantly in their modes of presentation, narrative content, and cultural emphasis. A comparative analysis reveals three core dimensions that frame these differences: (1) Inspiration and cultural context, (2) Artistic presentation and form, and (3) Knowledge generated through the creative process.

Inspiration and Cultural Context

The first creative work, *The Creation of Contemporary Performing Arts Based on Forest Ordination Derived from Lanna's Belief to Promote Forest Conservation*, is inspired by the Lanna forest ordination ceremony, a culturally embedded strategy that invokes sacred beliefs—such as those in forest spirits, water spirits, and mountain deities—as protective forces for forests and the natural environment. These belief systems reflect a worldview that regards the forest as a living entity with spiritual agency and deserving of reverence. The performance was created to communicate this profound spiritual relationship between humans and nature, suggesting that such cosmological views continue to hold power in raising environmental awareness in contemporary society.



Figure 3. Sacred offerings arranged by the artist as part of a forest ordination-inspired performance, symbolizing Lanna beliefs in the spiritual power of nature.
Source: Author (Work 1)

In contrast, the second creative work, *The Wisdom, Intelligence, and Creativity in Watershed Management of Lanna Community: The Media Presentation of Contemporary Lanna Performing Arts*, explores how the Ban Ko community manages its watershed and forest resources. It highlights local ecological wisdom that is harmoniously integrated with structured community management systems and modern technologies—such as solar panels, water pipelines, and groundwater wells. This work emphasizes the notion of "coexistence" between humans and nature as a lived social reality, where nature is not separate from human life but embedded within it, forming the basis for a sustainable way of living.

Artistic Presentation: Lanna Performing Arts as a Language of Storytelling

Both creative works employ Lanna performing arts as a central tool for communicating relationships between humans and nature. While the two adopt different modes of storytelling, they share the core belief that *traditional Lanna performance does not need to be altered to become contemporary*. Instead, contemporaneity arises through new configurations that connect traditional forms with present-day concerns—without diminishing their cultural identity. This reflects the idea that Lanna performing arts function as a powerful cultural language, capable of conveying meaning through lived, embodied experience.

The first work relies on non-verbal expression—bodily movement and the sound of traditional string instruments such as *sueng*, *salaw*, and *pin pia*. There is no spoken dialogue or narration. Instead, the piece unfolds through rhythm, gesture, and carefully constructed moments of silence. Here, silence is not simply the absence of sound but an intentional space that allows ambient natural sounds—like wind, rustling leaves, or footsteps—to become part of the storytelling.

This approach invites the audience into a deeper state of sensory awareness. It encourages a kind of "inner listening" that connects with the spirit of the forest and allows room for personal interpretation. It also reflects a belief in *embodied and spiritual knowledge*: the idea that understanding can arise not only through words or logic, but through sound, movement, atmosphere, and shared presence with nature.

The second work uses a more layered narrative structure. It combines newly composed *phleng so*, interview excerpts, staged performances, and footage of real community locations. The lyrics of the *phleng so* were created using actual voices and stories from Ban Ko villagers, giving the songs two important roles: (1) narrating local experiences of water

and forest management, and (2) providing a dignified platform for community voices to speak within an artistic framework.



Figure 4. A contemporary Lanna dance performed at Kaeng Ko, Lamphun, portraying the fluid movement of water as metaphor for sustainable community life.
Source: Author (Work 2)

This turns the piece into more than a performance—it becomes a kind of *artistic documentary* that bridges traditional aesthetics with contemporary reality. The use of real settings—shrines, reservoirs, meeting halls, forest streams—adds emotional and cultural depth, functioning as *cultural documentation* rooted in lived space and memory.

While the two works differ in form—one relying on body, sound, and silence; the other on spoken language, real-life testimony, and poetic song—they both affirm that traditional Lanna performance can act as a living language. Rather than decorating content, folk performance becomes a *knowledge-making process*, communicating through movement, rhythm, silence, and memory embedded in local culture.

Knowledge Generated through the Creative Process of Lanna Performing Arts

These two creative works not only address environmental themes, but also open new spaces for generating knowledge that is cultural, spiritual, and rooted in human-nature relations. Anchored in the framework of *art as a knowledge-making process*, both pieces demonstrate how artistic practice can give rise to ways of knowing that are embodied, situated, and meaningful to local contexts.

Lanna Performing Arts: An Alternative Language of Nature

The use of Lanna performing arts—including dance (*fon*), poetic chanting (*phleng so*), and traditional folk music—in both works reveals that traditional forms are not merely *tools* for communicating nature. Rather, they act as a *language of nature* itself, deeply embedded in local beliefs, lifeways, and value systems. The artists do not attempt to modernize these forms superficially, but instead reframe them in ways that bring forth their inherent contemporary relevance.

The First Work: Silence, Belief, and the Spirit of the Forest The first piece uses Lanna string instruments such as *sueng* and *salaw*, alongside bodily movement and *abstract silence*, to convey beliefs about forest spirits (*phi pa*) and the forest ordination ritual—entirely without spoken dialogue or narration. The audience engages with the work through what might be called *spiritual sensing*—an intuitive form of experience that activates imagination and deep awareness of the forest's spiritual dimension. Here, art

functions as a non-verbal dialogue between humans and nature, operating beyond the bounds of language and logic.

The Second Work: Phleng So and the Voice of the Community In the second work, *phleng so* is not merely an artistic embellishment but a newly composed poetic song based on real-life knowledge from the Ban Ko community. While it follows the traditional structure of *phleng so*, the lyrics are based on interviews and community narratives, referencing figures like Queen Chammathewi, village names, and watershed management in the Ping River Basin. This creative act demonstrates the adaptability of traditional art to new contexts, while retaining its original identity. More significantly, it offers a way for the community to *reclaim its voice*—to become authors of their own narrative through a familiar and culturally resonant form. *Phleng so*, in this sense, is both an artistic language and a vessel for *local knowledge*, capable of transmitting cultural memory in ways that are emotionally powerful, accessible, and true to community identity.

Practice-Based Knowledge

The creative processes behind both works illustrate that knowledge is not produced solely through theoretical analysis. It can also emerge from hands-on, embodied engagement—particularly in artistic contexts where creation involves direct interaction with people, place, and culture. Rehearsing dances in actual forest spaces, composing *phleng so* from oral interviews, and designing performances in harmony with existing landscapes are all lived experiences that generate learning through rhythm, sound, sensation, and immersion. Art, in this framework, becomes a *learning space*—where body, emotion, and spirit converge with ecological awareness and local storytelling. This aligns with the idea of *art as a generative form of knowledge*, not only reflecting what has been observed, but also creating new, evolving ways of understanding that emerge in the moment of creation and continue to evolve with each performance and each viewer.



Figure 5. Ms. Laksada Dongkamphu, Head of Water Resource Division, shares local insights into watershed practices during an interview conducted in Ban Ko.
Source: Author (Work 2)

Real Places as Spaces of Meaning: When Site Becomes a Co-Narrator

One shared feature of both works is the use of *real locations* not merely as scenic backdrops, but as active *co-narrators*—places imbued with physical, historical, spiritual, and emotional significance.



Figure 6. Community engagement sessions in Ban Ko where local residents shared water and forest management knowledge. These participatory activities informed the performance content and structure.
Source: Author (Work 2)

In the first work, the performance takes place in the forest of the Ban Pong Development Project at Maejo University—a site where actual forest ordination rituals were once held. Within this space, the movements, traditional string music, and intentional silence transform the forest into a character in its own right—one that speaks of nature's spirit in profound and embodied ways.



Figure 7. A Lanna dance and music performance staged in a burnt forest area, using bodily movement as a silent response to environmental destruction.
Source: Author (Work 1)

In the second work, locations across Ban Ko, Lamphun—including shrines, reservoirs, and village meeting halls—were selected for their functional and symbolic roles in local water management. The integration of *phleng so* and the voices of local residents situates the performance within the lived reality of the community, making it not just representative, but deeply connected.



Figure 8. A traditional Lanna dance performed in front of a community water service point in Ban Ko, Lamphun. The image highlights the intersection of cultural expression and everyday resource management practices.
Source: Author (Work 2)

These two cases suggest that real places are not passive containers for art, but *spaces of meaning* that bring life to the story in ways that academic information alone cannot. In this light, performing arts do not merely perform *in* a place—they perform *with* the place, co-creating a tangible dialogue between humans, nature, and culture. Together, these insights affirm the value of Lanna performing arts not only as cultural expression but as a dynamic framework for ecological storytelling, rooted in lived experience.

Conclusion

This article has presented a comparative analysis of two creative works that utilize Lanna performing arts as a medium for conveying concepts of natural resource conservation in contemporary contexts. The analysis reveals that, while the two works differ in narrative strategies—in terms of inspiration, presentation methods, and artistic techniques—they share a common belief: that traditional Lanna performing arts possess the potential to function as a powerful "language" for communicating contemporary themes, without requiring a transformation that compromises their cultural identity.

The first work employs bodily expression, traditional folk music, and abstract silence to explore the spiritual essence of the forest and beliefs surrounding forest ordination rituals. In contrast, the second work uses newly composed *phleng so*, informed by community-based data, interviews, and performances staged in real locations, to narrate the story of water resource management in Ban Ko village. Together, the two works demonstrate that performance is not merely a narrative medium but a *learning space*—one that weaves together body, emotion, spirit, and cultural context.

The study also shows that artistic creation is not only an act of producing work, but a *knowledge-making process*—emerging through direct practice, community engagement, and lived experience. Particularly through the use of real locations, these performances transform *place* into a co-narrator—infused with meaning, memory, and emotional presence—deepening the viewer's connection to the story.

Furthermore, the research raises a critical question about digital dissemination: is online presentation alone sufficient to generate social impact and raise environmental awareness? While this question remains open, what is evident throughout the creative process

is that when Lanna performing arts are integrated with community wisdom and digital technology, they can open new perceptual spaces—accessible both physically and spiritually.

In conclusion, this article does not seek to offer definitive answers, but rather to propose *possibilities*. It suggests that performing arts can serve as sustainable cultural tools—particularly when they are developed in ways that connect meaningfully with communities, audiences, and the shifting contexts of the digital age.

Suggestions

While this study highlights the potential of Lanna performing arts to communicate ecological and cultural themes in profound and resonant ways, several areas remain open for further development. One key direction involves gathering additional data on the impact of these works on audiences and communities, which could help assess the artistic and social value of the performances in more empirical and multidimensional terms.

Another important avenue is the continued development of diverse digital media formats that respond to contemporary contexts—such as interactive or immersive technologies (e.g., VR/AR). These formats may expand the perceptual space of the audience, enhancing both access and engagement across broader platforms.

Furthermore, designing long-term, participatory learning processes in collaboration with communities may offer new roles for traditional performing arts—not only as communicative forms, but as active agents in the revitalization, development, and sustainable preservation of local knowledge systems.

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Improvisation: Aesthetic Dialogues between Sound and Movement of Southern Thailand

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Abstract

This article explores the creative process behind contemporary performance art projects centered on *Nora*, a traditional performance form from Southern Thailand. Challenging conventional boundaries between music and dance, the project follows a three-phase methodology: *Decoding* examines the origins of *Nora*—its rhythms, soundscapes, movement, and costumes—to uncover its artistic essence; *Deconstructing* interprets its deeper meanings within religious, social, and cultural frameworks; and *Recomposing* reimagines its core elements into new expressions through music and dance, drawing on theories such as tone and colour, improvisation, choreography, and ethno-aesthetics.

The idea presents in three original performance pieces: *The Sorrow of Princess Nang Nuan Thong Samli*, a free-improvisation dance reflecting the princess's exile from a patriarchal society; *Silpa Song Thang: The Creation of Painting with Colour, Sound, and Rhythm*, a dialogue between Dr. Suchart Wongthong's paintings, live music, and dance gestures; and *Catalyst the Bliss*, an experimental performance inspired by the six traditional winds of Southern Thailand, symbolizing cultural fusion of this region.

The result shows that this project engages contemporary audiences while fostering a platform for artistic collaboration. It seeks to bridge traditional and modern performance practices, encouraging dialogue between traditional masters and contemporary practitioners. By transcending conventional artistic boundaries, this creative artwork can contribute to the evolving discourse on performance art, offering new possibilities for cultural reinterpretation and interdisciplinary creation.

Introduction

Nora is a southern Thai dance-drama living art, performing in various functions including a medium worshipping ancestor, a ritual healing an uncured illness, a folk theatre entertaining native audience, and a cultural performance showcasing the identity of southern Thai people. Since 2021, Nora has inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as a community-based practice with deep cultural and social significance for the people of southern Thailand for over 500 years with the name "Nora, dance drama in southern Thailand" (UNESCO, 2021). With the improvisational versing in local dialect, energetic and graceful movements accompanied by a traditional southern music ensemble, Nora bonds southern Thai people tightly as it portrays the unique cultural identity of southern Thailand. (https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/nora-dance-drama-in-southern-thailand-01587)

Nora engages with southern Thai communities in two main practices: a sacred ritual and a secular entertainment. In a ritual performance, Nora must adhere the traditional practice strictly. However, in the non-sacred performance, it is a free space where Nora masters, performers and practitioners can choreograph, design, compose, or even experiment the new

creative forms to glocalize Nora performance with contemporary contexts. Examples of these new choreographies are **'Silpa Rai Promdan' (*A Boundless Art*) of Thepsattha troupe** (2014), a cultural performance combining Southern Nora with Lanna elements; **The Nora showcases: 'Story of Nakha'** (2020)**,** a contemporary dance project rendering the silhouette of Nora fingernails' movements performed in various dance styles. (Nikhomrat & Thongkum, 2021); **Khon meets Nora: The intangible heritage on the path of continuation and creation** (2023), The Khon-Nora performance staging the story of Ramamakut Ayutthaya; **Nora Rerng-Ra Philharmonic Orchestra** (2024), a spectacular performance by the Thaksin Philharmonic Orchestra at the TSU Music and Arts Festival 2024 featuring with the traditional Nora dance; and **Manohra Fusion** (2024) the excerpt of Jataka stories presented in the contemporary art form co-created by Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Thaksin University, national artists and southern Thailand performing arts networks.

From the above the dance choreographies, it emphasizes that the element of Nora dance and music performance can dialogue, re-arrange, or re-compose across arts and cultures. As both are cultural researchers and performing arts practitioners, we have had the opportunity to explore the creative integration of research and practice. Our focus has been on developing performance works that reinterpret and present the identity of Southern Thai music and dance in contemporary forms, while still preserving the essence of their traditional roots.

This paper presents our creative process in reimagining *Nora*, a traditional performance art of Southern Thailand, alongside other regional music and dance forms. Our approach seeks to bridge the gap between tradition and innovation, using interdisciplinary methods to generate new artistic expressions that resonate with contemporary audiences while honoring cultural heritage.

Methodologies

The methodology adopted for this project challenges conventional disciplinary boundaries between music and dance, employing a three-stage creative process: *Decoding*, involving the elaboration of rhythms, sounds, musical structures, choreographic movements, and costumes to identify the core essence of the performance; *Deconstructing*, analyzing its deeper or hidden meaning of Genesis of Nora within religious, social, and cultural contexts; and *Recomposing*, integrating the fundamental elements of Nora into new artistic; expressed through music and dance by applying theories such as Tone and Colour, Music Improvisation, and Choreography.

Decoding the Nora dance and music components

An examination of the fundamental principles underlying *Nora* dance reveals a distinctive movement system built upon key choreographic characteristics. These core components form the structural foundation of *Nora*'s movement vocabulary and reflect its cultural and aesthetic identity. The main elements include: (1) the dualistic nature of *Nora* movement, which integrates contrasting qualities such as softness and strength; (2) the disciplined organization of the dancer's body; (3) the expressive technique known as *sad tha*, unique to *Nora*; (4) the seamless connection of gestures in performance; and (5) The creation of Nora dance gestures. Each of these components is discussed in detail below, with reference to relevant literature and cultural perspectives.

The dualistic nature of *Nora* movement

A traditional Southern Thai Nora dance reveals a sophisticated structure of movement and meaning grounded in regional identity. The essence of Nora movement is built upon contrasting dynamics: grace and strength, softness and assertiveness. These dualities reflect the temperament and cultural ethos of Southern Thai communities. Chuan Petchkaew (1997)

describes *Nora* as a culturally ancient, rhythmically-driven form of bodily communication that channels thought and spirit through physical expression. Similarly, Srisurang Poolthupya (1998) draws parallels between *Nora* gestures and South Indian classical dance, noting that *Nora* integrates swift, improvisational qualities unique to the Southern Thai aesthetic. Many gestures are creatively derived from environmental and cultural contexts, such as local flora and fauna—resulting in stylized forms like *buffalo horn*, *toddy palm*, *flower garland*, and *blossoming lotus* poses. Despite traces of Indian influence, *Nora* remains a culturally specific artform that embodies a hybrid identity shaped by centuries of exchange between Thai and Malay traditions.

The disciplined organization of the dancer's body

The body discipline of *Nora* performers has been consistently noted by scholars such as Udom Nuthong (1993), Thammanit Nikomrat (n.d.), and Jin Chimpong (2011). Key characteristics include a straightened back, a steady core, symmetrical hand-foot alignment, and lifted posture. These formal elements emphasize bodily balance and the harmonious opposition of movement forces. The goal is to achieve visual unity and fluid transition between gestures that correspond to the natural flow of human movement.

The expressive technique known as *sat tha*, unique to *Nora*

One of the most distinctive features of *Nora* is the practice of *sat tha* (expressive accentuation), which captivates audiences through its spontaneity. This includes *sat tua* (body shakes aligned with rhythmic pulses), *sat khruang* (intensified movement that activates ornamental costume elements), and *sat niew* (expressive finger flicking using extended metal fingernails). Based on field observation of Kanit Sripaoraya (2016), notes that this embodied interaction between dancer and music represents a peak state of rhythmic immersion, akin to possession. The dancer merges breath and motion with the character of *Nora*, drawing inspiration from mythological forms such as the half-human, half-bird *Kinnaree*—suggesting metaphors of "plumage shedding" or "wing fluttering."

The seamless connection of gestures in performance

Another vital aspect is *gesture linkage*, where *Nora* performers use flowing hand and arm motions, like a painter drawing continuous lines, synchronized with leg movements. Transitions are smooth and interconnected, likened to a spider weaving its web. This concept reflects the trained dancer's ability to seamlessly shift between poses with natural fluidity. The creation of Nora dance gestures.

Gesture creation in *Nora* involves *ta* (formal gestures) and *thi* (stylized nuances), both guided by oral tradition and personalized improvisation. According to Thammachuk Prompuay (2006), *ta* refers to canonical movements passed down by masters, while *thi* are unique flourishes taught selectively to trusted disciples. This improvisational aspect, referred to as *ti bot* (or "text embodiment"), allows dancers to encode meaning into gestures using hand signs and poses, echoing the *mudra* system in Indian classical dance (Thianchai Isaradej et al., 2003). These expressions are not fixed but evolve through personal interpretation, contextual influence, and cultural adaptation (Mattani Rutnin, 1996). Apart from that, there is a specialized form, *Ram Yua Thabb Yua Phi*, demonstrates high-level improvisation where dancers engage in spontaneous interaction with live musicians. The soloist synchronizes agile, expressive movements with dynamic, often unpredictable, rhythmic changes.

Musical Foundations in Nora Performance

Music plays an essential and indispensable role in Nora performance, serving as the lifeblood of the art form. Without music, Nora would lose its vitality and dynamic appeal, diminishing the emotional and rhythmic connection with the audience (Rungnapa Koengpitak, 2002, p. 100). The traditional Nora ensemble, known as Pi Phat Chatri, comprises a blend of melodic and percussive instruments (Kuan Thuanyok, (2007). At the core is the pi (oboe),

responsible for melodic articulation, and the thap, a single-headed drum typically made from jackfruit wood and covered with leather. The thap is performed in pairs to produce contrasting tones, with four primary strokes commonly used: *pa, thoeng, thuet*, and *tik*. Among all instruments, the thap is considered the most crucial, as it controls both rhythm and mood, closely interacting with the dancer's movements (Narongchai Pitakrat, 1995; Praphat Khwanpradap, 2005). Supporting the thap is the klong, a double-headed drum that reinforces the downbeats and provides rhythmic counterplay. The mong, a small metal gong, is played alongside ching cymbals and serves as a tempo anchor, preventing rhythmic overflow from other instruments. It also functions as a tonal reference for vocalists, enhancing melodic precision. Another key instrument is the trae, made from bamboo, which adds sharp rhythmic punctuation. It helps tighten the ensemble's cohesion and plays a prominent role during vocal chanting segments, especially in the raii na trae (the introductory dance), where it leads the rhythm.

Musical accompaniment in Nora is closely synchronized with dance gestures. The choreography dictates the musical flow, while the music remains flexible and adaptive to the dancer's improvisations. Musicians often loop short passages if time is limited, or extend melodic lines during longer sequences. Transitions in tempo and rhythm are signaled by slowing down the tempo, providing cues for dancers and musicians alike. This close interaction between music and movement creates a live, reciprocal dialogue that defines the vitality of Nora performance.

Creative Process: Deconstruction and Recomposition of New Dance Performance

The creative process for this performance began with the deconstruction of the Genesis of Nora, through the method of close reading. This interpretive strategy allowed for a nuanced engagement with the subtext and embedded meanings within the narrative, particularly focusing on the pivotal moment when Nang Nuantong Samli, a female figure, is punished by her father, Chao Phraya Saifafaht, the ruler of Wiang Klang Bangkaew, for conceiving a child out of wedlock. Her punishment—banishment through a symbolic act of "floating away on a raft" (loi phae)—became the central metaphor for exile, displacement, and female agency. This moment of narrative tension was chosen as the conceptual nucleus for the creation of the new dance performance, which aims to represent the internal and external states of a woman cast out from the social order. This theme is elaborated further in the performance analysis section to follow.

In composing the new choreographic work, the artist drew on core principles of Nora's embodied aesthetics, particularly the concept of dynamic equilibrium of opposites. This balance emerges both physically and psychologically through the dancer's control and modulation of movement qualities. Specifically, Nora dance is structured through the natural alternation between softness and strength, fluidity and precision, passivity and assertion. These contrasts are not merely aesthetic choices but fundamental to how identity, gender, and emotion are expressed through movement.

Accordingly, the choreographic structure employed alternating dynamics: extended and sustained gestures to communicate introspection, longing, and the feminine; and staccato, percussive articulations to suggest disruption, resistance, and the masculine. This tension between the binary qualities of movement was further emphasized through the interplay of weight and force, as well as symmetrical use of limbs—a core element in traditional Nora practice. Movement sequences were designed to seamlessly oscillate between motion and stillness, reinforcing the psychological instability of the exiled female figure while also adhering to the equilibrium found in Nora's traditional form.

Equally central to the compositional method was the integration of musical-movement coherence. Following traditional Nora aesthetics, the dancer and musician were required to

breathe as one, creating a unified performance organism. Rather than allowing music to serve as mere accompaniment, it functioned as an active interlocutor—guiding and being guided by the dancer. This ensemble approach avoided hierarchies between music and movement. Instead, both elements became mutually constitutive driving mechanisms of the dramaturgical arc.

The Principle of "Sat tha"

Incorporating the principle of Sad tha—the vigorous shaking or flicking movement unique to Nora—was fundamental to constructing an embodied dialogue between dancer and music. This included the rapid shaking of beaded costumes, sharp wrist rotations, and the iconic "greed niu" —the finger flicking motion enhanced by ornate nail extensions. These gestures are not ornamental but dialogic; they interact directly with the rhythm of Nora music in a call-and-response format.

In this work, *sat tha* served as a choreographic strategy to reflect emotional surges and moments of psychic rupture. The sharp, punctuated movements contrasted with the otherwise fluid transitions, symbolizing the abrupt violence of exile and the psychological dissonance experienced by the female protagonist. This technique allowed for the translation of internalized pain into an external kinetic form, thereby generating both expressive intensity and structural coherence within the performance.

In creating music to accompany performances, the composition integrates rhythmic motifs from traditional Thap Nora music, combined with Rumba rhythms such as Slow Rumba, Medium Rumba, and Fast Rumba. These rhythms are commonly used in Dikir Hulu and Ronggeng performances, serving as essential elements of the musical texture. For the melodic component, melodies from traditional Nang Talung performances—specifically from the prologue segment—were selected. Additionally, Melodies and verses from Southern Thai music, such as *Paktaii-Baan-Raw* by Hammer and the song Tari Kipas are incorporated.

Regarding instrumentation, the ensemble features a Soprano Saxophone, a woodwind instrument known for its high pitch, which resembles the sound of the Southern wind instrument "*Pi Tai*." The saxophone primarily plays the main melody and performs improvisations (improvise) based on the key, melodic line, and harmonic structure to ensure harmony with the accompanying chords. The performances use drums for rhythm section to establish a cohesive musical foundation. The improvisational performance considers the expressive nuances of the melody and the dancers' movements, maintaining a natural flow.

In addition, the improvisational approach employed in the performance was informed by the principles of jazz improvisation as outlined by Jerry Bergonzi (1994). His framework provided practical strategies that were adapted and applied throughout the creative process, particularly in the following areas:

Melodic Structures: The improvisation made use of *four-note groupings* and *note permutations* to develop coherent melodic phrases. These techniques enabled the performer to generate varied and engaging melodic content while maintaining structural unity.

Use of Scales: A diverse range of scales served as the basis for improvisation. These included the pentatonic scale (comprising five tones), the hexatonic scale (six tones), the diatonic scale (seven tones), as well as the major and dominant bebop scales, which provided chromatic coloration and rhythmic flexibility. The careful selection and juxtaposition of these scalar materials enriched the tonal palette and allowed for nuanced musical expression.

Melodic Rhythms: Rhythmic variation played a central role in shaping melodic lines. By employing diverse rhythmic groupings and phrasing strategies, the performer was able to create melodic gestures that were not only rhythmically compelling but also emotionally resonant. This rhythmic complexity contributed significantly to the overall color and vitality of the improvisation.

In addition, these creative performances draw upon the theoretical framework of the music-colour wheel, which explores the scientific relationship between musical notes and colours—a concept initially proposed by Isaac Newton in *Opticks* (1704). Newton postulated a direct correspondence between the seven colors of the visible light spectrum and the seven pitches of the diatonic musical scale (Frauenfelder, 2021, as cited in Raksadeja, 2022). In his model, red, representing the lowest visible light frequency, was associated with the musical note D, the first tone in the Dorian mode. Furthermore, primary colours such as yellow and blue were linked to the notes F and A, which together form a minor triad, highlighting the emotive and structural parallels between color and harmony. Newton also assigned orange and indigo to E and B respectively, both of which are semitone intervals from C and F—underscoring their role as composite or mixed colors derived from primary hues (Carnegie, 2018, as cited in Raksadeja, 2022).
experimented with three choreographic works. These works exemplify the synthesis of tradition and innovation in the creative process, each emerging from a deep interpretive engagement with the oral narrative of Nora's origin.

The Sorrow of Princess Nang Nuan Thong Samli

The first performance piece draws its conceptual foundation from the myth of Nora recounting the exile of Princess Nang Nuan Thong Samli by her father. The narrative centers on the punitive exile of the princess—cast adrift as punishment for an illegitimate pregnancy—reflecting the oppressive moral codes of a patriarchal society. The performance offers an embodied representation of her emotional turmoil, casting her not as a transgressor but as a complex figure: a mother who nurtures and raises the child with great care, and a first Nora master who initiates the boy into the art of Nora through teachings mediated by the reflection of the goddess Mae Khongkha (Mother of the Raters). Through this dual role as maternal figure and cultural transmitter, the princess becomes a source of artistic lineage. Her son, having refined his dance technique under her guidance and through communion with nature, eventually performs with such distinction that he encounters his grandfather and is granted the noble title of Khun Si Sattha.

This performance is structured around the invocation to the Master verse, which traditionally opens a Nora performance. This passage, with its slow, lamenting melody, serves as a powerful aural symbol of the grief and alienation of exile. The choreography reflects this emotional tone through the stylistic motif of "Mangmum Chakyai" (the Spider Weaving Its Web)—a compositional method involving the intricate interlacing of movements derived from the twelve principal gestures. These gestures are sequentially and fluidly connected to evoke a sense of entanglement and longing. Emphasis is placed on emotional expressivity (rasa), particularly the rasa of sorrow, and the choreographic style combines sustained, continuous motion with moments of suspended stillness.

Musically, the piece is anchored by traditional Nora instruments. The thap (a key percussion instrument) provides the rhythmic structure, while the mong fak (gong chime) delivers resonant, melancholic tones that shape the mood of the piece. The dual tones of the mong—one high-pitched, the other low—create a poignant auditory contrast, supporting the thematic duality of fragility and strength. Crucially, the mong is also responsible for regulating the structure of the performance (khum rong), signaling transitions and maintaining ensemble coherence.

Silpa Song Thang: The Creation of Painting with Colour, Sound, and Rhythm

This work is a collaborative, interdisciplinary performance that brings together three distinct artistic modalities—live painting by Dr. Suchart Wongthong, extemporized music, and contemporary *Nora*-based dance. The work explores the dialogic relationship between visual

art, music, and movement in a shared, improvisational space. Choreographically, this piece foregrounds the unique gestural idioms of *Nora*, particularly through the integration of the slow-paced melody, which serves as the rhythmic and emotive foundation for a stylized, fluid exploration of movement. The performance process is rooted in **improvisation**, where both the dancer and the saxophonist engage in real-time musical-dance dialogue (*dialogue improvisation*), responding to each other's cues in an active exchange of motifs and moods.

During the rehearsal phase, the dancer and musicians collaboratively developed a loose narrative structure for the performance. We incorporated traditional melodic references from Southern Thai culture—including musical idioms from *nora*, *nang talung* (shadow puppetry), and regional Malay musical forms such as *ronggeng*, *lagu*, *dua*, and *Tari kipas.* These melodies were reinterpreted through **saxophone and drum set**, replacing the conventional *pii*, *thap*, and traditional *nora* drums, thus blending cultural heritage with contemporary instrumentation.

Structurally, the performance adheres to the traditional format of *nora* storytelling: beginning with a prelude (*hom rong*), followed by slow-paced sections (*nad chaa*), fast-paced sequences (*nad reo*), and culminating in the lively *chap rabam* (group dance). In live performance, the integration of music, movement, and painting was executed in real time. One notable discovery was that the rapid finger flourishes and gestural flourishes (*sot tha* and *kreet nio*) typical of *nora* dance harmonized seamlessly with the nuanced finger techniques of the saxophonist.

In terms of musical arrangement, the performance featured the soprano saxophone as the primary melodic instrument, supported by a drum set that provided rhythmic structure. The opening section emphasized improvisation, with a simple melodic line that corresponded with the painter's foundational brushstrokes. The melodic framework was based predominantly on the pentatonic scale, with phrases that ascended and descended in alternation. This was performed at a slow ballad tempo, characterized by gentle, expressive phrasing and the use of vibrato to enhance emotional nuance.

Conceptually, the improvisation incorporated thematic material derived from Southern Thai folk melodies. Specifically, motifs were adapted from traditional songs such as *Pak Tai Ban Rao* and *Tari Kipas*, serving as both structural reference points and sources for creative expansion. This integration of indigenous melodic content lent the performance a culturally grounded identity.

Notably, the musical texture was intentionally sparse, as the absence of chordal instruments meant that no harmonic accompaniment was present. As a result, the soprano saxophone carried the melodic line unaccompanied, while the drum set managed rhythmic variation and momentum. Throughout the piece, groove patterns shifted between slow, moderate, and fast tempos, including rhythms such as Rumba and Funk, contributing to the performance's dynamic range.

The lack of harmonic constraints provided a significant degree of freedom for improvisation. This openness allowed for heightened sensitivity and responsiveness with the performer, particularly in the interplay between the percussionist's rhythmic expression, the painter's brushwork and use of color, and the dancer's gestural movements. Together, these elements created an interdisciplinary dialogue or triadic dialogue that emphasized spontaneous artistic interaction over fixed structure.

Visually, the painting emerged in response to the unfolding musical and choreographic stimuli, culminating in an expressive landscape of Sunset at Ko Yo —with visible brushwork suggesting waves, water reflections, and the golden shimmer of the descending sun mirrored on the sea's surface.

The central challenge of this piece was to remain fully "present in the moment"—a conscious effort to listen, respond, and communicate across disciplines, allowing the three art forms to co-create the performance in a spirit of mutual inspiration. According to audience feedback,

the work offered an immersive experience, allowing viewers to selectively engage with any of the three modalities—visual, aural, or kinesthetic—or experience the convergence of all three simultaneously.

As performers, one area identified for further development is the role fluidity between disciplines. A proposed enhancement involves rotating leadership roles, allowing artists to alternate between leading and following at different moments during the performance. This would further deepen the collaborative dimension and enrich the co-creative dynamic among the visual artist, dancer, and musician.

Catalyst the Bliss or "Lom Hok Thit" (The Winds of Six Directions)

The third creative work draws its inspiration from the diverse sociocultural identities of people who have migrated, relocated, or settled in Songkhla province from various directions. The concept of "winds from all directions" metaphorically represents the plurality of cultural traditions that now coexist in this region. This performance is thus an artistic expression of cultural confluence, using both traditional and contemporary musical idioms woven together into a collective narrative.

The performance features Nora and ronggeng as symbolic representatives of Southern Thai cultural heritage. These are presented alongside contributions from artists of diverse cultural backgrounds—each embodying a "direction of the wind." Together, they form a multicultural ensemble that reflects the interwoven identities of Songkhla's inhabitants. The four guest artists include:

Dr. Chumchon Suebwong (musician), representing the Isan diasporic community, whose music traditions carry the sonic textures of Northeast Thailand.

Ms. Anne Maneerat Singhanat (handpan performer), an aural storyteller and sound artist, symbolizing external, global cultural influences that have entered and blended into the local context.

Dr. Ratchakrit Phanukhakrachok (percussionist), a native of Songkhla, representing indigenous Southern Thai identity, deeply rooted in local customs and cultural lineage.

Dr. Kanit Sripaoraya (dancer), who performs as a Southern Thai descendant raised outside the region, symbolizing a return to ancestral roots through embodied cultural memory.

In the performance design phase, the overture section was carefully constructed to evoke the cultural ecology of Southern Thailand. This was achieved through a layered soundscape composed of percussive elements and vocal textures, functioning as an aural prelude that symbolically opened the space for intercultural encounter. The use of breath, rhythm, and ambient resonance aimed to establish a sensory connection between the performers and the environment, setting the tone for the forthcoming narrative of cultural convergence. The musical arrangement embraced cross-cultural instrumentation as a core compositional strategy. For example, the khene, a free-reed mouth organ traditionally associated with the Isan region of Northeastern Thailand, was recontextualized to perform ronggeng rhythms, typically belonging to Southern Malay-influenced performance genres. This deliberate displacement created a sonic hybridity, inviting audiences to reconsider fixed associations between musical forms and geographic identity.

Similarly, Isan folk melodies and timbres were introduced into Southern rhythmic frameworks, but adapted to fit the syncopated pulse of Southern folk music. This not only challenged conventional listening habits but also highlighted the malleability and adaptability of traditional forms when placed in dialogic tension with one another.

The central conceptual challenge of Lom Hok Thit lies in its aim to weave coexistence into co-creation. Rather than merely juxtaposing cultural expressions, the piece seeks to fuse them into a unified performance that reflects the interdependent and evolving identity of contemporary

Songkhla. The work was praised by audiences for its emotional and sensory depth, as well as for its portrayal of cultural harmony without dilution.

Conclusion

The creative outcomes of these three performance pieces reflect an ongoing process of experimentation, learning, and interdisciplinary exchange between traditional folk dance practitioners and music improvisers. Throughout the stages of conceptualization, rehearsal, and performance, the artists engaged deeply with one another's artistic languages, developing a mutual understanding of the distinct aesthetics and spatial practices inherent in their respective disciplines.

While the final works may not conform strictly to the formal conventions of any single artistic tradition, they represent an earnest effort to explore new possibilities for collaborative creation. It is hoped that this form of performance can serve as a platform for dialogue and co-creation—one that welcomes contributions from both traditional masters and contemporary practitioners, fostering an inclusive space for artistic innovation and cultural exchange.

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The Creation of *Krai Kha Tia*: A Mixed Media Stage Play for Actor Development and Personal Branding at Maiosiam Artist Management

Sutida Singharach

Abstract

Thailand's entertainment industry has grown into a dynamic and influential sector, with professional actors playing a key role in setting performance standards and driving success. To maintain excellence and prepare talents for diverse roles, enhancing their capabilities is essential. With the industry becoming increasingly competitive and fast-evolving, developing actors as personal brands has emerged as a strategic approach to captivate both domestic and global audiences. In response, Maiosiam Artist Management Co., Ltd. launched *Krai Kha Tia*, a mixed-media stage play aimed at strengthening the acting skills of its artists while reinforcing their brand identity. The production is directed by Professor Sutida Singharach, Head of Cinematic Arts and Creative Media (International Program) at the College of Communication Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. Scheduled for six performances on March 30–31, 2024, at The Street Hall (The Street Ratchada, 5th floor), the initiative serves not only as a platform for professional actors to showcase their talents but also as a learning opportunity for students to gain hands-on experience in stage production. This structured and strategic endeavor highlights Maiosiam's commitment to maintaining high production standards and nurturing its actors as both skilled performers and brand ambassadors.

Keywords : Thai entertainment industry , Actor development , Personal branding , Mixed-media stage play

Objectives

1. To examine how the production of "Krai Kha Tia?", a mixed-media stage play, contributes to enhancing the acting skills and personal branding of the talents at Maiosiam Artist Management Co., Ltd., in alignment with the national strategy for the promotion of the Thai film and video industry.
2. To examine the role of personal branding in positioning Thai actors as cultural representatives particularly in relation to the company's efforts to align talent development with national soft power objectives.

Methodology

The Preparation of Acting Readiness for Actors under Maiosiam Artist Management Co., Ltd.

Currently, emerging actors from various agencies, including those under Maiosiam Artist Management Co., Ltd., are strongly encouraged to continuously develop and refine their acting skills. This preparation not only ensures their readiness for professional work but also instills discipline an essential trait for the new generation of entertainers. Moreover, enhancing the acting readiness of performers helps reduce production risks and quality concerns at every stage of the creative process. As such, investing in the development of new actors' practical skills is a critical and necessary component of today's media and entertainment production landscape in Thailand.

An actor's popularity is a key factor influencing the success of television dramas, as audiences often choose to watch shows based on their favorite performers. Thus, actors serve

as the front line in creating lasting impressions for viewers and followers, while simultaneously representing the agencies and production companies behind them. In this context, actors are akin to products on a competitive commercial stage, where producers must offer diverse and high-quality choices to satisfy varied consumer preferences.

Beyond offering variety, producers must also demonstrate sincerity and credibility by delivering actors who are genuinely talented and worthy of public admiration. This has led entertainment companies such as Maiosiam Artist Management Co., Ltd. to recognize the importance of holistic and well-structured acting preparation. As content production continues to grow alongside increasing viewer demands, the only sustainable path to maintaining a top-tier position in the industry is to produce quality content especially through well-trained actors, who serve as the core product of entertainment organizations. Actors play a crucial role throughout the creative process of performance production (Veera Supa, 1993). Therefore, the systematic preparation of actors under Maiosiam Artist Management Co., Ltd. is a vital process requiring time, strategic planning, and effective implementation to ensure genuine skill development and long-term industry success.



An Explanation of the Entertainment Business Model of Maiosiam Artist Management Co., Ltd.

In addition to planning and setting goals for the development and preparation of acting skills for actors under their management, one crucial factor that each agency must consider is the selection of qualified personnel to take responsibility for designing and overseeing the structure of actor training programs. Recognizing the importance of this element, Maiosiam Artist Management Co., Ltd. has appointed Asst. Prof. Suthida Singharach, Head of the Department of Film and Creative Media Arts, College of Communication Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University an expert in acting instruction and directing as a consultant and lead coordinator for the company's actor training and development program.

As stated by Assoc. Prof. Kulthana Thanaphongthorn (1992), "The fundamental principle of personnel recruitment in any organization is the search for the most qualified individual who possesses the knowledge and suitability for the position, using effective and efficient methods aligned with the economic conditions and business policies."

Moreover, the College of Communication Arts at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University is well-equipped in terms of faculty, staff, and facilities, making it an ideal learning environment for collaborative activities. This collaboration offers an excellent opportunity for

in-house talent to work with Maiosiam Artist Management Co., Ltd. to enhance their acting potential and become knowledgeable, skilled, and professional performers.

This initiative aligns with the 4th Phase (2023–2027) of Thailand's Strategic Plan to Promote the Film and Video Industry, particularly Strategy 2, which focuses on enhancing human capital to compete at the Asian level and to become a global business partner. This strategy supports the development of capable personnel, the establishment of professional incubators in the film and video sectors, and the recognition and honor of individuals contributing to the industry.

In the process of training acting skills and managing rehearsals for the actors of the mixed media stage play " Krai Kha Tia?" the process is divided into three phases:

Phase 1: Preparation in understanding the acting roles and deep character interpretation

Phase 2: Rehearsing in a simulated space and group rehearsals based on character relationships

Phase 3: Rehearsal and performance in the actual space, allowing audience interaction with actors through a 360-degree stage design.

Details are as follows:

Phase 1: Preparation in understanding acting roles and deep character interpretation At this stage

The director plans the preparation for understanding the roles, which is considered the foundation for the actors to comprehend crucial information related to their characters. The director uses a method of explaining the structure of every character in detail so the actors can clearly visualize the characters they are responsible for.

The process begins with explaining the structure of the Pattharasins family, which appears in the stage play "Krai Kha Tia?", where all characters are interconnected. This is followed by describing each character's background, including their story, origin, life path, upbringing, mindset, interactions with other characters, relationships with the environment, and challenges or obstacles faced at various points. This creates a connection with the storyline and the ongoing struggles and development of each character.

A key emphasis by the director is explaining the desires of each character, as these desires are the core that brings characters to life and drives their purposeful actions. A character's desires are not limited to just one thing; they may change, decrease, or increase at any time. Therefore, the detailed information provided by the director greatly benefits the actors' understanding of their roles.

Besides building role comprehension, the director also emphasizes the importance of strong foundational acting skills and understanding of stage acting techniques. The director explains the steps and forms of stage acting, along with training actors to perform correctly. Training includes movement on stage and proper voice use in stage acting for all actors. This aligns with Chutima Maneewattana (2018), who states that acting principles and character development are key aspects of actor management and development. It is the director's duty to know the basics of acting in order to guide, identify performance issues, and provide constructive criticism aimed at improvement.

Thus, the phase of training acting skills and managing rehearsals for the actors in the mixed media stage play "Krai Kha Tia?" is an appropriate period for the director to identify actors' strengths and areas for improvement. This ensures that actors are well-prepared to use their acting tools effectively to enhance their performances in their respective roles.

Phase 2: Rehearsing in a simulated space and group rehearsals based on character relationships

At this stage, the director brought the actors into a simulated studio space to rehearse their performances and meaningful character movements. The goal was to familiarize the actors

with the actions and lifestyle of their characters within the simulated environment. The director designed the blocking to support the direction, allowing deep communication of the characters' actions and emotions. The simulated rehearsal space was scaled to match the actual performance venue, providing the actors and crew with a realistic experience.

The rehearsal management team divided the rehearsal into three acts so that the actors could follow the sequence continuously without confusion. In each act, the director designed the characters' movements (blocking) while explaining the interpretation of actions, thoughts, feelings, and desires to the actors, who were then expected to perform accordingly. This helped the actors remember their positions while understanding their characters' intentions, behaviors, and desires in detail. Additionally, it allowed each actor to become familiar with the space and the timing of interactions with scene partners. This phase served as physical and mental preparation before the actual performances.

Phase 3: Rehearsal and preparation in the actual performance space with audience interaction through a 360-degree stage design

In this phase, the director brought the actors and crew to rehearse in the real performance venue. The mixed media stage play "Krai Kha Tia?" was performed at The Street Hall inside The Street Ratchada shopping mall for six shows. Upon entering the real venue, the director began by holding a meeting with the team and actors to explain the conditions and constraints of the space, ensuring everyone shared the same rehearsal and work plan.

Regarding direction, the director first arranged and explained the actors' stage positions and entry and exit directions to ensure accurate understanding and memorization. Then, the director led the actors to test their movements and blocking on the actual stage, trying out walking, sitting, turning, and moving according to their characters' entrances and exits. The actors also practiced their vocal projection to assess how well their voices carried throughout the venue, considering ambient noise such as air conditioning during actual performances.

Since the venue had background noise, the director needed to ensure these distractions would not interfere with the audience's experience. Testing revealed that some actors lacked sufficient vocal power to reach all audience areas. To address this, the director adjusted the stage positions and enhanced stage design elements to help actors project their voices effectively to distant audience members.

It is undeniable that staging a live theater performance requires meticulous planning and design to accommodate the venue's limitations. Unlike film or television, live theater has no pauses, advertisements, or opportunities for retakes. Therefore, a director's ability to design performances and solve on-the-spot issues is crucial to overcoming actor challenges and venue constraints to deliver a seamless, high-quality production.

Results

On the actual performance day, it was found that the 360-degree stage design, which did not limit the actors to performing only on a traditional stage, helped create a novel atmosphere for both performing and watching the play. This design enhanced the audience's viewing experience because the seating arrangement surrounded the performance area, allowing viewers to feel closer to the story and the characters, as if they were sharing the same space.

Generally, most theater productions are designed with a clear separation between the audience area and the performance space. Besides positive feedback from the general audience regarding this stage design, it was also observed that fans of the actors under Maiosiam Artist Management Co., Ltd. were especially impressed with the performance and the venue. They appreciated the opportunity to watch their favorite actors up close, creating memorable experiences. This was a great opportunity to foster shared experiences between the acting team and their fan base, as well as with general audience members and actors from other affiliated

agencies who are good partners supporting the actors under Maiosiam Artist Management Co., Ltd.

The production of the stage play "Krai Kha Tia?" is considered a strategic move to support personal branding for the actors under the agency. It aims to highlight their well-rounded acting skills without limiting them to just a few acting styles. This approach responds to a current issue where many new actors from various agencies primarily focus on working with cameras and new technologies. They often work against time and complex production systems, which may cause them to lose sight of the fundamental roots of acting, potentially maintaining their standards only for a short period.

Therefore, this stage play production serves to instill discipline and uphold acting standards among the agency's actors. Throughout the rehearsal period, every actor learns the deep roots of stage acting an art form with a long history. They also gain an in-depth understanding of intricate details, including emotional nuances that must be sharp and clear in order to effectively convey the character's message. Thus, it can be said that training through stage play rehearsals is an important strategy to strengthen the actors' skills within the agency.

Additionally, the agency's management opens opportunities for fan groups who admire the actors to visit rehearsals up close in a friendly environment. Fans are granted the chance to talk with the actors, take photos and videos, and give gifts, presents, and food support to the actors. This simple and informal atmosphere of interaction between fans and actors becomes a distinctive factor in creating a memorable image and a special feeling for fans, allowing them to remember the actors' approachability.

The result of providing this welcoming space between actors and fans, as part of the management's policy, leads to love, goodwill, support, and loyalty from the fan groups. These qualities are highly desired by all artist and actor management agencies. Support and consistent admiration from loyal fans serve as key indicators of growth in personal branding, significantly influencing how others perceive the actors.

Conclusion

Adding value to actors at each stage reflects a personal branding strategy that aligns with the approach of developing a unique identity and image. This is a crucial factor in building a personal brand that is influential and clearly recognized within the industry. Moreover, a strategy that enhances personal branding value helps performers to develop and elevate their career success further.

In the context of the entertainment industry, besides supporting and creating opportunities for affiliated actors and artists to gain experience and practice skills for self-development, retention is also a highly important strategy. Personal branding for actors involves not only the development of their potential and acting skills but also managing the relationship between the agency and the actors (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017). The retention strategy is therefore a key factor that helps keep actors interested in maintaining long-term collaboration with their agency. This consideration goes beyond financial compensation or career opportunities to include cultivating an organizational culture that values care, fairness, and transparent communication (Boyle, 2020). A family-like management style can reduce the gap between management and actors, promote bonding, and foster motivation for ongoing collaboration.

Therefore, the approach of building personal branding through mixed media stage plays not only helps develop the potential of actors under Maiosiam Artist Management but also promotes their recognition as unique personal brands. This, in turn, will support their ability to expand into future business opportunities.

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Agitating Towards Flourishing: Fermentation Intelligences in Para-Pedagogical Practice

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Abstract

This paper positions the para-pedagogical as a liberatory practice and theoretical orientation of 'learning beside'. It seeks to liberate pedagogy from the contextualising of objects and artefacts through the reimagining of learning, people and more-than-human bodies and energies as material. Building on a shared interest in interrogating how learning moves through mainstream education, the para-pedagogical in this context situates the work in direct relation with the gallery and museum sector rather than the university. Drawing from embodied research across diverse geographies and institutional contexts, it argues for fermentation as a methodological lens, articulated through a set of 'fermentation intelligences' that make para-pedagogical work possible. These intelligences—contamination, queer temporalities, interspecies kinship, agitating towards stability, and preserving and transforming—animate pedagogy as a site of relational learning, institutional reimagining, and sovereignty through the position of the beside. By shifting focus from outcomes to conditions, the paper repositions pedagogy as central, not to contextualise objects, artists, or exhibitions, but as a critical, sovereign force in its own right. It contributes to emerging discourses on para-institutionalism and pedagogical sovereignty, proposing new vocabularies and infrastructures through which institutions might re-world themselves amidst cultural and ecological precarity. This is not a model to scale, but a method to sit with: porous, durational, and alive with potential. The para-pedagogical, as articulated here, is both a vessel and an invitation to begin again, beside again, and again.

Keywords: para-pedagogical, fermentation intelligences, institutional critique, eco-pedagogies, para-curatorial

100-word bio

Lleah Smith practices at the intersection of pedagogy, art, and the curatorial. Since 2012, she has made significant contributions in the Asia-Pacific Region, working independently and through institutional roles. She is currently Head of Public Practice & Creative Enquiry at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery | Len Lye Centre and Puke Ariki Museum and Libraries in Ngāmotu, Aotearoa.

Her PhD research at Monash University agitates the pedagogy–art–curatorial relationship by positioning fermentation as teacher, speculative metaphor, and guiding force for change. Smith creates spaces of productive agitation within caring environments that enable difference to flourish.

Her independent research into the para-pedagogical—which bubbled up during a 2024 residency at Konstmuseet i Norr (KIN), Sweden and cultivated over 12 years of practice—extends this enquiry into situated, materially grounded curatorial methodologies.

The Culture of the 'Para'

The para-pedagogical did not begin as a theory for me. It emerged as something more unruly, cultured slowly across places, relations, and moments of institutional dissonance. It came through agitation: the quiet resistance of learning practices that didn't fit, that didn't clarify, that didn't translate easily into institutional outcomes. It grew, like fermentation, from the margins. From what bubbled. From what refused to settle.

Yet, it is a term with a lineage. In 2008, Erickson articulated a *para-pedagogical* practice that runs alongside mainstream college instruction by drawing on the concept of 'mystification' from Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992, 2001). He rejected commonplace mystifications of writing and instead created the *Writer's Journey* para-pedagogy: twelve semi-prescriptive, reflective activities designed to engage First-Year Composition students without recourse to dominant ideological frameworks. In 2015, Zerdy and Daddario framed the para-pedagogical as a bootleg practice of emancipatory, student-driven learning that runs alongside university education, reclaiming 'failure' as generative. Their bootleg class on listening redefined the classroom as a materialist utopia where students and facilitators engaged in reflective, embodied practices of attentiveness. Listening, both as a sensory act and a philosophical stance, became a central ethical practice.

In October 2024, Canadian theorists Erin Manning and Brian Massumi (2024) framed the para-pedagogical as a practice that moves fluidly across philosophy, artistic practice, and formal pedagogy. They described it as requiring an attunement to time-sensitive, emergent logics of knowledge creation and situate it within practices of resistance. This is particularly resonate in the context of 3E, a grassroots off-grid environment designed to host people, events, and experiences (Manning & Massumi, 2024, para. 3). The 3Ecologies Project is an autonomous organization dedicated to participatory experimentation in research creation. It is described as "an autonomous 'para-institutional' space – a kind of adjacent undercommons, spun off from the university while remaining in complex relation to it" (3Ecologies, n.d).

What seems to be shared is an interest in interrogating the way learning functions within mainstream education. What also strikes me is that the history of the para-pedagogical is entangled with the university as the primary 'institution' one is seeking to disrupt. In contrast, the para-pedagogical in this context emerges in direct relation with the cultural and artistic institution, primarily the gallery and museum sector. It seeks to liberate pedagogy from the contextualising of objects and artefacts through the reimagining of learning, people and more-than-human bodies and energies as material.

With this foundation in place, this paper asks: *What might it mean to treat learning as central—not supplementary—to cultural institutions? And what might the para-pedagogical learn from fermentation— as metaphor, and as method?* These questions are not rhetorical; they are rooted in lived, messy experiences. To trace their earliest cultures, we must move from theory to practice—from the margins to bellies and galleries to ecosystems. For me, the para-pedagogical emerges through practice and an ongoing engagement with the edges—edges encountered in New Delhi, Western Sydney, Kiruna, and Ngāmotu, where the boundaries between art, life and learning blurred.

This paper ferments two bodies of research into one: the para-pedagogical, as a situated, sovereign practice of learning beside; and the fermentation intelligences that have shaped and suffused it—intellectually, materially, and methodologically. The question at the heart of this work is not how to define the para-pedagogical, but how to stay with it. I began

thinking with the term 'para-pedagogical' in October of 2024 while grappling with feelings around the 'para-curatorial' (Hoffman, 2011, 2013; McDowell, 2016) and the desire to extend upon Helguera's model of *Education as Art* (Helguera, 2024), which will be unpacked further in subsequent sections. But for me, the para-pedagogical seeks to recognise pedagogical practices within arts and cultural institutions that move with their intentionality, not in service to an exhibition but in dialogue with institutional values and community needs, which is a deviation from earlier manifestations of the practice.

The Grammar of this 'Para'

While the para-pedagogical boldly asks: *What might it mean to treat learning as central—not supplementary—to cultural institutions?* It must be said that it also emerges in dialogue and opposition to the para-curatorial (Hoffman, 2011, 2013; McDowell, 2016). The prefix *para* holds its etymology in Greek and carries a double meaning. It is both *beside* and *beyond*, but also, crucially, can be translated as *amiss* or *irregular*. That instability—semantic, structural, political—is where this work lives. The para-pedagogical does not claim neutrality. It embraces its adjacency, its asymmetry, and its deviation. It begins from beside, not to complete, but to unsettle.

American-born, Australia-based curator and art historian Tara McDowell's (2016) framing of the para-curatorial was one of the first to position the term within curatorial discourse. She describes it as "the array of curatorial activities that are usually parenthetical or supplementary to the exhibition proper" (p. 22). The terms *parenthetical*, *supplementary*, and *proper* rub up against me. 'Parenthetical' explains or qualifies. 'Supplementary' implies dependency. 'Proper' asserts hierarchy. These are not neutral descriptors—they entrench a power relation between the exhibition and everything else that supports it, orbits it. This tension is not lost on McDowell. She acknowledges that the pairing of 'para' and 'curatorial' is a provocation: "an unstable binary, a dubious hierarchy… and a theory in which to poke holes" (p. 24). That instability is not something to be resolved—it's something to be worked with. To be fermented. To be disrupted.

Costa Rican–born, London-based curator Jens Hoffmann (2011, 2013) similarly invokes the para-curatorial as a category of activities that include "lectures, screenings, exhibitions without art, working with artists on projects without ever producing anything that could be exhibited" (2011, para. 6). For Hoffmann, these practices are not insignificant, but they are paratextual, always in relation to a 'main text', the 'exhibition proper'. He draws from Gérard Genette's theory of the paratext (1991) the title pages, footnotes, prefaces, and blurbs that support the primary body of a text. Hoffmann's frustration is clear when he critiques the way curating has been expanded to include any act of selection—menus, playlists, and interior design. His response is to double down on the exhibition as curating's 'proper form'. The centre that holds everything else in its orbit, but the para-pedagogical is not content to orbit. It does not seek to supplement the exhibition. It proposes an entirely different axis.

This requires, first, an important clarification: curating is not the same as the curatorial. While curating is often defined as the act of selecting, organising, and displaying (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024), the curatorial has, over the last two decades, been theorised as something more processual, ecological, and situated (Rogoff, 2006; Lind, 2021). The curatorial is not format-bound—it is method, ethics, and affect. I draw here on multiple thinkers and practitioners who have shaped this redefinition. Maria Lind positions the curatorial as "a

multidimensional role that includes critique, editing, education, fundraising" (2021, para. 8). I see the para-pedagogical as a parallel multidimensionality. I follow Irit Rogoff's (2013) assertion that the curatorial constitutes "an event of knowledge" (p. 45), producing relations between things, which are not necessarily art. That language—*event*, *relation*, not *necessarily art*, is foundational. It opens the possibility that pedagogy might not explain art but may occur beside it. That pedagogy might itself constitute a site of knowledge production, transformation, encounter and enquiry.

Curatorial work in the Asia Pacific Region further complicates and expands these positions. Ute Meta Bauer (2016) argues that curatorial thinking unfolds in "new sites and situations"—in streets, studios, and schools. Not just museums. Not just white walls. David Teh (2016), writing from Singapore, notes the porosity and 'shareware' of Southeast Asian curatorial practices—models rooted not in exclusivity, but in relational openness. ruangrupa's lumbung (documenta fifteen, 2022) didn't offer a theme; it offered a method: surplus redistribution, collective structuring, and resource pooling. It didn't curate an exhibition. It built an alternative economy.

Friendship, as articulated by Zoe Butt (2015) and Indonesian duo Dika+Lija (2023), offers another model. Friendship, in their terms, is not affective nicety—it is political infrastructure. It is how one resists extractive logics and builds durational structures of co-learning. These values resonate deeply with the para-pedagogical. They allow us to think of pedagogy not as content delivery, but as attunement without coercion. And so, the para-pedagogical emerges from this context and this lineage of theory, but it proposes a reorientation of institutional practice towards slow, story-rich, and situated pedagogical enquiry. It resists becoming legible through outcomes or deliverables. It is not opposed to the exhibition, but it is not tethered to it. It moves beside. It ferments. The para-pedagogical asks what it might mean to centre learning, not just as content, but as practice. As a sovereign site of institutional meaning-making. It refuses the instrumentalisation of education as audience development. It resists being positioned only in service to a curatorial exhibition vision. It insists that pedagogy is not there to explain. It is there to ask. This reframing is also a reckoning. It acknowledges how pedagogical labour—especially when feminised, racialised, or grounded in Indigenous and non-Western traditions—has been devalued, under-cited, underpaid, and overlooked. The para-pedagogical does not seek assimilation into dominant structures. It does not seek centrality. It seeks to reorient the institution itself toward hosting, toward relation, toward the more-than-human.

It is not display-based. It is processual. It is atmospheric.

As Pablo Helguera (2010) insists, education in art should not be seen as support material—it is material. It shapes the conditions under which art, relation, and publicness can occur. The para-pedagogical takes this further.

It says we do not arrive after the art.

We arrive with it.

We stay longer.

Together.

With people, with bodies, with atmospheres as material.

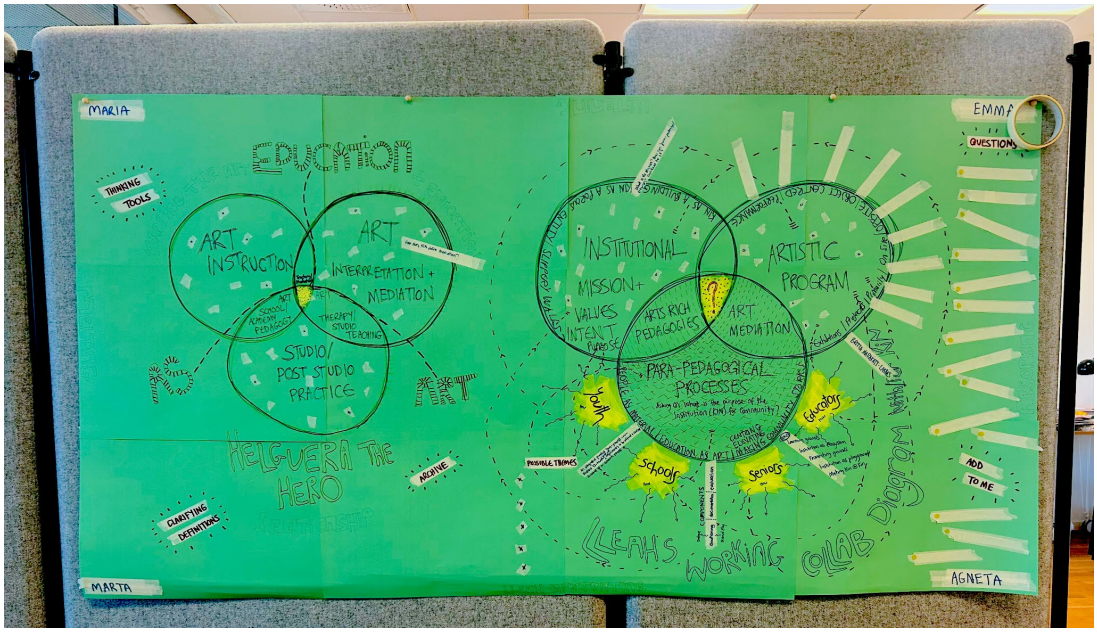
Honouring my Foundations

If the para-pedagogical fermented in the cracks of institutional work, then its earliest traceable cultures—however incomplete—might be found in New Delhi, 2011, when I worked at Khoj International Artists' Association. There, amid the textured edges of a dense urban neighbourhood, I began building a pedagogical approach that sought to invite diverse publics into its process. There was no pre-existing model, only a sense that learning could be otherwise: slow, dialogical, porous, and embodied. At Khoj, space had already been carved out through a commitment to taking contemporary art outside institutional walls, particularly via a sustained engagement with public art and ecological thinking. This ethos is expressed through two formative projects: *In Context: Public.Art.Ecology* (2011-2013) which unfolded over two years across India and evolved into a focus on food security, production, and ritual, and *Negotiating Routes: Ecologies of the Byways* (2010-2014), which catalysed site-specific, interdisciplinary responses to the National Highway Development Program (NHDP)—a timely intervention amid contested land rights and coercive development. It was within this ferment of ideas and urgencies that I attempted to build a Learning Department. I did not have a plan, but I recognised a gap. I spent the next few years calling schools, persuading principals, and trying to articulate why students should visit a place where the art might not be on the walls, where the work was sometimes in flux or unseen. In those early gestures, I now see the fermentation intelligences at work. *Agitating towards stability* (Chen, 2018)—where discomfort didn't need to be resolved. *Preserving and transforming* (Fournier, 2020)—where knowledge held lineage but remained responsive. These were not metaphors. They were pedagogical conditions at work.

At the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo/Parramatta, where I spent some time as an auxiliary body - an Artistic Associate, I was guided by a strong, poetic and purposeful institutional voice, *At the service of stories*, which is part of Powerhouse's new strategic vision that emerged during the renewal project. It became a grounding logic. The para-pedagogical took further root here, not in practice but as a way of 'thinking with'. A way of programming not from content, but from context. I consider this move towards *adjacency* as an enabling force that allows programming, learning and knowledge exchange to begin with questions rather than themes, objects or people. When moving beyond a person-centred or object-centred logic, something else becomes possible; alternative questions rise to the top, such as *Who is this institution for? How are resources distributed? Who gets to speak? Who do we serve and to what end?*

Whilst fermenting in the container of my body for a few months, the term para-pedagogical truly flourished during a residency at Konstmuseet i Norr (KIN) in Kiruna, Sweden, in October 2024. Here, I worked with the museum's mediation team at the invitation of Swedish Curator and Artistic Director Maria Lind. I arrived with practices cultivated in the Asia Pacific, but quickly realised that not everything should travel. That agitation was instrumental in my thinking; it was the first time I was able to verbally and visually articulate how I thought pedagogical practice could look, or rather should look in a museum or cultural institution, irrespective of where you are situated in the world, Asia, the Pacific or the Swedish Arctic, it didn't matter. I sketched a diagram reworking Pablo Helguera's model of *Education as Art* (Helguera, 2024) to illustrate the messy thoughts that had been bubbling in my body for more than a decade and were finally becoming form. Three entangled logics: artistic programming, institutional intent, and para-pedagogical practice. Not concentric. Not linear. More like culture. Shaped by leaks, overlaps, and mutual activation.

Figure 1
A visual explanation of the Para-Pedagogical (own work).



The para-pedagogical does not belong to a single moment or site—it has fermented slowly across Delhi, Western Sydney, the Swedish Arctic, and now Aotearoa. Each context added texture; each agitation made its mark. What began as a gut-sense in the margins has gradually taken shape—first as practice, then as language, and eventually, as structure. What follows is an account of how the para-pedagogical now lives and breathes within an institutional ecology, in Ngāmotu, Aotearoa, where adjacency is not just metaphor, but method.

Honouring my Present

In September 2024, I moved to Ngāmotu, Taranaki, to take on the position of Cultural Experiences, Public Programmes and Learning Lead across the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery | Len Lye Centre and Puke Ariki Museum and Libraries—an institutional ecology defined by relation. We have 11 people in our team: *Programmer, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery | Len Lye Centre*, *Programmer, Puke Ariki*, *Pasifika Programmer*, *Māori Programmer* and a *Learning Supervisor*. We also have 5 *Kaiako (Educators)* in our team who also work across the three institutions. Each arrives with interwoven histories, trusted community connections, curatorial insights honed through research, a commitment to educational practice, and other unique expertise. Our team does not sit within one department or discipline. We move between, with, and beside—weaving across. This adjacency is the condition. It is the para-pedagogical made structural. It allows for a distinctly para-logic to take root: one that weaves different knowledge hubs together, not for coherence, but for co-presence. It cultivates an ecology of relation where learning circulates laterally, where resources are shared, and where institutional memory stretches across silos. This is not a seamless or frictionless arrangement. It holds tension and welcomes the leak.

In many ways, this model has been born of necessity. Shrinking budgets, constrained resources, and funding precarity demand a kind of institutional elasticity. But within those constraints lies a radical potential: a call to reimagine resourcefulness not as scarcity but as a

method. In this frame, sustainability is not a rhetorical flourish—it is a generative and regenerative practice. Degrowth and slow instituting become potential practices and a way of engaging critically with ideas of use, value and purpose. The para-pedagogical in this context is not applied to a single program or department; it is infrastructural and therein lies the great experiment.

This commitment to emergent structure is perhaps most clearly reflected in our recent renaming. As of 1 July, we are no longer the Public Programmes and Learning team, but the Public Practice & Creative Enquiry team. This shift is more than semantic; it enacts the para-pedagogical through language. These are familiar terms, yet placed together, they resist fixed definition—an ambiguity that invites our team to actively shape its meaning with their communities. We define Public as a people-centred position, ensuring participatory methods remain central. Practice signals continuity—an evolving journey, not a one-off encounter. Creative speaks to the generative nature of our work across audiences and timelines. Enquiry foregrounds depth, curiosity, and critical engagement with art, culture, histories, and futures. This naming acknowledges work already happening while elevating its significance. It is a structural gesture—one that uplifts both people and their mahi (work).

And so, a research portal opens that enables leadership to become a pedagogical act, where my role is to support our team in becoming the kind of programmers, educators, or community leaders they aspire to be. This approach is inspired by Mexican-American artist and educator Jorge Lucero's (2016) assertion that the role of an educator is, fundamentally, to help other educators become the kind of educators they wish to be. In this way, the para-pedagogical can shape how we meet the Other, how we plan, how we stretch across demands, how we prioritise, and how we measure purpose and value. It is slow, yes—but it is not passive. It is a deliberate form of reorienting toward what matters: relation, care, responsiveness and, as Lebanese-American essayist and mathematical statistician Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2012) would say, the 'anti-fragile.' A curious term that cannot exist without crisis, compression and rupture.

We often speak of slow institutions, of sustainable futures, of decolonial and Indigenous-led methodologies—but rarely are these values held at the level of organisational design outside of grassroots instituting. Here, in this small node on the west coast of Aotearoa, there is an opportunity to test these values at scale. To not only speak of para-logics but to enact them—to let pedagogy lead from context, and to treat cultural work as shared enquiry. This is not a case study to be scaled. It is an emergent ecology—a vessel for the now.

What I am tracing here is a culture. A practice that ferments in place, but can be (and should be) led by similar values as those outlined throughout this paper. It insists on specificity, on situatedness. It is shaped as much by soil, water and season alongside programming and planning.

But what, exactly, ferments? And how might fermentation—beyond metaphor—offer pedagogy? The next section dwells here. Turning toward the microbial, the messy, and the relational, I attend to the logics of fermentation not as a framework to apply, but as a set of living intelligences already entangled with the para-pedagogical as I understand it.

Honouring Fermentation

Fermentation had been present all along—in the sideways movements, the porous structures, the unruly timelines, but it wasn't until I began working through the iterative,

embodied process of PhD research that I came to understand it not only as metaphor, but as method. A methodology of doing. Of attending to what ferments quietly beneath the surface, the para-pedagogical, I came to see, can be moved by the rhythm of fermentation's logics. The intelligences of fermentation framed through my PhD research—*contamination* (Van Groll & Kummen, 2021; Tsing, 2015), *queer temporalities* (Halberstam, 2005; McCallum and Tuhkanen, 2011), *interspecies kinship* (Haraway, 2016), *agitating towards stability* (Chen, 2018) and *preserving and transforming* (Fournier, 2020; Katz, 2020)—were already encoded in the values of the para-pedagogical. *Contamination*, for instance, had always been there—in the porousness of programs that refused disciplinary boundaries, in the way community and institutional knowledge leaked into one another, and in the refusal to sanitise learning into neat outcomes. *Queer temporalities* surfaced in the non-linear pacing of programs, in the willingness to dwell in the not-yet, and in the insistence that some pedagogical processes needed to wander, loop, and return. *Interspecies kinship* had shaped my attention to context from the beginning, but only in the research did I see how microbial, material and environmental conditions were not just background but co-actors in how learning could unfold. Whether through the souring of milk in Delhi's heat or the soft mossy quiet of Kiruna's sub-Arctic terrain, these more-than-human rhythms structured the way relations were formed, questions were held, and transformation was made possible.

These fermentation intelligences do not offer a framework to apply in all circumstances, but they reveal an ecological opportunity already in motion. One where pedagogy is not about a mastered skill, or remembering information, but one that is centred on attunement, attention and critical reflection. Where to learn is to leak, to be influenced, to change in contact with others—human and otherwise. Where slowness is not failure, the mess is not misstep, and pedagogy, when practised in the 'para', is less about delivery and more about cultivation. Cultivation not of outcomes, but of conditions.

A warm jar.

A gentle hold.

An invitation to bubble.

This is what the para-pedagogical learns from fermentation.

Becoming ~ Becoming ~ Becoming: Fermentation Intelligences in this 'Para'

Within para-pedagogical practice, learning is not organised around outcomes, objects, or interpretive clarity. It is dis/organised. Slow. Sovereign. It leaks across institutional boundaries and refuses the exhibition as an epistemic anchor. Instead, it asks: *how else might knowledge circulate? What other logics might guide our being-with?* The five fermentation intelligences cultivated through my PhD research offer one mode of conceptual companion to this reorientation. They are not metaphors layered on top, but methodologies drawn from material practice and more-than-human thinking. Each intelligence animates a para-pedagogical ecology—one that learns through agitation, relation, and transformation.

Figure 2
A visual explanation of the Fermentation Intelligences (own work).



- **Agitating Towards Stability (Chen, 2018)**

What might it mean to focus on the embodiment of agitation as a form of living presence... rather than on the strategies used to kill it?
Chen, 2018, p.551

This provocation by queer disability activist and theorist Mel Y. Chen sits at the heart of this fermentation intelligence. What if agitation is not a disruption to be resolved, but a vital presence to be held? Reimagined as purposeful, generative, and necessary, agitation invites us to think with rather than against discomfort. In the context of fermentation, agitation is what ensures transformation, encouraging interactions between elements so they do not settle too quickly, allowing for a desirable and stable outcome to emerge. But here, stability is not stasis. As Chen reminds us, the stable can also be in motion.

Transposed into social and organisational ecologies, this intelligence suggests that continual questioning, challenge, and movement can generate resilience rather than collapse. Within para-pedagogical practice, agitation is not noise to be silenced but structure to be metabolised. It becomes a way of working with agitation, not to resolve or erase it, but to stay with it, allowing disagreement, ambiguity, and friction to teach. Agitation, in this frame, is not the opposite of relation; it is relation in motion.

- **Preserving and Transforming (Fournier, 2020; Katz, 2020)**

Fermentation embodies the paradoxical cooperation between these processes of preservation and transformation that, at first, might seem antithetical.
Fournier, 2020, p.96

As a force for change, fermentation is relatively gentle. Bubbles are not flames. Still, they do transform material and matter.
Katz, 2020, p. 25

Fermentation's paradox lies in its dual capacity: to preserve and to transform. Each fermenting process alters what it touches—materials shift, textures deepen, and meanings evolve (Fournier, 2020, p. 96). This quiet transformation pays homage to the labour, relations, and learnings carried within bodies and across skins, acknowledging both ancestral memory and present entanglements.

Fermentation, as both process and metaphor, carries ancestral ties to place, culture, practice, and environment. It is grounded in seasonal knowledge and attuned to time, as both duration and timing. These practices often operate through intergenerational knowledge-sharing, where recipes, rhythms, and techniques are passed between kin, embedding cultural continuity into daily life. This living inheritance does not remain static; it actively shapes and is shaped by contemporary exchanges, influencing how communities gather, nourish, and sustain each other today.

In this porous process, the encounter becomes both a site of care and contamination, where shared space shapes what emerges. The intelligence of *Preserving and transforming* insists we can honour what came before while remaining attuned to the urgencies of now. For para-pedagogical practice, it offers a structure of care that embraces continuity. It is not about preserving institutional forms but about preserving relation, memory, and co-existence, always with the expectation of transformation.

Rather than monumentalising the past, this approach legitimises change grounded in body-memory, history, and lived context. It invites us to move with culture, not around it—preserving not what is fixed, but what is felt.

- **Contamination (Van Groll & Kummen, 2021; Tsing, 2015)**

Microbially, interspecies contact and the resulting "contamination" is not only inevitable but an essential aspect of our world making. As humans, we are always contaminating and being contaminated in our encounters with the world.
Van Groll & Kummen, 2021, p 33

Everyone carries a history of contamination; purity is not an option.
Tsing, 2015, p 27

Contamination teaches us that contact is constitutive. To ferment is to invite encounter—to host and be hosted, to become-with others in ways that cannot be fully anticipated or controlled. Contamination in this sense is not failure or risk, but a vital process of co-becoming. It reveals how change is often carried in through the porous edges: the air, the hands, the vessel, not fully sterilised. In fermentation, contamination is neither accident nor error—it is the logic that allows something to come alive.

The quotes from Van Groll & Kummen (2021) and Tsing (2015) affirm this: that contamination is not a deviation from the norm, but the norm itself. It is both unavoidable and necessary. In this frame, purity is a myth; all things carry the traces of encounter. To ferment is to lean into this inevitability—to welcome the microbial, material, cultural and conceptual residues of others, and allow them to shape what becomes.

Within para-pedagogical practice, contamination shifts from metaphor to method. It challenges the clean borders of institutional knowledge production, unsettling the logics of control, mastery, and containment that often underpin educational design. Contamination here becomes a force that allows epistemologies to leak into and through one another—queer, Indigenous, ecological, decolonial—co-existing not in harmony, but in agitationj, tension, and interdependence.

Pedagogy, when informed by this intelligence, becomes hybrid and cross-pollinated. It resists single-origin narratives and instead values the intermingling of perspectives, bodies, and experiences. Contamination legitimises pedagogies that are in-process, in-relation, and in-transit. It opens space for learning that is collaborative but not always coherent, layered but not always legible.

To work para-pedagogically is to accept that we are always already contaminated—and that this is a condition of ethical relation. It invites educators, artists, programmers, curators and institutions to loosen their grip on control, and instead attune to what emerges through shared presence, porous boundaries, and messy, entangled becoming. It is a call to embrace complexity, to refuse sanitisation, and to let learning ferment in the open air.

- **Queer Temporalities (Halberstam, 2005; McCallum and Tuhkanen, 2011)**

If we try to think about queerness as an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices… we detach queerness from sexual identity and come closer to understanding Foucault's comment in 'Friendship as a Way of Life' 'homosexuality threatens people as a 'way of life' rather than as a way of having sex.
Halberstam, 2005, p. 310

If queer theorists have agreed on anything, it is that for queer thought to have any specificity at all, it must be characterized by becoming (not being) and the constant breaking of habits.
McCallum and Tuhkanen, 2011, p. ix

Queer Temporalities offer a rejection of normative timeframes, emphasising a more inclusive breath, breadth, scale, and rhythm—ways of being and becoming that resist the structures of straight time. As Halberstam (2005) suggests, queerness emerges through *strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices*, positioning queer time as fundamentally oppositional to heteronormative logics of family, productivity, and reproduction. Tuhkanen and McCallum (2011) remind us that queer thought gains its specificity not from stasis, but from the *constant breaking of habits*—from becoming rather than being. These provocations underlie the generative potential of queer temporalities as a fermentation

intelligence: one that disrupts conventional narratives and advocates for ecological, communal, and more-than-human attunement to time.

In para-pedagogical contexts, queer temporality allows for delay, for wandering, for rhythms that emerge through relation rather than imposition. It resists the tyranny of deliverables and refuses the logic of linear progression. This intelligence legitimises forms of learning that unfold, ferment, and linger—expanding duration as a site of meaning-making. Programming shaped by this intelligence might begin with a single story and stretch across seasons. It holds space for slow noticing, long-term attunement, and the generative excess of learning that refuses to arrive on time.

- **Interspecies Kinship (Haraway, 2016)**

What must be cut and what must be tied if multispecies flourishing on earth, including human and other-than-human beings in kinship, are to have a chance?

(Haraway, 2016, p. 2).

Life unfolds through entanglements—across species, ecosystems, materials and scales of being. Fermentation embodies this: a practice made possible only through microbial co-operation, through unseen but intimate relations that span human, more-than-human and environmental bodies. It reveals how change is a shared process, how life sustains itself not through separation, but through complex, interdependent ties.

Haraway's provocation foregrounds kinship not as given, but as an active, ethical practice: a question of which relations we maintain, which we sever, and to what ends. In fermentation, to tie is to stay with the microbial, the fungal and the bacterial. To move beyond the visual as the primary sense and to recognise that the body perceives and receives knowledge cues in a variety of ways. Taken seriously, this kinship holds ecological consequences. It challenges anthropocentric control and asks instead what modes of shared living we must cultivate for multispecies flourishing to be possible.

For para-pedagogical practice, this intelligence decentres the human as sole knower or maker. It remakes the institutional imaginary around co-agency. Programming influenced by this intelligence listens to more-than-human rhythms—seasonal decay, microbial timing, fungal bloom—and takes these as pedagogical signals, not environmental background.

Rather than incorporating the more-than-human as metaphor or theme, interspecies kinship requires that we work *with* it. This includes shaping learning environments that are ecologically entangled—where microbial presences matter, where vegetal timelines count, where pedagogical pulses include the flourishing of all kinds.

Interspecies kinship**,** then, is a call to make and remake learning spaces as shared habitats.

Figure 3

Documentation of the Thinking Bodies. Fermenting Worlds series at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery | Len Lye Centre by Lleah Smith, activating the Fermentation Intelligences through hands-on workshops.



These intelligences do not form a toolkit, or even a cohesive methodology. They ferment. They interact, leak, contradict, and bubble. They offer no fixed order or outcome, but instead signal a different mode of sensing, making, and teaching—one that is responsive to context, to relation, to the ecological and institutional conditions in which learning takes place.

In this sense, fermentation is not only a metaphor but the method. It names the porous, shifting ground of para-pedagogical practice, where transformation occurs not despite instability, but through it. These five intelligences—agitating towards stability, preserving and transforming, contamination, queer temporalities, and interspecies kinship—do not prescribe, but provoke. They invite us to reimagine pedagogy not as delivery or control, but as attunement, entanglement, and agitation**.**

Importantly, these are not the only intelligences that could shape a para-pedagogical world. They are five among many: partial, situated and lively. What they offer is an open ecology—a pedagogical orientation that makes room for other logics to enter, take hold, and transform what comes next. To welcome a way of *being otherwise* or *beside*.

To work para-pedagogically with fermentation is to commit to the unfinished.

It is to begin again—and again—and again with the belief that through agitation, relation, and contamination, new worlds might be rendered possible.

A Case in Ferment: *The Fermenting Kunsthalle*, Bern, Switzerland

If fermentation is more than metaphor—if it is a method for institutional becoming—then how might it unfold in real time, within an actual cultural structure?

In 2024, Kunsthalle Bern undertook an ambitious institutional experiment under renovation—one that embodied fermentation not as metaphor but as method. Entitled *The Fermenting Kunsthalle*, the project emerged during the building's physical transformation from June 2024 to March 2025, yet rather than suspending activity, the institution used the interruption as a site of reflection and pedagogical reconfiguration. It asked: "When can an institution take a breath? How does an institution become a 'work in progress'?" (Kunsthalle Bern, 2024). These questions signal an intent not only to disrupt routine but to animate the institution as a fermenting vessel—open to change, agitation, and new rhythms of co-creation.

This framing resonates with the fermentation intelligence *Agitating Towards Stability*, where transformation does not arrive through resolution but by staying with the trouble (Haraway, 2016). The building itself became a membrane, wrapped in jute sacks as part of a new commission by Ibrahim Mahama, whose work gestures toward the histories of global labour, displacement, and infrastructural neglect. Rather than merely decorating the façade, Mahama's installation enacted a material form of agitation: both protective and disruptive, ceremonial and infrastructural (McGivern, 2025).

The institutional programme titled *With a Little Help From My Friends* carried this ethos further, positioning friendship as a methodology. This was not simply thematic but structural. Friendship as a method invited para-pedagogical commitments: co-presence, slowness, collective authorship, and lingering attention. The programme extended beyond outputs into durational rhythms, speculative enquiry, and the recalibration of what institutional work can hold (e-flux, 2024). Fermentation, in this frame, becomes a way of staying with the 'not-yet', allowing meaning and relation to form slowly, through attunement rather than production.

In April 2025, the project deepened through *Social Fermentation*, a workshop led by Maya Minder and Byungseo Yoo. Their work brought traditional Korean fermentation practices—particularly kimchi-making—into the institutional frame, embedding more-than-human relations, intergenerational knowledge, and microbial stewardship into the pedagogical field. As Minder facilitated participants through processes of bringing and seasoning, Yoo shared family recipes passed down through generations. This event became more than a culinary session; it enacted a trans-local exchange, where ecological knowledge travelled across language, context, and body. In doing so, it modelled what the fermentation intelligence *Interspecies Kinship* invites: that the microbial is not metaphor but method, that ancestral knowledge embedded in foodways can reorient how institutions learn, share, and hold space.

What emerged in *The Fermenting Kunsthalle* was not a themed programme but a structural fermentation—an institutional commitment to leak, to dwell, and to attend. It trusted in process, kinship, and speculation. In para-pedagogical terms, this was not a case study to be scaled but a vessel for the now. Fermentation was not something referenced—it was enacted. It moved through architecture, time, bodies, recipes, and relations. It was a pedagogy of suspension, a pedagogy of pressure, and a pedagogy of breath.

Ultimately, the project affirms what fermentation intelligences suggest: that to work para-pedagogically is to resist closure, to remain open to re-becoming, and to accept the unfinished as a generative condition. Fermentation is not a detour or a hobby. It is the work, and sometimes, it is within the institutional pause that new imaginaries begin to bubble.

Though grounded in the Global North, *The Fermenting Kunsthalle* (and its *Social Fermentation* iteration) has a lot to teach us here in the Asia-Pacific and the Global South about what it means to pause with purpose.

A Case in Ferment: Lalaga, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery | Len Lye Centre, Ngāmotu, Taranaki, Aotearoa

When I stepped into my role as Cultural Experiences, Public Programs and Learning Lead, I entered an institution—or rather, a network of entangled institutions—already thick with ferment. My arrival coincided with the opening of *Lalaga: Le Hui Fono*, 2 Nov 2024 - 25 May 2025, an exhibition at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, which served as the culmination of a three-year web of relations nurtured through purposeful enquiry.

Dr Zara Stanhope, Director, Cultural Experiences, which includes the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery | Len Lye Centre and Puke Ariki Museum and Libraries generously reminded me a few days ago that this journey began with a question: *Who are we?*—as in, who are we as an institution, with its people, its spaces, and its guiding ethos—and *Who are we?* in terms of the local community, the Pasifika peoples and their networks in Taranaki. That initial question sparked a commitment to co-enquiry.

In the earliest phase, securing a grant from Creative NZ enabled the gallery to employ a dedicated Pasifika Programmer for six months—Theresa Tongi—whose lived experience and community connections brought local Pasifika voices to the fore. Theresa's appointment focused on embedding someone with deep cultural knowledge into the Gallery's programming team, so that she could reach into churches, schools, marae, and family networks, extending up and building purposeful relationships. These first steps—meeting, listening, building trust—wove together Pasifika artists, elders, and community groups with gallery staff.

Once additional funding was found to continue Theresa's role, the opportunity arose to bring Ruha Fifita on board as Pacific Curator-at-Large. Ruha arrived from Meanjin (Brisbane), bringing curatorial expertise honed through work on the Asia Pacific Triennial at QAGOMA and lived experience as an artist and independent curator. Her brief asked, *What value do we, the Gallery, hold for Pasifika communities and Pacific artists?* Research and relationships formed a single practice: each conversation enriched the Gallery's understanding of Pasifika cultural protocols, and ways of making, gathering and sharing knowledges.

From the very beginning, 'weaving together' functioned as both metaphor and practice. Theresa first articulated this early on, and it became the underpinning ethos of all subsequent activities visible and invisible to the public—a gesture that blurred boundaries between artist, institution, host, community member and visitor.

The notion of 'being public' didn't arrive fully formed. It stirred and shifted in conversation. Zara once described the first *Lalaga Pasifika* day on Saturday, 28 May 2022, as a massive boiling pot—it had heat. The Gallery burst open: hand-woven textiles, Samoan tattooing, Pasifika kai trucks out front, performances unfolding into all corners. It felt alive. The morning pōwhiri, with speeches and kava, set the tone, not just as a welcome, but as a shared holding of place with Mana Whenua in the Gallery context.

Over the next three years, that three-way entanglement deepened. At the pōwhiri in November 2024 for *Lalaga: Le Hui Fono*, it was there—held by Māori and Pacific leaders,

and again, grounded by kava. In between those anchor points, Theresa and Ruha moved relationally, cultivating space inside and outside the Gallery, private weaving sessions on Sundays, live ngatu work in *Te Au: Liquid Constituencies* with Robin White and a collective from Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland), the formation of *Te Moana Nui-a-Kiwa* advisory group, Moana Soundz drumming with local youth, and grassroots making for each *Lalaga* day.

These gatherings—some quiet, some loud—fermented over time. Each interaction left a trace. The Gallery became less a container and more a porous membrane, holding and held by vibrant communities.

When I returned to the Gallery in early 2025, after undertaking my residency at KIN in the Swedish Arctic, I arrived at a moment when the Gallery was again fermenting under the pressure of relation, resistance, and re-imagination. The colonial architecture of the 'modern, white-walled gallery' had begun to soften, contaminated by relational modes of working that refused neat separations. Curation, pedagogy, programming, artmaking, and community engagement seeped into one another. In Theresa and Ruha's approach, labels like curator, educator, host, artist and/or collector became slippery. Their work demanded warmth, generosity, and a degree of chaos.

By April 2025, the *Lalaga Talanoa* marked another bubbling—three days of collective enquiry from the 25th to the 27th that brought together past contributors and new interlocutors to ask not *What now, but what next? What might come after an exhibition that was never meant to be a conclusion? How could the work continue without hardening into programmatic repetition? How could the work remain alive and resonant?*

Manatikanga (hospitality) became a critical mode of pedagogy. The *Talanoa* hosted a community kai (food) event for 80 Pacific elders, community members, artists, young people and participants arranged in the mode of a marae. The learning studios became kitchens, halls, and places of laughter and recognition. Taro cakes, island music, young people's voices, and ancestral blessings folded into the walls of the institution. These weren't add-ons. They were atmospheres. They reconfigured what counted as artistic and cultural work, and how it could be held.

At that moment, the Govett-Brewster did not host Pacific communities. It was hosted by them, and this inversion—this para-relationality—was a profound expression of the para-pedagogical. It echoed what fermentation does best: destabilise fixed forms, hold the difference in relation, and create the conditions for transformation that are not dictated by the centre. Importantly, this did not happen outside the institution. It happened within it, but not from its centre.

The role of Zara Stanhope, Director of Cultural Experiences, formerly the Director of the Govett-Brewster, was pivotal here. Her expansive, trusting leadership created the structural warmth needed—she held the container open. This is the kind of *agitation towards flourishing* the para-pedagogical calls for. One that allows discomfort, friction, opacity and emergence to be part of the learning. One that resists clarity too soon. One who believes in pedagogy as a relational vessel—as a support. To host, not to extract. Lalaga/Pasifika/Le Hui Fono/Talanoa is a practice, a methodology and a value system. It did not arrive with answers; it arrived with a question, and in its wake, it leaves a residue that brews slowly, that leaks and stains, that calls for institutions to not just represent communities but to be transformed by them.

This is what flourishing looks like in the para-pedagogical: not calm or resolution but a continuous fermentation of purpose, relation, and institutional possibility.

A refusal to settle.

Figure 4
Personal documentation from the Lalaga Talanoa 25 - 27 April 2025









A Vessel for the Now

The para-pedagogical offers a theory and a practice of adjacency, or rather, it proposes a potent position of *beside*. It seeks to be a practice of resistance and a framework for transformation that emerges through relation, particularly through time, place, and institutional entanglement.

For me, now here in Ngāmotu, the para-pedagogical continues to evolve, especially now that it has language to articulate itself. The learning and programming team does not sit within any single institution. It wraps around them. We report not to curators or exhibition-makers exclusively, but to the Director, Cultural Experiences—a structure that reflects a para-position. This adjacency is what allows learning to function with sovereignty, intentionality and with care. It invites each team member to ask: *How do I meet the Other? How do I plan and prioritise without losing sight of reciprocal responsibility? How do I measure, and what do I measure? How do I contribute with purpose?* By holding the container lightly and by offering trust, the para-pedagogical makes room for discomfort, agitation, opacity, and emergence to be part of our collective learning. In doing so, it reminds us that flourishing is never finished but remains a continuous fermentation of possibility.

This is the world of confluence, experience, and context in which the para-pedagogical thrives, today—a *vessel for the now* in terribly trying times. It is a mode of enquiry—a slow, situated, critical, and relational practice that resists hierarchies of form and insists on the value of embodied and dialogical learning. It is an approach that decentres the exhibition, reclaims pedagogy as a vital cultural force, and invites institutions to re-world themselves from the ground of relation rather than the walls of display and the stores of collections.

The para-pedagogical is a reorienting presence.

It leads, listens, and stays.

It co-authors meaning.

It holds institutions accountable—and gently asks more of them.

What, then, does it liberate?

- *It liberates pedagogy from orbiting the exhibition.* It frees learning from the need to contextualise objects or explain artworks. Instead, it opens pedagogy as its own site of enquiry—one that values pause, mismatch, repetition, and what remains unrecorded.

- *It liberates time.* While institutions often move with urgency towards openings, deliverables, and outcomes, the para-pedagogical approach holds a slower tempo. A soaked tempo. One attuned to the pace of trust, repair, and relation.

- *It liberates relations.* Hospitality is not aesthetic here—it is infrastructural. Tea before questions. Food before forms. Stories before interpretation. These are not gestures of comfort. They are methodologies of care. They shift the terms under which knowledge appears.

- *It liberates institutional intent.* Held adjacent to the exhibition, the para-pedagogical asks different questions. Not: *What will we show?* But: *What do we need to ask? Whom do we stand with? What forms of knowledge do we uphold? What does care look like here?* These are not rhetorical questions. They are operational. They shape timelines, resourcing, and governance. They ferment the very logic of the institution.

These liberations—of form, time, relation, and intent—ferment together. They leak into one another. They destabilise old logics and open new ones. And through this, something

else becomes possible: the arrival of knowledges otherwise, of practices and bodies long held at the margin. As the place where institutions begin again.

The challenge now is to build infrastructures—not just events—that embed para-logics as an institutional method. The structure at the Govett-Brewster and Puke Ariki offers one such vessel.

A pedagogical ecology shaped like a fermentation jar.

Porous.

Protected.

Not sealed, but held.

Inside: knowledge is slow.

Agitation is a method.

Salt and storyline the walls.

It is dark enough to allow transformation.

Warm enough to sustain it.

This is not a model to scale. It is a method to sit with. A vessel for the now.

Bubbles rise. They burst. Something changes.

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Reproduction of Traditional Karawitan *Gending* With Hybrid Instrumentation for Community Revitalisation in Art Performances

Dr. Sn. I Ketut Ardana, M.Sn.

Abstract

Traditional karawitan *gending* has a standard system for its performance. The system affects the quality of the performance. Adjustment models, game techniques, and types of gamelan instruments are interrelated elements that show that the system works. The interconnectedness of the three is a factor in the beauty and authenticity of karawitan. All three also traditionally require that traditional karawitan *gending* be served with many karawitan players. Thus, it is natural that every karawitan community must have many members of the players to play the karawitan *gending*. On the other hand, many karawitan communities today have few members, so they cannot play the karawitan *gending* ideally. Often, this community plays karawitan *gending-gending* with a reduction of (incomplete) instruments. It causes the performance to be inauthentic, and the resulting sound removes the characteristics of the gamelan beauty. Therefore, the phenomenon is one of the problems faced by the karawitan community, especially the art of karawitan related to Bali and Java. For this reason, the researcher tried to reproduce the traditional karawitan *gending* using hybrid instrumentation.

Hybrid instrumentation is a way to present *gending* with analogue and digital instrumentation. This hybrid instrumentation can be utilised, as Western music uses the same thing. The challenge is that karawitan has acoustic characteristics that are different from Western music. Therefore, this research is significant to be carried out, aiming to find the right formula for using hybrid instrumentation in traditional art. The purpose of this study is to find a formulation of the use of hybrid instrumentation in traditional karawitan art so that the karawitan art community can present traditional *gending* performances with good quality. This study uses the practice-led research method to find the formula. This practice-led research has a long history and has been reconsidered in many academic contexts worldwide.

Keynotes: gamelan community, *gending karawitan*, hibrid instrumentation, tradisionally.

Background

Balinese karawitan is traditional Indonesian music with philosophical, spiritual, and aesthetic values (Mawan & Santosa, 2025; Sugiarta, 2015). These values are manifested in traditional *gending*s. This value is an important message in traditional art performances (Bandem, 1986). Balinese karawitan traditional *gending* that manifests these values is arranged with a structured, orderly system by incorporating musical elements typical of Balinese karawitan such as patet, laras, playing techniques, tempo, melody, and dynamics. These elements complement each other among gamelan instruments. The arrangement of these distinctive musical elements indicates the authenticity of the sound, beauty, and quality of the performance of Balinese karawitan *gending*. Thus, such musical elements must always be maintained so that Balinese karawitan *gending* does not lose its traditional value.

Unfortunately, some karawitan groups or sekaa *gong* (a local Balinese term) now face complex challenges in playing traditional Balinese karawitan *gending*, both for ritual performance and other functions. The lack of gamelan musicians who can play traditional *gending* in performing arts is a challenge. Often, musicians from these groups are competent in their limited number of personnel, so they cannot display the *gending* with the entire

orchestration. As a result, they reduce or eliminate some of the instruments that must be played. The incomplete condition of this instrument affects the sound quality of the *gending* presented. The effect is a decrease in the quality of gamelan sounds, such as rumbling, vibration, and sound waves from each instrument, which should always be present in traditional Balinese *gending* because it is a peculiarity and a factor of traditional Balinese beauty.

At the same time, technological advances in the music world have made it easier for musicians, including karawitan, to play music. The opportunity to utilise hybrid instrumentation is one of the alternatives to playing Balinese karawitan *gending*. The combination of instrumentation between analogue and digital sounds of gamelan instruments makes it possible to overcome the problem of the lack of competent musicians in playing the karawitan *gending*. The *gending* played still maintains the traditional values even though it uses hybrid instrumentation. Western music practice has often applied similar methods (Acosta Martínez & Daffern, 2023). However, in the context of Karawitan, its application still requires more in-depth study because of the differences in sound characteristics, aesthetics, and philosophy between the two traditions. That way, the use of technology in presenting *gending* karawitan needs to be explored, so efforts to maintain the traditional values of Balinese karawitan will be easier.

The limited number of musicians who can perform and play the *gending* is a significant problem in this study. This situation is seen in some art communities in rural or urban areas; the function of the community is more oriented to carrying out art activities related to social society; usually, an art community like this does not have a vision of professionalism. As a result, traditional *gending* performances cannot be appropriately performed; in some situations, they cannot be performed at all. In this context, using technology through a hybrid instrumentation approach is particularly relevant as an alternative solution. Technology is expected to fill the gaps in the structure of music presentation without overriding the values of musicality and the richness of traditional sounds characteristic of Balinese karawitan. Based on this problem, the right research question is: How can the application of hybrid instrumentation present authentic sound quality in traditional Balinese karawitan *gending* performances? This question is the basis for artistic and conceptual exploration in research and a measure of the success of creating a working model based on practice-led research.

This study aims to formulate the proper formulation in applying hybrid instrumentation in presenting traditional Balinese karawitan *gending*s. The development of this hybrid instrumentation is important because it can provide a practical solution for the art community or sekaa *gong* in maintaining and presenting traditional repertoire. Hybrid instrumentation is an alternative that allows the presentation of *gending* to continue to be carried out optimally in conditions of limited capacity and quality of human resources. Thus, the art community can be more productive in presenting traditional *gending*s in ritual ceremonies and other socio-cultural activities.

Several previous studies have analysed the use of hybrid instrumentation in the context of musical phenomena (Mayall, 2016; Ramadhan & Wulandari, 2023; Wahyudi et al., 2025); however, the focus is still limited to Western music. The study of hybrid instrumentation has not touched on the case study of Balinese gamelan in general, nor traditional *gending-gending* in particular. So far, research on Balinese gamelan has focused more on ethnomusicological aspects (Balkan, 2012; Hood, 2010; Tenzer, 1991), cultural studies (I Wayan Suharta, 2007), and musicology. (Ardana, 2021). Although some studies highlight the development of Balinese gamelan in the context of new and popular music (McGraw, 2013; Sudirga, 2020), no study specifically addresses the issue of hybrid instrumentation in this context. Therefore, this research opens up new opportunities for developing knowledge that is beneficial for developing Balinese karawitan or gamelan.

Method

This study uses a practice-led research approach as the primary method to formulate an ideal artwork model using hybrid instruments in the presentation of traditional Balinese karawitan *gending*. Practice-led research allows the practice of art creation and *gending* presentation to be an integral part of research (Smith & Dean, 2009). This approach was chosen because it allows for exploring and creating knowledge through hands-on artistic practice, which is particularly relevant in art research. Through this approach, hybrid instrumentation has been formulated accurately, for example, what musical instruments should be played with analogue and digital instrumentation. This division is important because it influences the production of authentic musical instruments, thus achieving a sound balance between analogue and digital instrumentation. To ensure the effectiveness and relevance of this approach, the research stages have been systematically designed using the following processes.

Theoretical studies, literature studies, and relevant practices

This stage is carried out to strengthen theoretical arguments and support practical hypotheses. The researcher conducts a literature study using the contextual review method to relate various theories, concepts, and previous practices with current and existing practices. This study includes the study of karawitan, digital music technology, and experimental practices that the arts community has carried out in the performing arts.

Designing Practice

The practice that has been designed is the *gending leluangan*. This *gending* is often used by the art community in Kesiman Village, Denpasar, Bali, to accompany religious rituals. *Gending* has a crucial role in the ritual process. Traditionally, these *gending*s require a complete instrument to produce the ideal sound quality. Twenty-five musicians must play a complete instrument. However, this design experimented with using five musical players as analogue representations of instrumentation; the remaining 20 other musical instrument voices were played through digital instrumentation. Practice design using musical experimentation methods. This experiment combines the sounds of the gamelan *gong* kebyar analogue and digital. These two types of instrumentation are treated as the same entity, so it is necessary to deepen the quality of the sound in order to produce an authentic impression because they are played differently.

Studio Work and Documentation

Studio work is a practical process that turns a design into a *gending* that can be heard for authenticity. This work is divided into two stages: first, making a musical pattern using digital instrumentation, then continuing by making a musical pattern with analogue instrumentation. Musical patterns are played with digital instrumentation using computer aids and FL Studio applications. Sounds of musical instruments such as *gong*s, *kempur*, *jublag pengumbang-pengisep*, *jegogan pengumbang-pengisep*, *kajar*, *reyong* recorded, then made the musical pattern with the help of the application. The result of this recording is a representation of digital instrumentation. Next is to create a musical pattern that is played in analogue. Musical instrument sounds such as *gangsa polos pengumbang-pengisep*, *gangsa sangsih pengumbang-pengisep*, dan *kendang* Played analogue by five musicians. Experiments were carried out repeatedly to obtain sound results that met the criteria of karawitan musicals.

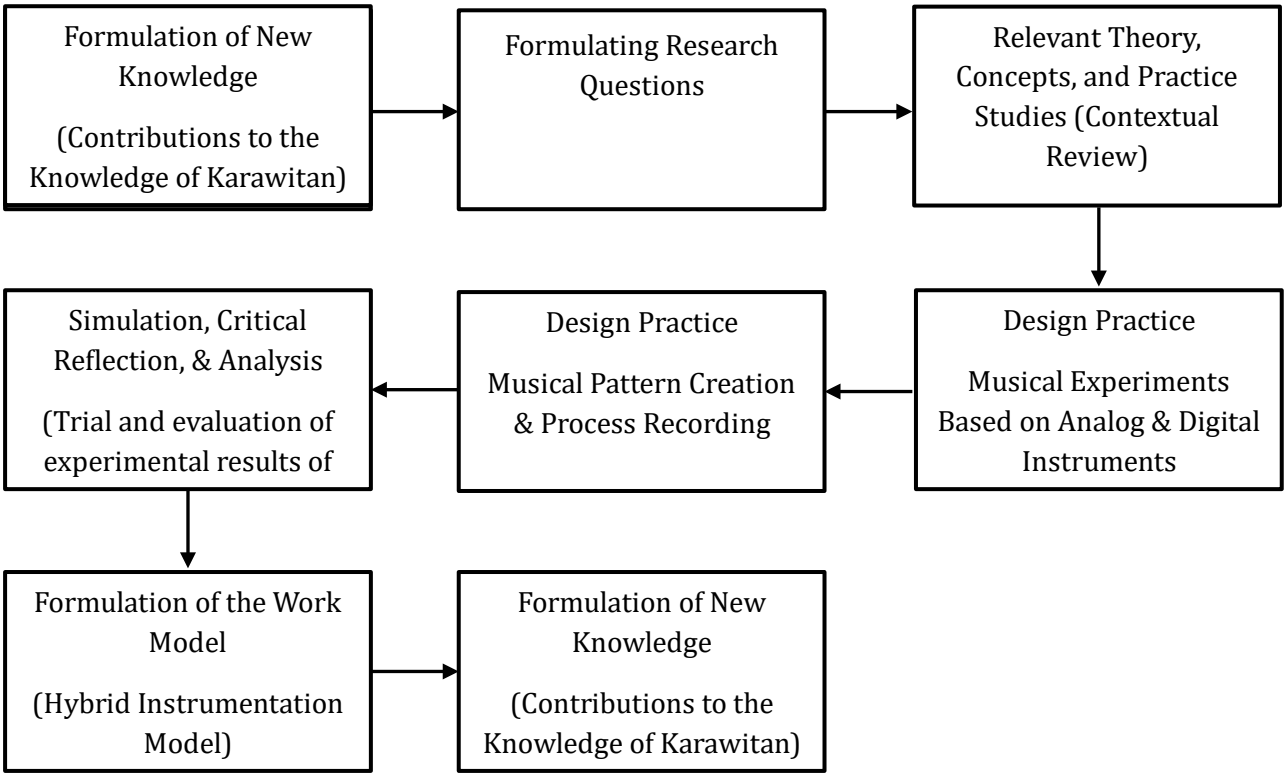
Simulation, Critical Reflection, and Analysis

Re-experiment to simulate a model of musical patterns incorporated into a hybrid of instrumentation. This simulation is to see the inaccuracy of each instrumentation in creating an authentic sound. This simulation is a reflection in assessing the musical experiment that has been carried out and whether it has shown ideal results or not. The assessment process also involves karawitan experts who can listen and assess the authenticity of the sound of a hybrid instrument. The advantages and disadvantages of the experimental artwork can be seen in the simulation. The results of the simulation always have recommendations for making

improvements to the artwork to produce authentic *gending*. Therefore, the simulation stage is carried out simultaneously with the studio's work. The final result of this simulation is a prototype of the *gending leluangan*. This prototype artwork is distributed to the community to play. The results were analysed to determine the effectiveness, authenticity, and traditional values still inherent in the artwork.

Knowledge Formulation

In this section, the process that has been carried out and the results that have been performed are compared to become a knowledge formulation of the hybrid instrumentation model in traditional karawitan *gending* performances. The new knowledge can be produced is the function and proportionalization between analogue and digital instruments, which are measurable in a traditional *gending-gending* presentation process. Further details of the research process are as follows.



Schematic of the research process

Research Results

Practice One: Musical Design for Digital Instrumentation

Practice one is a musical design process performed due to digital instrumentation. The result in question is in the form of a musical pattern played by gamelan instruments such as *gong*s, *kempur*, *jublag pengumbang-pengisep*, *jegogan pengumbang-pengisep*, *reyong*, dan *kajar*. All the musical patterns of the instrument are created using the FL Studio 20 DAW application. Below is an overview of these patterns.

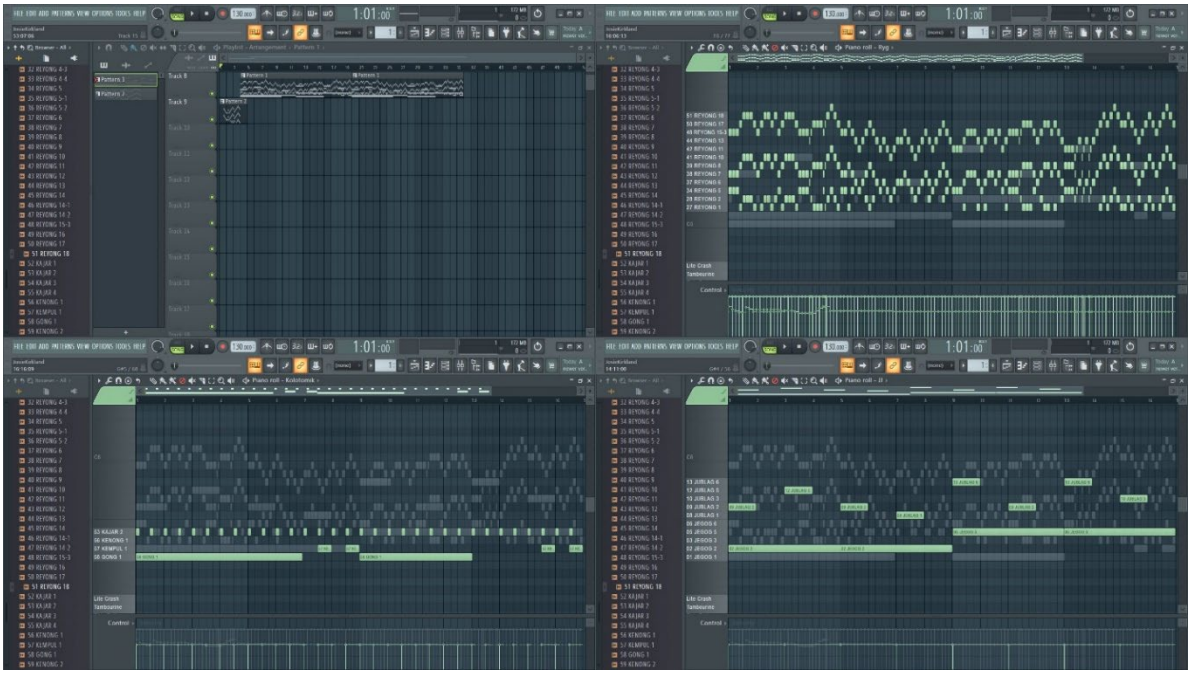


Figure 1. Musical pattern model as a representation of digital instrumentation

The musical patterns above are divided into four parts of the data, namely: (1) the musical patterns of the entire digital instrumentation (top left); (2) melodic patterns from *reyong* instrument playing (top right); (3) Colotomic patterns of *gong*, *kempur*, and *kajar* instrument playings (bottom left); serta (4) The main melodic musical pattern of the playing of instruments *jegogan pengumbang-pengisep* and *jublag pengumbang-pengisep* (bottom right). Each instrument plays a role and function in the Balinese gamelan tradition. *Gong*s serve as the end marker of a phrase in a melodic sentence or as a marker of the end of the cycle. The patterns played are slow and appear at the end of the musical section. *Kempur* serves as a marker of the sub-section in the cycle, with a more frequent frequency than the *gong*. The instruments of *jegogan* and *jublag* play the main melody that emphasises the melodic segments in a sentence. Meanwhile, *Reyong* plays the main melodic pattern that becomes the identity or marker of the song's character. That way, the above *gending* of *leluangan* has shown a strong concept of tradition, so it is ideal to be used as an analysis sample in the problem of hybrid instrumentation.

These instruments are designed using digital instrumentation with several considerations, including (1) the existence of instruments that have low frequencies, such as *gong*s, *kempur*, *jublag*, and *jegogan*; and (2) musical patterns that play the main melody. Both of these criteria allow musical patterns to be more easily integrated with analogue instrumentation so that the integrity of musical patterns can be more easily realised in hybrid practice. In addition to the lows, the instruments of *gong*, *kempur*, *jegogan*, *jublag*, and *kajar* also fill the 'musical space' that is rare; for example, in some durations, the *gong* or other instruments are just played. This is a consequence of the function of the instrument as a determinant of the segments of another sentence (colotomic instrument). These patterns can be engineered to sound to be balanced with analogue instrumentation through digital instrumentation. The musical patterns of *gong*, *kempur*, *jegogan*, *jublag*, *kajar*, and *reyong* greatly determine sound balance quality. The regulation of the instrument's volume and intensity is crucial for this determination. All the instruments played in this digital instrumentation have different sound characters. For this reason, the composer's ability to process these characters in a frotyloop DAW while maintaining their authenticity is of great significance. Therefore, this phase of practice is a process that plays an important role in determining success in the next stage.

Practice Two: Musical Design for Analogue Instrumentation

Practice two is a process of realising musical patterns using analogue instrumentation. This musical design is realised through the use of several gamelan musical instruments, including *gangsa polos pengumbang-pengisep* (2 musicians), *gangsa sangsih pengumbang-pengisep* (2 musicians), and Balinese *kendang*s (1 music player). *Gangsa polos pengumbang-pengisep* and *gangsa sangsih pengumbang-pengisep* This is a musical instrument played by 2 pairs, of which one pair consists of *gangsa polos* and *sangsih pengumbang* and *gangsa polos* and *sangsih pengisep*. The following is a design of musical patterns analogue instrumentation.

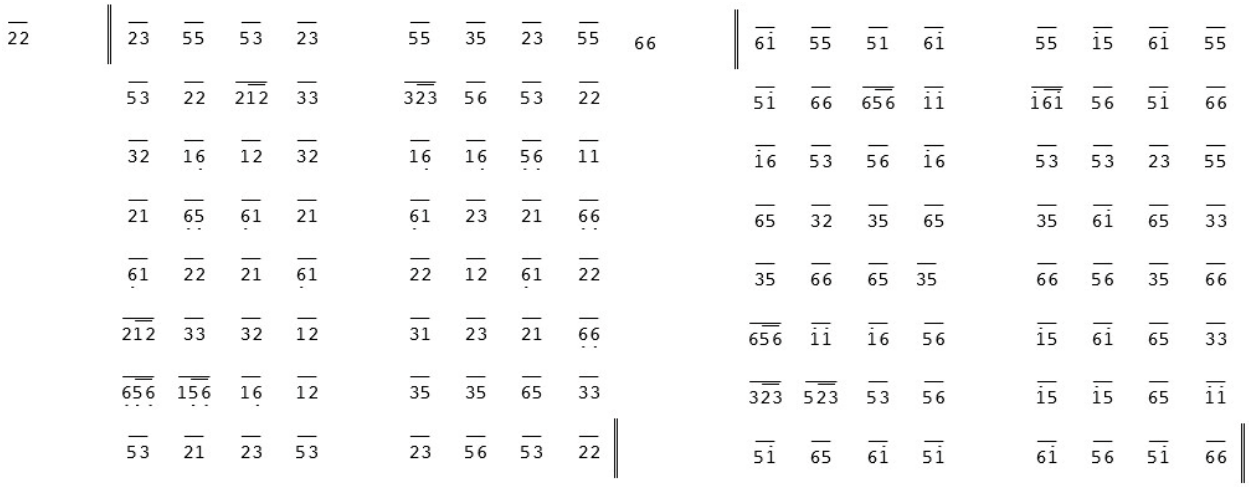


Figure 2. Musical pattern models as representations of instrumentation analogues

The above pattern plays the same role as the melody of the *reyong* instrument. Thus, the melodic grooves formed in a single sentence have similarities. This pattern is the main melody of this *leluangan gending*. Melodically, this main melody can justify whether or not a *gending* is included in the *leluangan*. Therefore, the main melody has a crucial meaning in determining the character of the *gending leluangan*. The melodic pattern of this *gangsa* instrument is played by four *gangsa* players, consisting of *polos* and *sangsih*, and further divided into *pengumbang* and *pengisep*. Players who play the pattern *polos* consists of *polos pengumbang* and *polos pengisep* (left), While the *sangsih* pattern consists of the *sangsih pengumbang* and the *sangsih pengisep* (right). In addition, the pattern is also equipped with a *leluangan kendang*an motif played by one player. The *kendang*an pattern is played improvised to enrich the rhythmic pattern.

Gangsa and *kendang* instruments are designed using analog instrumentation, taking into account the following: (1) *Gangsa* consist of a pair of *pengumbang* and *pengisep*; (2) to create a balance in melodic instruments, where one instrument (*reyong*) uses digital and the other (*gangsa*) using analogues; and (3) Improvised *kendang* patterns are more suitable to be played directly through analogue instrumentation. This musical pattern of analogue instrumentation is played to fill and complement the digital instrumentation pattern, aiming to produce a complex *gending*. However, instrumentation analogues greatly determine the authenticity of the *gending* presented. *Gangsa* and *kendang* players must be able to measure the volume and intensity of the sound to be played. The benchmark for high-low volume and currency that must be played is from digital instrumentation. Therefore, *gangsa* and *kendang* players must balance the volume and intensity of the digital instrumentation so that the overall instrument gets an authentic sound balance, just like the original.

Practice three: Musical Pattern Hybrid Design

The hybrid design of musical patterns combines digital design and analogue instrumentation. Both are integrated into a work of art that is complete, shaped, and has the

traditional value of Balinese karawitan. The integration process is carried out as a form of simulation to find the right formula to combine the two with authentic sound quality, resembling the traditional *gending* format played entirely with live instruments. The results of this integration process are as follows:



Figure 3. The process of integrating musical patterns between digital and analogue

Gending leluangan in the form of audio-visuals above is the result of a simulation of the presentation of *gending* as if it was done directly, like in a traditional performance. This presentation is a trial to determine the results of the sound integration process between analogue and digital instrumentation. *Gangsa* and *kendang* players listen to musical patterns played digitally. At the same time, analogue players responded to the digital musical pattern by playing *gangsa* melodies and *kendang*s that paid great attention to the sound's volume, volume and intensity. Player sensitivity in making high-low volume and intensity responses is one of the key factors for success in the integration process. The primary focus of this process is to ensure a balance of sound quality between digital and analogue instrumentation. This balance greatly determines the quality of the presentation, whether it can present an authentic impression or not. The authentic impression in question is the result of a game that can produce the same or very similar sound quality compared to traditional *gending* presentations, where all instruments are played live.

Balance is measured by the clarity of the sound of each instrument, both in the pattern of musicality and the characteristics of the sound, especially the characters' sound waves. In all the instruments used in this hybrid practice, several must clearly display sound waves, namely *gong*, *jublag*, *jegogan*, and *gangsa*. Meanwhile, instruments such as *kendang*, *reyong*, *kempur*, and *kajar* do not have sound wave characteristics.

Protipe

The process that has been carried out has gradually produced a model of traditional *gending leluangan* presented in MP3 audio format.

Discussion

The research that raises the topic of reproduction of traditional Balinese *gending* using a hybrid instrumentation approach is discussed from two main aspects, namely: (1) the

authenticity of the sound of the *gending* presented, and (2) the usefulness of the reproduction in the context of empowering sekaa *gong* or gamelan communities in Bali.

Authentic Sound

Traditionally, the *gending-gending* served by Balinese gamelan usually has its peculiarities (Sukerta, 2010). This peculiarity is called authentic sound. The authenticity is the sound of the gamelan made of bronze, iron, bamboo, or brass. Based on this material, Balinese gamelan sounds loud, with waves and powerful sound vibrations in that loudness. This vibration results from the concept of *pengumbang-pengisep* found on musical instruments (Sukerta, 2009), such as *gangsa*, *jegogan*, and *jublag* instruments. These instruments are paired. If both are played, then they always produce strong vibrations, or what is commonly termed sound waves.

Authenticity is the primary key to maintaining the artistic value of the Balinese karawitan tradition. Without an authentic sound, Balinese gamelan loses its characteristics. This means that an inauthentic sound means that it loses its beauty. A *gending* that is not beautiful is a failed dish. In other words, authentic sound is a beauty factor in the presentation of Balinese karawitan *gending*. Therefore, the authenticity of the sound must be maintained so that the *gending* presented is always beautiful.

The *gending leluangan* created in this study still maintains its authenticity, even though it combines digital and analogue instrumentation. As evidence, the sounds of several main instruments, such as *jegogan*, *jublag*, *gong*, and *gangsa*, can still maintain their sound characteristics. This is especially evident from the success of reproducing sound waves, which is the difference in frequency between the pairs of *pengumbang-pengisep* instruments that creates a vibrational effect typical of Balinese gamelan. On the other hand, instruments such as *kendang*, *reyong*, *kempur*, and *kajar* that do not have the character of sound waves still play an important role in supporting the rhythmic structure and dynamics of the *gending*. The patterns played by the *kendang*s, although improvisative, also show that the combination of digital and analogue sounds can still maintain musical cohesion in the overall presentation.

In this hybrid practice, digital sound quality is transformed so that it can blend harmoniously with the analogue sound produced directly. This harmony shows that the integrated digital and analogue sounds are balanced. This balance shows that the volume and intensity played are just right, meaning that the musician can appropriately play the volume and intensity of the sound from analogue instrumentation (Sugiartha, 2015). It can be said that the *gending leluangan* has maintained one of its traditional values. Thus, the quality of this hybrid sound can be accepted as an authentic representation of traditional *gending*, especially in the context of performance.

The Effectiveness of Sekaa *Gong* through a Digital-Analog Approach

The hybrid approach between digital and analogue in the presentation of traditional Balinese gamelan *gending* has significantly impacted the sekaa *gong* or gamelan community. The gamelan community is more effective in presenting the *gending leluangan*. With only five players, the *gending* can be presented authentically. This is very good for the art community Because the problem of the lack of music players who can play traditional *gending leluangan* has been resolved. The effect of this effectiveness is that the art community can carry out its agenda to carry out various art presentations, especially for ritual purposes. Therefore, the community becomes more vital and exists to carry out social activities.

In addition to overcoming the lack of gamelan players, hybrid instrumentation also solves the problem of incomplete musical instrument equipment. In the process, music players from the community can do sound engineering on specific musical instruments and then make them into digital sounds. This strategy will complement the sounds of musical instruments not yet owned by the community so that, if necessary, the *gending* presented will display the sounds

of the complexity of the musical instrument. Thus, hybrid instrumentation is effective in overcoming the problem of musical instrument incompleteness.

More than just efficiency, this approach also provides accessibility for gamelan communities in remote areas or schools that do not have complete instrument equipment. In addition, it opens up new possibilities in the context of art education (Liao & Cao, 2025)**,** digital archive of culture**,** and the development of multimedia-based performances without abandoning traditional aesthetic principles. Thus, this approach addresses the player crisis and offers a new empowerment model that is adaptive to the times (Fu, 2025) while remaining based on traditional values. Digitalisation in Balinese gamelan is not just a replacement but can be a reinforcer of cultural sustainability if managed wisely.

A productive community

Theoretically, the effectiveness obtained through the use of hybrid instrumentation in the presentation of Balinese gamelan has a direct impact on increasing artistic productivity. In this context, effectiveness is defined as the ability of the community to present *gending* with fewer resources while still maintaining musical quality. Productivity includes the ability to produce more works or performances in a shorter time span and increase the intensity of engagement in artistic activities.

Hybrid instrumentation presents significant technical convenience, especially in terms of reducing the need for a large number of players. In traditional gamelan practice, one *gending* composition can require 20 or more players. However, with digital technology, the community can now present complex *gending* with only 3–5 players, as other parts can be filled through digital instrumentation designed to resemble the sound character of the original instrument.

Socioculturally, this approach is also a way to bridge the generational gap in tradition. The younger generation, who are more familiar with digital technology, can more easily be interested in and involved in gamelan's creative process without losing the traditional roots that are the basis of cultural expression. Thus, technology is a tool and a preservation and regeneration strategy**.** Furthermore, this productivity also targets the realm of documentation and distribution of work (Fitria & Supriono, 2024). With the help of digital technology, a *gending* recording in a hybrid format can be easily disseminated through digital platforms such as YouTube, social media, or online archives in the community. This not only expands the audience but also strengthens the position of gamelan as part of a culture that is alive and adaptive to the times. In other words, hybrid technology allows sekaa *gong* to remain active and relevant in various contexts, from traditional ceremonies to experimental spaces of contemporary art. This approach is a driver of art productivity that remains grounded in local values but is open to global progress.

Conclusion

This study found an appropriate formulation for regulating the use of instrumentation hybrids in the presentation of traditional karawitan *gending leluangan*. In addition to being authentic, the *gending leluangan* played with five music players shows that the use of hybrid instrumentation can overcome the problems faced by the art community. Thus, hybrid instrumentation in presenting traditional Balinese karawitan *gending leluangan* is an effective production and adaptive strategy for the art community.

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Voice From An Urban Village: Negotiating The Ethnic Identity of Kalipasir Cikini Village Through Performing Arts.

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Abstract.

Urban villages in the middle of metropolitan Jakarta, Indonesia's capital city, face great challenges in maintaining their cultural identity amidst the pressures of globalization and social change. Kalipasir, a village in the Cikini and Gondangdia area of Central Jakarta, is a unique example of how a local community has survived more than a century in the midst of urban development. Despite being directly adjacent to an elite area, Kalipasir has maintained its distinctive character as a dynamic urban village. However, big questions arise: how do Betawi and non-Betawi identities survive in this space? How do immigrants who have lived here for decades negotiate their cultural identities?

The Community Service Program conducted by the Graduate School of the Jakarta Institute of Arts (IKJ) through arts training, especially performing arts, seeks to answer this question by facilitating a space for expression for residents. This program places at "Balai RW" as a community center where art is used as a means of maintaining, negotiating, and reconstructing cultural identity in urban life.

Kalipasir reflects a broader phenomenon in major cities around the world, where local communities struggle to maintain their cultural identity amidst urbanization. This performing arts training program is expected to serve as a model for similar initiatives in other urban areas, demonstrating how art not only functions as an individual expression, but also as a social tool in shaping more inclusive and sustainable spaces. As such, this activity not only contributes to the local community, but also to the global discourse on art, identity, and the production of urban space in the modern era. In addition, to further explore cultural identity, an oral history method was used with in-depth interviews with three generations of Kalipasir residents to reveal how their artistic identity evolved with social and spatial changes in the city.

Keywords: Betawi, Identity, Kalipasir Cikini, Theater, Performings Arts.

Background.

In 2023 and 2024, the Urban Creative Hub Study Center of the Jakarta Institute of Arts (UCH-IKJ) collaborated with the Head of Kalipasir Community Association (RW-01). UCH-IKJ was initiated to become an active institution that offers solutions to urban problems, by creating urban spaces that are more cultured, functional, and inclusive. Its main focus includes two aspects: physical issues of urban space (such as planning and preservation) and socio-cultural issues of urban communities. As part of IKJ, UCH integrates research results and creative processes into the curriculum to enrich art education, while acting as a networking center for various community potentials in facing the challenges of urban life.

Geographically, Kalipasir Village is located directly adjacent to the IKJ campus complex and the Ismail Marzuki Arts Center. Since its establishment in 1970, IKJ's existence has shared space and time boundaries with the Kalipasir community, forming a socio-cultural

relationship that has lasted for more than five decades. We lecturers and students who are members of UCH-IKJ carry out research and community service activities that focus on residents of RW 01, Kalipasir Village, Menteng District, Central Jakarta. This research and community service activity is a concrete manifestation that is part of a strategic effort to strengthen the involvement of art education institutions in the dynamics of urban society.

Kalipasir, as one of the urban villages located in the administrative center of the capital city, holds complex social diversity and cultural heritage, which often goes unnoticed in modern urban planning discourse. Therefore, this research is directed at identifying, documenting, and activating the socio-cultural potential of Kalipasir residents through an arts and urban studies approach. By positioning Kalipasir as a space for dialogue between institutions and communities, this activity not only contributes to the development of knowledge, but also strengthens the position of the campus as a whole.

Kalipasir - an urban village

Kalipasir, located in the Cikini area of Central Jakarta, is one of the oldest residential entities in the capital's urban core. Traces of its existence have been documented on colonial maps since 1874. The colonial landscape marks the village's importance not only as a geographical location, but also as a continuous social space. This is in contrast to a number of other kampongs in the vicinity that disappeared in the process of modernization, massive development, or urban space control.



Figure 17 map of Cikini area

Kalipasir has shown remarkable spatial and cultural resilience. It has survived for more than a century, witnessing Jakarta's transformation from colonial city, national administrative center, to metropolis. Kalipasir Village, located between Cikini and Gondangdia in the administrative area of Menteng, Central Jakarta, is an urban enclave that holds its own narrative, a narrative that is often overlooked in the discourse of metropolitan development. Although geographically attached to the elite Menteng area, Kalipasir retains its character as an urban village, with its own distinctive social networks, architecture, and daily practices. This phenomenon presents a stark contrast between community-based urban life and urban spatial planning that is increasingly driven by the logic of capital and modernization. The Cikini-Kalipasir Gondangdia area is relatively safe from area rehabilitation programs, which are usually followed by gentrification processes, because this area has a strong history and has always been an area with elite residents, meaning the upper class and moneyed. Urban complexity is less pronounced and visible in this area because this area has various capitals that can protect this area from negative gentrification threats (Sondakh and Gunawan, 2019).

Like most urban villages, Kalipasir is inhabited by two broad categories of residents: the so-called “original” residents who have lived there for generations since the early days of the village's formation, and the “newcomers” who came later and chose to settle in the established social networks. These two groups interact in relations that are constantly negotiated, both in the context of identity, cultural practices, and management of shared space.

This constellation creates a distinctive social dynamic: the village as a space where encounters, mixing, and sometimes friction between identities occur. In this case, Kalipasir is not just a physical entity, but also a field of negotiation of identity, collective memory, and rights to the city. Its sustainability to this day is not only due to its strategic geographical position, but also to the strength of social and cultural relations that have been built for more than a century.

The characteristics of Kalipasir reflect the description of an urban village as described by Antony Sihombing, which is a village with middle to lower socio-economic conditions. This situation contrasts with the surrounding areas, such as Menteng and Gondangdia, which are elite areas. This contrast has the potential to cause social and economic problems that are unique to the border area between the village and the city.

> “Kampung is an unstructured, unorganized and informal settlement in relation to the broader socio-economic system. It can also be realized as a settlement in an urban area without infrastructure, planning or urban economic networking. Poverty and poor quality of life are the features of kampungs.”
> (Antony Sihombing, 2004)

Historically, the original inhabitants of Kalipasir were ethnic Betawi people. But over time, their numbers have decreased and been replaced by migrants who came to Jakarta to make a living. The current occupations of Kalipasir residents are quite diverse, ranging from traders, employees, online motorcycle taxi drivers, city cleaning to freelancers.

In the RW 01 Kalipasir area, the life of the residents looks dynamic. Various community activities take place actively, both through the women's group (*PKK*) and young groups (*Karang Taruna*). Karang Taruna, for example, organizes art activities such as dance and hadroh practice. Martial arts traditions such as silat still exist, but the regeneration process seems to have declined.



Figure 18 Situation at Balai RW 01

The high level of urbanization and the influx of migrants to Kalipasir brings its own challenges in maintaining local identity. Relationships between residents have also become more diverse and complex. This is interesting to observe, especially because Kalipasir is very close to art institutions such as Taman Ismail Marzuki and the Jakarta Arts Institute, which are

also located in the Cikini Village area. Despite their physical proximity, the connection between Kalipasir residents and these arts centers seems to be limited.

In this context, it becomes relevant to further explore how Betawi residents in Kalipasir respond to external influences coming from surrounding areas. How do they negotiate their identity amidst the swift flow of modernization? How do domestic spaces, such as the living room, kitchen, or community hall, become arenas for the defense of values and identity? And how do women's bodies-which are often the economic support as well as the guardians of tradition-play a role in maintaining the continuity of the village in the midst of urban transformation?

Theater Performance as an Approach.

In the initial interaction process, a strong need emerged from the residents to have a space for expression for children, teenagers and the biggest encouragement came from the group of mothers who are members of the PKK organization. They actively voiced their desire for activities in the arts. From here came the initiative to use the performing arts approach, especially theater, as a medium of interaction between the research team and the residents.

Theater was chosen because of its participatory nature and its ability to bridge social, cultural and educational relationships in society. In this context, theater is not only a means of artistic expression, but also acts as an agent of social change that opens up space for broad public involvement. One of the relevant and powerful issues to be raised in this theater performance is the issue of women.

Women's issues offer rich material for artistic exploration, as they encompass experiences that are both personal and universal. Raising this theme in performance allows for collective awareness of issues such as violence, discrimination, gender stereotypes, and the limited representation of women in art. By making space for women's voices and experiences, performances become more organic, responsive and contextualized.

The creative process in this theater is open and collaborative, where ideas and stories develop through improvisation, discussion, and physical and emotional exploration of the participants. The stories that emerge are not the result of unilateral construction, but rather come from the actors' spontaneous responses to the themes and issues raised. Thus, the theater we create is part of research that grows directly from the experiences of the community and becomes a mirror of the social dynamics they face on a daily basis.

Daily Stories of the Mothers in Kalipasir

In the process of creating scenarios and performances, daily conversations between women in the Kalipasir neighborhood, Cikini, often become a space for sharing experiences and deep feelings. The term sharing, which is often used casually, actually reflects the release of various pressures, hopes, and survival strategies that are lived by women in a challenging urban life.

The topics of conversation that arise are very diverse, ranging from household affairs, family economic conditions, to childcare issues. One issue that often arises is economic pressure. Many mothers have to work to help make ends meet, while their children are cared for by grandmothers or relatives since childhood. Despite this, most of the children in Kalipasir continue to complete their education up to university level, showing a high spirit of learning even in the midst of poverty.

In the midst of modern challenges such as the influence of technology and a fast-changing environment, mothers try to maintain traditional values. For example, they still encourage their children to participate in activities such as Quran recitation in the afternoons and evenings, activities that they used to do when they were young. This shows an effort to maintain the continuity of local values and practices in the midst of modernity.

Household problems, especially divorce, are stories that are often shared because many mothers experience similar situations. The impact of divorce is not only felt by the couple, but also by the children who grow up with a minimal or absent father. In addition, the issue of debts is also often a hot topic. Some mothers borrow money from neighbors for urgent needs such as daily shopping, school fees, or health. Although this is done with mutual trust, difficulties in repayment can cause social tension and even damage good relations between neighbors.

In more difficult circumstances, some mothers resort to borrowing money from loan sharks or online loan applications. Unfortunately, high interest rates make matters worse and become an additional psychological burden. Shame, anxiety and social pressure further aggravate their situation.

Local forms of solidarity are still present in Kalipasir. Women often help each other by lending items such as rice, kitchen utensils, or other household needs. However, this practice is also not free from friction, especially when the items are not returned in good condition or even forgotten.

WA Ida's Story: The Resilience of a Woman in Kalipasir

One of the most profound processes in this activity was observing the life of Wa Ida, a 68-year-old resilient woman living in the Kalipasir area. Her life story reflects the strength of a woman in the face of loss, economic pressure, and injustice, without losing her zest for life and sense of humor.

Wa Ida married with the hope of building a happy family until old age. However, this hope did not come true. After a few years of marriage and a daughter, her husband began to neglect his responsibilities. When the child was in the 5th grade, Wa Ida began to notice a change and finally learned that her husband was having an affair. Since then, her husband disappeared without news and no longer gave her any money.

Years later, news of her husband's death came from a relative, without explanation or closure. In a state of disappointment and anger, Wa Ida's main strength remained in her role as a mother. She worked as a laundress in a boarding house around Kalipasir for a small daily wage, and from this work she saved little by little to pay for her son's education until he graduated from high school. As he grew up, his son started to work and build his own family, and since then, Wa Ida has been a mother.



Figure 19 Kalipasir environtment situation



Figure 20 Aulia with Wa Ida

Wa Ida's daily life reflects extraordinary courage and independence. Her activities begin at dawn with prayers at the mosque, followed by work as a security guard around the village at night - a profession generally undertaken by men. In addition, Wa Ida also works as a parking attendant at a nightspot in her neighborhood.

When asked about these roles, Wa Ida answered calmly and straightforwardly:

"There is no need to complicate life. If you're hungry, just work as a parking lot attendant. But coffee and smoking are mandatory."

For Wa Ida, smoking and drinking coffee are simple but meaningful daily rituals. Both became a form of control over personal happiness. Despite the deep wounds and disappointments, there is no room in her heart for hate. When asked about her feelings towards her late husband, she firmly stated that there was no hatred-only acceptance.

Wa Ida's story shows that women's resilience does not always come in big or heroic forms, but in small daily decisions made independently. She not only survives, but lives life according to her own principles and choices.

The following is the result of the scenario created collectively with the Kalipasir women:

Title: *Gossip Yu*!!! (Lets Gossip)

Theater Script by Aulia Detha Amalia together with the mothers in Kalipasir, Cikini with stories from the lives they live. This scenario tells the story of the daily life of a busy urban village woman who takes care of her home, children, and serves her husband despite economic limitations. Conflict arises when the "angry mother" neighbor is chased by debt collectors because of large interest-bearing debts, triggering an argument with the "busy mother" and other residents. The initially tense situation ends with empathy, the debt is forgiven, assistance is provided, and the women share stories about the challenges of their roles. The story concludes with solidarity and the affirmation that women are the guardians of the home, family, and future dreams.

Sabar: "hidup gini-gini banget masak, nyuci, mandiin anak. (sedang menjemur cucian) " Suami S: "Buuu…"
Sabar: (hanya Tarik napas)
Suami S: Bu siapin makanan udah jam berapa nihh? "
Sabar: "iya pak bentar, sabar ya nak"

Sabar: "(suara anak kecil nangis) sebentar lagi ibu selesai"
Suami: "Bu airnya abis buuuu"
Suami: (keluar dengan keadaan rambut berbusa)
Sabar: "ya allah pak, sabar ini sebentar lagi "(mengambil ember dan masuk ke dalam rumah) Suami: (suami berangkat kerja)
"bu 30 ribu harus cukup belilauk pauk dan jangan lupa beli susu anak, hidup harusdisyukurin bu jangan ban yak ngeluh"
Tak lama kemudian terlihat ibu rempong yang menguping percakapan ibu S dan suaminya
Rempong: "Bisa-bisanya lo ya ngasih duit 30 ribu haruscukup, sana lu aja yang belanja biar lu tau harga cabe tuhberapa, belum lagi beli susu buat anak lu, klo lu ga sanggupbeliin susu anak lu, lu aja yang nyusuin"
Suami S: "Ah heboh aja lu tetangga, sana siapin sarapansuami lo"
Rempong: "Heh berani lo sama janda, suami gw tidur ga bangun-bangun sampe sekarang"
Sabar: "Udah-udah jangan berantem, hati-hati ya pak"
Suami S: "Udah bu masuk aja sana jangan gabung sama tuhibu, kerjaannya gossip mulu"
Rempong: "Kurang ajar lo ya" (sambal mengepalkan tangan)
Tak lama kemudian terdengar suara ibu-ibu yang sedang teriak
Pemarah: "Tolong-tolong" (sambil berlari)
Sabar: "Tenang-tenang ada apa bu?"
Pemarah: "Itu-itu ada yang mau culik saya"
Rempong: "Culik-culik mending cantik lu"
Terlihat depkolektor yang menghampiri ibu pemarah, namun ibu pemarah bersembunyi di balik badan ibu Sabar
Rempong: "Ini nih orangnya culik aja bang" (sambil mendorong ibu P ke hadapan depkolektor) Depkolektor: "Bu hutang tuh di bayar jangan menghindar, nanti matiny susah loh"
Pemarah: "Gamau saya ga akan bayar utangnya sampai kapanpun saya ga akan bayar hutangnya TITIK."
Sabar: "Sebentar-sebentar mari kita bicarakan secara baik-baik"
Depkolektor: "Jadi gini bu, si ibu P minjam uang sebesar 1 juta dan baru dikembalikan hanya 100 ribu, maka nya sayatagih terus karna udah jatuh tempo dan ibu ini gamau bayar"
Pemarah: "Eh jangan bohong ya, kan saya Cuma pinjam 500 knpa jadi satu juta, kamu nipu saya tau, emang kamupikir saya bodoh"
Rempong: "Buset 500 rb tuh bunga, bisa naik haji dah keluargalu, Namanya riba itu bang riba"
Sabar: "Yaallah kenapa dendanya bisa besar banget, ibu bisa ngutang sama Bank keliling?"
Pemarah: "Jadi gini bu, anak saya lagi sakit, suami saya pergi dari rumah sama perempuan lain dan saya baru aja anter anak saya yang kecil ke puskesmas. Saya bingung buat makan gimana akhirnya saya minjem di Bank keliling"
Rempong: "Tuhkan lelaki emang pada ga ngerti perannya, bisa-bisanya selingkuh dan ga kasih nafkah. Untung suami gua udah ditanah"
Sabar: "Hush bu gaboleh ngomong gitu, kita selesaikan secara baik-baik ya mpok depkolektor Sabar: "Mba kenapa ya utang nya kok jadi berbunga dan besar banget?"

Depkolektor: "Bu, saya disini hanya mengikuti prosedur, Cuma ini ibu yang ngutang gamau bayar eh malah marah-marah. Mangkanya saya kesel"
Sabar: "Loh dikata-katain, dikata-katain gimana mba???"
Depkolektor: "Nih ibu liat aja sendiri kalau ga percaya" (sambil menunjukan isi chat dengan si ibu P)
Sabar: "Astagfirullahaladzim bu, istighfar bu istighfar bu 100 kali, kenapa ibu kasar begini??"
Ibu pemarah hanya diam karena merasa malu, namun tiba-tiba saja menangis cerita mengeluarkan segala kesedihannya. Lalu mereka saling bertatapan satu sama lain, depkolektor mengeluarkan uang dari dompet.
Depkolektor: "Bu, saya minta maaf atas bunga yang besar, saya anggap lunas saja bu dan ini saya ada sedikit rezeki untuk bisa dipakai biaya sekolah, makan atau keperluan lainnya"
Akhirnya ibu pemarah menerima uang tersebut, namun ibu rempong yang jail terus saja meledek.
Rempong: "Dih enak jdi lo, udh ngutang di kasih duit pula, gw janda nih, lu gamau apa sedekah sama janda, rezeki luberlipat-lipat, jaminannya surga, bagi dlu seratus"
Sabar: "Hush ibu gaboleh begitu ga sopan"
Rempong: "Hehe maaf, bu jadi tugas kita sebagai perempuan banyak ye? Saya loh jadi gatau yang saya mau sebenernya apa. Kadang mikir kok berat banget. Dirumah harus jadi istri sama ibu yang baik, padahal seharian udah jadi karyawan yang baik, belum lagi kalau anak sama suami sakit, pasti yang disalain tuh emaknya, orang bakal bilang ga becus jaga anak. Dikira gampang kali ya ngurus beberapa hal dalam satu waktu"
Depkolektor: "Bener bu, coba deh pekerjaan apa yang engga pernah disentuh perempuan? Kadang suami saya kalau ada apa-apa juga Cuma bilang 'tanya ibu' padahal daia ada dirumah.
Sabar: "Kita semua sebagai perempuan pasti cape, tapi saya selalu ingat satu hal: perempuan itu engga Cuma jaga rumah, tapi juga jagain mimpi keluarganya. Kalau kita sebagai perempuan ga kuat, siapa yang bakal bikin anak punya masa depan lebih baik? Karena kalau saya berhenti, mimpi-mimpi itu juga selesai.
Pemarah; iya bener, kadang kita lupa, perempuan itu tulang punggung mimpi. Semua orang besandar pada kita. Dan kita tetap berdiri meski sering kali engga ada yang melihat seberapa berat yang kita pikul.
Ibu-ibu saling berpelukan hangat dan menguatkan satu sama lain
Depkolektor: "Yaudah bu kalau gtu saya pulang dulu ya, semoga kita selalu kuat dengan posisi dan anugerah kita sebagai perempuan"
Depkolektor itupun pergi, dan ibu-ibu pulang kerumah masing

Portrait of Kalipasir Village: Density, Accessibility, and Social Dynamics

Kalipasir Village, located in Cikini Urban Village, Central Jakarta, is one of the most densely populated urban villages with 3,155 residents. Although high density is one of its characteristics, the physical condition of this settlement cannot necessarily be equated with the slum image that is often attached to villages in other areas, such as some parts of North Jakarta. Instead, Kalipasir shows the face of a dynamic urban village, dense but relatively well-maintained housing.

The narrow spaces in Kalipasir function not only as mobility routes, but also as social and economic spaces. Along the side of the road, many residents sell food and daily necessities, creating a lively and interactive atmosphere. The function of the street in this village is multifunctional: as a place for pedestrian and motorcycle traffic, as a trading location, and as an informal meeting space between residents. When walking down the alleys of this village,

there is always a dynamic going on - whether it's motorcyclists passing by, children playing, or vendors offering food such as instant noodles, ice mix, and fried chicken.

In addition to residential functions, many houses also open rooms for rent as boarding houses. The village's strategic location-close to office areas, education centers, and arts centers such as Taman Ismail Marzuki-opens up additional economic opportunities for residents through the rental business. This phenomenon also enriches the social diversity in Kalipasir, with boarders from various backgrounds shaping the dynamics of the community.

The Kalipasir area reflects the social dynamics of a typical urban village in the center of Jakarta. Some of the main challenges faced by residents include:

1. Population Density: Kalipasir is a densely populated area, which results in narrow living spaces, a lack of green open spaces, and limited public facilities. This condition triggers social pressure between residents due to too close interaction and narrow space.
2. Cleanliness and Environment: Trash that accumulates around the river often pollutes the environment and triggers various diseases such as diarrhea and dengue fever. Lack of environmental management has a direct impact on residents' health.
3. Economic Conditions: Most residents work in the informal sector with uncertain income. This makes them vulnerable to economic pressures, difficulty accessing education and health services, and the risk of continued poverty.
4. Transportation and Congestion: Narrow roads that are often used for illegal parking and residents' activities cause congestion and disrupt daily mobility.
5. Social Inequality: Kalipasir is adjacent to the elite Menteng neighborhood. The stark social class differences sometimes create distance between residents and hinder social integration.
6. Security and Crime: The high density makes the area prone to theft and other petty crimes. To respond to this, residents have taken the initiative to set up a nightly ronda schedule. However, this effort has not yet been fully realized.

Expression Space and Social Dynamics in Kalipasir

The results of this process were then presented to the public through a program entitled “Pengalaman Warga, Spektakel Kota” (Citizens' Experiences, City Spectacle), which was held at the Wahyu Sihombing Theater, Taman Ismail Marzuki, Jalan Cikini Raya 73, Central Jakarta, on Wednesday, January 10, 2024, starting at 7:00 p.m. until finished.

The event featured a series of activities, including the theater performance, the launch of a podcast, and a public discussion themed “Present, Past, Our Issues.” This performance program marks the culmination of the collaborative journey with the residents of Kali Pasir, Cikini Village, who have been actively involved in the artistic training process. Through works born from their own experiences, voices, and stories, the residents present a unique perspective on life in an urban village. This moment also demonstrates how art can serve as a medium to connect communities, empower residents’ voices, and celebrate local identity within the ever-changing urban landscape. This is a link to a behind-the-scenes video of the process with the residents.
https://youtu.be/MQhfGRIDxiQ?si=D_p3Tq8b1SfKAcId



Figure 21 Mom from the village perform



Figure 22 Publication for the performance

Through the interaction process established during the Community Service activities in Kalipasir Village, an expression space has been formed that provides a place for residents to channel their aspirations and creativity, especially in the field of arts. This space is not only a place for art, but also a medium for identity articulation, social reflection, and strengthening the role of citizens.

This activity is designed to open up possibilities for Kalipasir residents both individually and collectively to assert their identity, both in the spatial (living space) and temporal (relationship with time and history) dimensions. Through community-based artistic expression, residents can build socio-cultural independence that is more in line with the reality of today's urban life. It is hoped that this space can develop sustainably and become part of the city's vibrant, organic and participatory cultural infrastructure.

Furthermore, this activity shows that art has a concrete social function. Art is not just aesthetics, but also a tool of social transformation that can strengthen citizen cohesion, open spaces for dialogue, and support the sustainability of urban community life. In the context of Kalipasir, citizen art activities also contribute to the production of urban space that is, how space is created, lived, and interpreted by the community.

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Multidimensional Analysis of the Integration of Chinese and Western Music in Guzheng: A Case Study of "Ding Feng Bo"

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Abstract

Since modern times, the continuous influx of Western musical ideas has had a profound impact on the art of Guzheng, which is not only reflected in performance techniques and work creation, but also in Guzheng education, cultural dissemination, aesthetic concepts, and other aspects. The Guzheng Concerto "Ding Feng Bo", as a modern Guzheng work, not only retains the essence of traditional Chinese music, but also cleverly integrates Western music elements. This article will use three research methods, namely music analysis, case study, and interview, to analyze the creative background, melody structure, performance techniques, and harmony direction of the music itself, explore the application of Chinese and Western music elements in the work, compare two performance cases, analyze the handling methods of two performers and their reflection of the integration of Chinese and Western music, interview guzheng performers, composers, and music scholars to understand their views and interpretations of the integration of Chinese and Western elements in "Ding Feng Bo", interview audiences to understand their acceptance and feelings of the integration of Chinese and Western elements in the work, and discuss how to achieve the integration of Chinese and Western music in the guzheng work "Ding Feng Bo", Explore and understand the new directions and possibilities arising from the fusion of Chinese and Western musical elements in guzheng music, and reveal the cultural significance of this fusion and its implications for modern music creation.

Keywords: Guzheng; Ding Feng Bo "; Integration of Chinese and Western Music

Introduction

The Guzheng Concerto "Ding Feng Bo" was created by the famous young Guzheng performer Mr. Deng Yiqun in 2015. Since its official publication, the work has won the third prize in the "National Excellent Guzheng Music Works Competition" at the Shanghai Graduate Art Academic Forum, thanks to its combination of technical, musical, and humanistic factors. This work is also a representative modern Guzheng concerto and has been selected as a contestant's entry in professional Guzheng competitions such as the China Music Golden Bell Award, CCTV China Instrumental Television Competition, and Wenhua Award.

The title of the work "Dingfengbo" is based on the poem "Dingfengbo · Don't Listen to the Sound of Beating Leaves through the Forest" written by Su Shi, a litterateur in the Northern Song Dynasty, in 1802. The poem uses literary techniques such as synaesthesia, pun, metaphor and contrast to describe a character in a coir raincoat and wearing straw sandals. The composer uses narrative music language and blends Western music colors to showcase the open-minded, heroic, and transcendent attitude expressed in the lyrics through the unique tone and performance techniques of the Guzheng. Through this, they express their optimistic and cheerful outlook on life after encountering setbacks and difficulties.

Research Objectives

Revealing the specific manifestations of the fusion of Chinese and Western elements in "Ding Feng Bo".

Scope of the Research

This study focuses on the performance videos of two performers since the publication of the original work and the self determined controversy in 2015, analyzing their performance videos. In addition, audience interviews will be conducted to understand their acceptance and feelings towards the fusion of Chinese and Western elements in the work after watching the videos.

Research Methodology

1. Literature research method:

Collect and analyze literature related to "Ding Feng Bo", including the composer's creative background, work analysis, and commentary articles. Refer to books, journal articles,dissertations, etc. to understand the research results of predecessors on "Ding Feng Bo".

2. Music analysis method:

A detailed analysis of the melody, harmony, rhythm, and performance techniques of "Ding Feng Bo". Through music score analysis, explore the specific application of Chinese and Western music elements in the work.

3. Case study method:

Select specific segments from "Ding Feng Bo", analyze its melody, harmony, rhythm, and performance techniques, and explore the specific manifestations of the integration of Chinese and Western music. Based on actual performance recordings, analyze the performer's handling methods and their reflection of the integration of Chinese and Western music.

4. Interview method:

Interview the audience to understand their acceptance and feelings towards the integration of Chinese and Western elements in the work.

Research Results

1.Fusion in Music

In the late 1980s, there was a trend in China's cultural circles to promote traditional Chinese studies and culture. In this special social context, artists rooted themselves in tradition and kept up with the times, learning from excellent Western creative concepts and exploring a diversified creative path. Guzheng music also increasingly tended towards the modern music context, and composers created music works belonging to this era in such an environment.

1.1 Integration of tuning and tuning

In the long process of historical development, the number of strings in the Guzheng has varied from few to many. During the Tang and Song dynasties, there were thirteen strings, and later it increased to sixteen, eighteen, twenty-one, and even more strings in the modulated Guzheng The most commonly used instrument at present is the 21 string zither, which provides a good performance space for the zither in the four octave range from high to low. After the 1980s, under the influence of the wave of reform and opening up, cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries have become increasingly widespread. In the collision of Chinese and Western music cultures, the three-dimensional nature of Western music, the richness of sound colors, and the diversity of creative techniques have deeply influenced contemporary Chinese composers. Many works are created by professional composers who use artificial tuning and tuning according to the needs of the works. Artificial mode "is a new mode that is different from traditional modes. It is defined in the" Basic Music Theory Tutorial "as" the

scale mode artificially created by composers in the actual creative process to express the needs of their works, which is called artificial mode "

The tuning scale of "Ding Feng Bo" (Figure 1) conforms to the pentatonic scale tonality of traditional Chinese music, with the C-palace system as the main tone of the work. The 12-21 strings in the middle and low ranges are arranged in a D-E-G-A-C arrangement, setting the tone for the entire piece and preserving the traditional charm of Guzheng music. In the 11-1 string of the high pitched section, the first and seventh strings have been added with a palace change B, and the arrangement has been changed to B-C-D-E-G-A. This changes the mode of the section to a six tone scale, without affecting its main C-palace mode. The addition of two palace change scales makes the modulation technique of the piece more flexible, breaking the traditional "single tone" situation in the work. This creates a tonal change in the internal structure of the work, presenting a richer musical color compared to traditional five tone Guzheng works and providing favorable conditions for the integration of Western music elements.

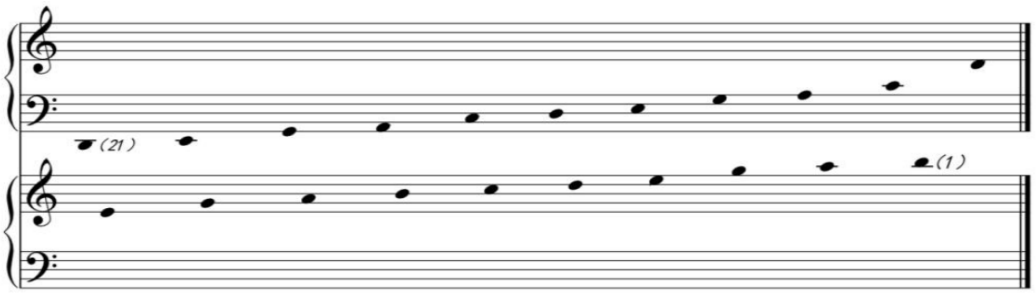


Figure 1

1.2 Integration of Performance Techniques

The traditional Guzheng and piano, as instruments representing the West and the East respectively, have complex and distinctive playing techniques. The complexity of piano playing techniques is reflected in its wide range of keyboards and varied keystrokes. Pianists use different finger techniques to play scales, arpeggios, octaves, whorls, chords, and other techniques to showcase the richness and dynamic changes of music. The complexity of Guzheng playing techniques is reflected in its unique coordination between left and right hands. In Guzheng performance, coordination between the left and right hands is particularly important. The left hand is responsible for pressing the strings on the left side of the zither to change the pitch, while the right hand is responsible for plucking the strings on the right side of the zither to produce sound. The tacit coordination between the two is the key to playing beautiful music.

In terms of performance techniques, "Ding Feng Bo" actively absorbs the performance experience of Western musical instruments such as piano. For example, it borrows the performance techniques of piano and boldly adds the finger sequence technique of piano to the work. The right hand plays the melody lines through finger sequence, while the left hand is responsible for changing the melody pitch according to the strings (Figure 2). It uses a combination of various performance techniques such as kneading and chanting to change the pitch while singing the melody lines.



Figure 2

Obviously, this piece of music is no longer confined to the simple techniques of rubbing, chanting, pressing, sliding, and trembling in traditional zither music, but uses composite techniques to combine traditional techniques with Western instrument playing techniques, pioneering the use of left-hand rhyme and right-hand zither singing. This not only develops the playing techniques of the zither, but also enriches the sound color of the zither.

2. Integration in Performance

The author believes that after fully understanding the composer's intention of fusion in creation, only by deeply analyzing the fusion in performance can we better serve the presentation of the work. So, in addition to analyzing the integration of the work itself, it is also necessary to conduct a deep analysis of the character images depicted in the work, which requires the use of the concept of "synesthesia" in music psychology.

Synesthesia is defined in music psychology as the psychological activity in which one sensation triggers another sensation. Excluding the composer's own intention, the notes on the spectrum cannot independently form an auditory and visual sensation and form a synesthetic relationship with the audience. Therefore, the work itself cannot directly convey the story plot of the described object to the audience. This must be achieved through the performer's interpretation of the work and the audience's perception of what they hear and see. In other words, synesthesia plays a mediating role.

The author selected the video version of Deng Yiqun's "Yong" - Young Performer Series Concert in 2024 (Figure 3) and the version of Cheng Haoru's "Ding Feng Bo" performance at Cheng Haoru's Master's Guzheng Graduation Solo Concert in 2018 (Figure 4) as different versions of performance videos for comparison, and conducted a deep analysis of the fusion in performance from the perspective of the audience.



Figure 3



Figure 4

2.1 Visual Dimension

The art of playing Guzheng is presented on stage, bringing the audience a dual sensory experience of auditory and visual senses. In the performance of a piece of music, the performer not only needs solid basic skills, but also appropriate body movements to express the rich emotions and connotations of the work.The author will summarize the fusion differences between the two versions from a visual perspective.

The body language characteristics of Deng Yiqun's performance version: Deng Yiqun's state is natural during performance, and his body language is relatively concise. In the introduction

and slow paced parts, his movements are not exaggerated and just right. Nodding in conjunction with pressing the tone, as if feeling melancholy and lamenting. Entering the small fast-paced, fast-paced, and fast-paced sections, his body movements are smaller, showing his calm and composed state of mind in the fast-paced segments. The rush ended with a scraping sound, and his arm fell slowly after hovering, with his head slightly tilted back, indicating a change in mood. At the end of the Huacai section, he uses his waist to drive the strength of his head and arms, creating a stunning sound effect. In the slow paced reproduction part, his body movements are stretched out, showing a broad-minded and transcendent demeanor after experiencing wind and rain.

The body language characteristics of Cheng Haoru's performance version: Cheng Haoru has strong explosive power when playing, mainly focusing on his arms and head, and can control his body movements freely. In the introduction, her sweeping and scraping movements have a large amplitude, allowing the listener to quickly enter the musical mood. In the slow section, her arm movements are relatively large, using her arms to drive her fingers to play, with clear undulations resembling sighs. The small fast-paced board, fast-paced board, and sharp board parts have strong sweeping power, allowing viewers to feel the fierce wind and rain both auditory and visual. In the colorful part, the sweeping arm movements are clean and sharp, and the breathing is short yet powerful. The processing of the slow board reproduction part has a certain degree of relaxation, and compared to the previous slow board part, the amplitude of the action has been reduced, reflecting transparency and calmness.

Overall, Deng Yiqun's performance focuses more on expressing the original emotional intention of the work, with relatively concise and direct use of body language and techniques, emphasizing the logical and expressive power of the music itself; Cheng Haoru incorporates more Western music elements on the basis of the original song's artistic conception, with rich and exaggerated body language and more personalized and expressive techniques, allowing the audience to feel a stronger emotional impact both visually and auditory.

2.2 Auditory Dimension

Deng Yiqun's performance version is based on the score and lasts for 13 minutes and 35 seconds. Cheng Haoru's performance version is basically consistent with the original score in terms of paragraph arrangement, with only modifications made to the ending section, replacing sections 207-216 with sections 60-74 of the slow tempo, increasing the volume of the ending section, and extending the performance time to 13 minutes and 40 seconds. The two performers have different speed controls for each section (Figure 5), reflecting their different perceptions and interpretations of the music.

		Deng Yiqun	Cheng Haoru
Time		2024.05.05	2018.05.20
Location		Wuxi grand theatre	Central Conservatory of Music
Combination		Guzheng and Ethnic Orchestra	Guzheng and Piano
Duration		13' 35"	13' 40"
Segment Duration	Introduzione	2' 33"	2' 54"
	Lento	3' 19"	3' 14"
	Rubato	38"	41"
	Allegretto	1' 20"	1' 14"

	Allergo	23"	25"
	Presto	50"	52"
	Largo	30"	32"
	Cadenza	1' 20"	1' 33"
	Lento	52"	45"
	Coda	1' 50"	1' 30"

Figure 5

From an auditory perspective, Deng Yiqun's performance version has a more rational processing of speed, basically playing according to the timing and rhythm of the notes on the sheet, and the speed of each section is precisely controlled by him. Cheng Haoru's performance version speed processing has its personalized aspect. In the introduction, Deng Yiqun's speed processing is slightly slower, and there is appropriate blank space between musical phrases, expressing the introduction with free rhythm and flexible speed clearly and cleanly. Cheng Haoru played the version at a slightly faster speed, and made appropriate adjustments while maintaining the original score style. In the 13th bar, she changed the four note group in the bass region to play with her left hand in the disordered tone region on the left side of the zither code, which to some extent shortened the duration of the introduction.

In Rubato, the speed processing of Deng Yiqun's version is slightly faster than that of Cheng Haoru's version. The different levels of speed in the slow board advance significantly and are relatively compact, making the smooth slow board flow. The starting speed of Cheng Haoru's version is slightly slower, the melody lines are smooth, the tone is long, and the glissando is gradually slowed down. The delicate emotional processing shows a sad mood.

In Allegretto, the starting speed of Deng Yiqun's version is 160 beats per minute, which is slightly delayed and focuses on expressing sadness and emotions. In the first beat of the 62nd section, Deng Yiqun's version played as a gentle rolling of the strings, without emphasizing it, while Cheng Haoru's version played as a glide, extending the rhythm. In the 77-78 sections of the scattered board, Deng Yiqun played a version with fast vibrato speed, large amplitude, and average frequency after sliding up. The vibrato in Cheng Haoru's version is rich in variation, with the amplitude of the vibrato after sliding up increasing from deep to shallow and the frequency increasing from sparse to dense.

From this, it can be seen that as a composer, Deng Yiqun's performance pays more attention to the expression of the original emotional intention of the work, and the fusion of Chinese and Western music is reflected in the precise combination of traditional guzheng techniques and modern harmony. For example, in the introduction, the combination of piano and guzheng is natural and smooth, showcasing the harmonious unity of Chinese and Western instruments. Cheng Haoru's performance is more dramatic in terms of the fusion of Chinese and Western music, combining the expressive power of Western modern music with the traditional charm of the guzheng through exaggerated changes in intensity and rich tone processing. For example, in the fast-paced section, a strong visual effect of wind and rain is created through intense contrast and rapid scraping techniques.

3. Visual Fusion

The visual effect of the stage plays a driving role in the narrative presentation of music performance. Mainly reflected in stage design, costumes, scenery, lighting, and other aspects, these stage effects enhance the expressive and appreciative power of music performance, making it easier for the audience to immerse themselves in the narrative atmosphere created by

the performer. The two video versions compared in this article are mainly analyzed and compared in terms of costumes, band composition, and performance venues.

3.1 Costume

The performance costumes on stage not only add visual effects, but also help performers better convey emotions and tell stories, completing the shaping of musical images.

From the performance costumes of the two performers (Figures 6-7), Deng Yiqun wore a white standing collar buckle Zhongshan suit during the solo concert, and embroidered the designed pattern on the fabric with embroidery under the collar. The style incorporates a lot of Chinese elements. The term 'white' precisely corresponds to the poet Su Shi's indifferent attitude towards fame and fortune, and also has a certain degree of coherence in the narrative plot of the music.

Cheng Haoru wore a blue sleeveless chiffon gown during her master's graduation concert performance. The upper body of the gown was layered according to the thickness of the chiffon and decorated with rhinestones and pearls. Blue "is a cool color tone, echoing the clear blue sky after the thunderstorm and haze dissipate in the poem.



Figure 6

From the overall stage effect, whether it is piano accompaniment or band accompaniment, the accompanists all use dark tones in their costumes, and Deng Yiqun's white performance costume and Cheng Haoru's blue performance costume are both highlighted, so the overall stage effect is clear and layered (Figure 7).



Figure 7

3.2 Band Composition

In Cheng Haoru's master's graduation concert, she used a piano as accompaniment for "Ding Feng Bo", placing the piano and guzheng in the center position. This concise layout focused the audience's attention on the performer and the music itself. The interaction between the piano

and the soloist is intimate and intuitive, allowing the audience to clearly see every movement and expression of the performer, enhancing the infectious power of the music.

In Deng Yiqun's series of concerts for young musicians, he used a large orchestra as accompaniment for "Ding Feng Bo". The stage accompanied by a large orchestra usually requires a large space to accommodate numerous instruments and performers, with each instrument group distributed in different positions, forming a clear visual effect. This grand lineup and rich visual layers not only enhance the symphonic nature of the music, but also create a spectacular visual impact. During the performance, the playing movements and expressions of each instrument group are rich and diverse, creating a dynamic stage effect that makes the audience feel as if they are immersed in a sea of music.

From a visual perspective, piano accompaniment and orchestral accompaniment each have their own unique visual effects. Cheng Haoru chose a simple and focused stage layout with piano accompaniment, making it easier for the audience to focus on the performer and the music itself, creating a warm and delicate atmosphere, suitable for small-scale performances as a master's solo concert. Deng Yiqun's stage, accompanied by a large orchestra, presents a grand and rich visual level. Through a grand lineup and dynamic stage effects, it creates a spectacular visual impact, suitable for large-scale performances that combine a single instrument with symphonies. Both performers achieved the best stage visual effect and musical expression based on the style, emotional needs, and specific circumstances of the performance.

Discussion

The work is inspired by Su Shi's poem "Ding Feng Bo" and combines traditional Chinese culture with modern Western music techniques. This cultural fusion not only enriches the artistic connotation of the works, but also reflects the composer's inheritance and innovation of traditional Chinese culture. Traditional guzheng works mainly focus on depicting natural landscapes or traditional emotions, while "Ding Feng Bo" uses a combination of Chinese and Western techniques to better express complex emotions and modern artistic conception. Various special sound simulation techniques are used in the works, such as the arpeggios of the two hand sixteenth note in the rapid board imitating the scene of pouring rain, and techniques such as sweeping, sweeping strings, and scraping the disordered sound area on the left side of the zheng code to simulate the strong atmosphere of wind and rain. The use of these sound effects makes the work more visually appealing and infectious to the ear.

The poem 'Ding Feng Bo' not only showcases Su Shi's broad mindedness and composure in music, but also conveys the composer's own state of mind when facing difficulties through music. The depth and authenticity of this emotional expression make the work more artistically infectious and thought-provoking. In terms of musical expression, the work combines the artistic conception of traditional Chinese music with the emotional expression of Western music, showcasing Su Shi's open-minded and composed attitude towards life when facing difficulties through music. This expression not only reflects the connotation of traditional Chinese culture, but also meets the emotional needs of modern people.

These feelings reflect the unique charm of the fusion of Chinese and Western elements, emotional expression, and performance techniques in "Ding Feng Bo", as well as the personalized understanding and resonance of different audiences towards the musical works.

Conclusion

From this, it can be seen that "Ding Feng Bo" showcases cultural diversity and inclusiveness through the integration of Chinese and Western music. This integration not only enriches the forms of musical expression, but also promotes cultural exchange and dialogue between the East and the West. The success of this song provides an important enlightenment for modern

music creation: on the basis of inheriting the tradition, we can boldly absorb the essence of foreign culture, so that we can not only create works with a sense of the times, but also promote the innovation and development of music art.

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Beyond the Classroom: Exploring Collaborative Learning and Student-Lecturer Dynamics in Practice-Based Design Festival

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Abstract

This study explores Vietnam's National Architecture Student Festival as a model of collaborative, practice-based learning in design education, focusing on the dynamic partnership between students and lecturers. The festival brings together participants from various universities to engage in intensive, hands-on design challenges, fostering a unique environment where investigation, creative proposals, and learning function as interconnected processes. By examining how participants co-create, exchange knowledge, and navigate creative problem-solving within the festival setting, this study frames the event as a living laboratory for artistic research and community-driven design. It investigates how experiential, practice-based approaches strengthen design education, encouraging adaptability, innovation, and critical thinking. This research employs a qualitative, reflective approach, drawing on the author's first-hand experience at the 2024 festival in Hue, Vietnam. Primary methods include reflective inquiry – analysing personal observations and interactions – and semi-structured interviews with participating students and lecturers to capture diverse perspectives on collaboration and creative processes. Additionally, a review of festival materials will provide further context on projects and methodologies. The findings will contribute to discussions on artistic research, participatory education, and creative communities, offering insights into how collaborative learning models can be applied beyond the festival context. By positioning the festival as a site of artistic and architectural research, this paper aligns primarily with the theme of "Learning to Create with Communities", illustrating how multiple agents across education, community engagement, and creative practice can work together to shape more engaged, resilient, and innovative creative environments.

Keywords: collaborative learning, design education, practice-based pedagogy, student-lecturer collaboration, student festival

Introduction

Architectural education in Southeast Asia is increasingly experimenting with inter-institutional and interdisciplinary learning models. One notable example is the National Architecture Student Festival of Vietnam, a biannual event bringing together hundreds of students, lecturers, and experts from across the country for site-based design challenges and collaborative learning. This paper examines the dynamics of such collaboration through the perspectives of educators and students who participated in the 14th edition of the festival.

Background and Context

The 14th National Architecture Student Festival took place in Hue, Vietnam, in April 2024, under the theme "Hue – Youth with Heritage". Co-organised by the Vietnam Association of Architects and the University of Sciences – Hue University, it gathered over 700 students from 29 universities. Multidisciplinary and inter-institutional teams competed in five main fields: Architectural Design, Urban Design, Graphic Design, Illustration and Drawing, and Photography, alongside cultural and academic activities.

Beyond the competitive element, the festival acted as an intensive learning environment fostering rapid, collaborative, and experimental design-making. As a guest lecturer and team mentor, the author engaged in both formal and informal exchanges, contributing to competition preparations and supporting student groups.

Purpose of this Research

This study investigates how collaborative learning develops in short-term creative events involving diverse institutions and disciplines. It focuses on the pedagogical value, creative practice, and transformations that occur when students are placed in new contexts with complex briefs and mixed teams. The research combines the author's autoethnographic reflections as a mentor with semi-structured interviews with students and staff, framed through three theoretical lenses: Expansive Learning, Cognitive Apprenticeship, and Design-Based Learning.

Significance and Research Gap

Festivals and design workshops are widely used in creative education but remain under-explored as transformative pedagogical spaces in Southeast Asia. Existing literature tends to address outputs or organisational aspects rather than the collaborative dynamics and learning processes experienced by participants. This research addresses that gap by integrating facilitator and participant perspectives to reveal how such events can accelerate skill-building, identity formation, and cross-institutional peer learning.

Theoretical Framework

This research draws upon three interrelated theoretical perspectives to interpret the collaborative and learning experiences observed during the events of the aforementioned festival: Expansive Learning, Cognitive Apprenticeship, and Design-Based Learning. Each of these frameworks offers a distinct yet complementary lens for understanding how students and lecturers engaged with knowledge, creativity, and identity formation within a highly dynamic and interdisciplinary setting.

Expansive Learning and Transformative Collaboration

Developed by Engestrom (1987), Expansive Learning emerges from activity theory and focuses on how individuals and groups reconceptualise their activity systems in response to contradictions, tensions, or novel challenges. It is particularly suited to analysing collective learning in contexts where fixed roles, disciplines, and institutional structures are suspended or reconfigured – such as in inter-university, cross-disciplinary festivals.

In the case of the Festival, students were placed in mixed teams composed of peers from different universities, disciplines, and years of study, forcing them to negotiate unfamiliar social, professional, and institutional boundaries. These interactions catalysed transformations in their learning identities, encouraging students to rethink their positions not only as designers but also as collaborators and cultural agents. Through participation in thematic competitions in a new context, students moved beyond their accustomed roles, encountering the need to adjust leadership dynamics, reinterpret heritage through creative forms, and develop shared goals with unfamiliar peers. These processes reflect key features of expansive learning, including boundary crossing, collective agency, and new forms of practice (Engeström & Sannino, 2010).

Cognitive Apprenticeship and Peer Learning

The second theoretical anchor is Cognitive Apprenticeship, as introduced by Collins, Brown, and Newman (1989). This model focuses on how complex skills and problem-solving are taught through modelling, scaffolding, and gradual transfer of responsibility from expert to learner. Unlike traditional apprenticeships, cognitive apprenticeship emphasises making thinking visible, encouraging articulation, reflection, and social negotiation of meaning.

In the Festival setting, mentorship was not focused on top-down instruction but emerged dynamically through peer-to-peer interaction, student leadership, and informal mentoring that did not impose ideas but suggested critical thinking instead. Students openly shared potential solutions, sketched in real time, and negotiated design choices in an iterative, dialogic manner. The presence of lecturers played a facilitative rather than directive role, often stepping back to allow students to lead. The fluid structure of the event allowed for reciprocal teaching moments, in which senior students guided juniors, and skills were distributed across disciplinary boundaries – mirroring the conditions described in the cognitive apprenticeship model.

Design-Based Learning in Compressed Collaborative Contexts

The third conceptual strand is Design-Based Learning (DBL), which emphasises learning through iterative cycles of ideation, prototyping, critique, and reflection within real-world or authentic design problems (Kolodner et al., 2003). DBL provides an apt lens for interpreting how time-constrained, competition-driven environments still support deep engagement with creative processes.

In this Festival, the compressed timeframe of each live competition demanded rapid synthesis of ideas, collective decision-making, and distributed responsibilities. Although this intensity introduced stress and sometimes unfinished outcomes, it also promoted high levels of engagement, improvisation, and self-organisation. The teams often began with sketching and site analysis, followed by multiple rounds of conceptual development, eventually producing tangible artefacts –urban plans, architectural models, illustrations, photographs, and graphic compositions. This form of fast-paced design work aligns with DBL's emphasis on doing, reflecting, revising, and learning through action. It also foregrounds how collaboration itself becomes a condition for creativity, particularly when students must negotiate how to visually and conceptually integrate distinct contributions.

Integrative Lens for Interpretation

These three frameworks are not treated in isolation but are employed in concert to interpret the data generated through autoethnographic reflection and student interviews. Expansive Learning helps trace how identities and roles shift across institutional and cultural boundaries; Cognitive Apprenticeship clarifies the mentoring and peer-learning dynamics; and Design-Based Learning captures the iterative, collaborative making process in an event-based, real-world context. Together, they allow for a multi-layered reading of how creativity, pedagogy, and professional approaches intersect during ephemeral yet impactful events like architecture student festivals.

Methodology and Approach

Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretivist design, combining autoethnographic observation and reflection with semi-structured interviews to explore how architecture students and educators experience collaborative, interdisciplinary, and creative learning in the context of the Hue 2024 Festival. Drawing from models of artistic research, the study also aligns with the logic of practice-led inquiry where the event itself becomes a case for investigating educational and creative dynamics (Candy, 2006).

The research is positioned within alternative formats of inquiry, incorporating reflective practice, participatory observation, and dialogical knowledge production. As such, it does not aim to generalise across all design education contexts, but rather to offer rich, situated insight into how learning and collaboration unfold within design events. The analysis is theory-informed yet grounded in empirical detail, with particular attention to how students navigate boundaries – disciplinary, institutional, and social – through creative work. As shown

in Figure 1, the festival's competition working space was accessible and easy to document without intrusion or alteration of the student behaviour, allowing students focus on producing their designs and freely undertaking interactions with peers.

Figure 1: *Festival Competition Teams in Their Classroom.* Copyright: author of this research.



Data Collection

Two complementary sources of data inform the study:

Reflective Practice (Autoethnographic Report)

The researcher participated in the Festival as a guest lecturer and mentor, engaging directly with students and staff across several days of workshops, meetings, competition preparation, and informal exchanges. Multiple sources such as notes, sketches, photographs, and post-event reflections were collected and thematically organised. This self-reflective process follows the principles of analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006), where the researcher critically engages with their own role and experience as data.

Semi-Structured Interviews with Participants

Interviews were designed to capture lecturer and student perspectives on collaboration, learning, creativity, and the negotiation of roles. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants from different universities, ages, nationalities, roles, and specialisations. Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol based on themes derived from the theoretical framework and reflective findings. Interviews were conducted in online, recorded, and transcribed for analysis.

Both data sources were collected with informed consent, and participants were anonymised in reporting to maintain ethical research standards.

Data Analysis

Data analysis follows a thematic approach, suitable for synthesising insights from both autoethnographic and interview materials. The reflective practice report was first coded inductively to surface key moments, tensions, and patterns in the researcher's experience. Themes such as boundary crossing, peer mentoring, disciplinary hybridity, and collaborative design processes emerged.

These preliminary themes informed the coding of the interview transcripts, allowing for a recursive process of comparison and refinement across data sources. Thematic categories were iteratively developed, defined, and deepened until they were optimal for cross-validation between the two methods. This method aims not to quantify, but to provide grounded

interpretations of how both lecturers and students make sense of the design practice, learning, and collaboration in the specific context of the festival.

The analytical process is also informed by the three theoretical lenses presented in Chapter 2. Themes are examined not only descriptively but through the lens of the three key theories studies, offering a layered and critical reading of both student and lecturer experiences.

Results and Findings

Insights from Reflective Autoethnography

This section presents thematised insights derived from the researcher's reflective engagement with the festival. As a guest lecturer and mentor, the author observed and participated in design workshops, student mentoring sessions, pre-competition meetings, and social activities across the five-day event. The reflective account, developed using analytic autoethnographic methods, surfaces key moments that illustrate the dynamics of hybrid design learning in a highly compressed design environment. These are interpreted through the lenses of the theoretical frameworks proposed in Chapters 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3.

Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries and Expanding Perspectives

One of the most striking dynamics at the Festival was the students' frequent boundary crossing – both disciplinary and conceptual. While the competition categories were formally divided (e.g., architecture, urban design, illustration, photography, graphic design), students often subverted these boundaries through interdisciplinary experimentation. Architectural models adopted sculptural forms; illustration entries resembled fine-art paintings; photography submissions integrated graphic design techniques; and graphic pieces were enriched with architectural or site-responsive motifs. On Figure 2 below is shown an example of one the participants who applied unique trans-disciplinary approaches, by using fine-arts-related painting techniques and acrylic mediums, often disregarded in architectural and urban planning representations such as master plans, which often utilise technical drawings, predominantly built based on line systems and limited presence of artistic elements such as colour, art style, brushwork, etc.

Figure 2: *Example of Student Works.* Copyright: author of this research.



As theorised in Section 2.1, these moments reflect expansive learning through role shifts and boundary-crossing, whereby learners transform their activity system through collaboration and innovation. The Festival offered a temporary "third space" (Gutierrez, 2008) in which institutional constraints – such as assessment rubrics, course modules, or departmental divisions – were suspended, allowing students to co-create shared meanings around the theme of "heritage". Notably, students also redefined the idea of heritage itself: some adopted deeply humanistic perspectives, centring communities and memory; others rendered heritage through speculative, futuristic, or technologically mediated lenses. In doing so, they blurred not only disciplinary lines, but also temporal, cultural, and philosophical boundaries.

Mentoring as Embedded Cognitive Apprenticeship

Within teams, informal mentoring and peer-based apprenticeship emerged organically. As students came from different universities, years of study, and specialist backgrounds, their skills and levels of confidence varied. Older or more technically proficient students frequently supported others in tasks such as team leadership and planning, while other students focused on digital production or model-making. Beyond technical assistance, some also provided strategic direction, facilitating group decisions or mediating conceptual debates. This dynamic aligns with Cognitive Apprenticeship models (Collins et al., 1989), where learning is scaffolded not through top-down instruction, but by guided participation and mutual observation.

Moreover, the researcher's role as a mentor embedded within the process, rather than an evaluator external to it, further contributed to this ecology of support. Informal discussions often occurred outside formal sessions – during meals, cultural visits, or while walking to events – highlighting the porous nature of learning environments during intensive festivals. These unstructured exchanges not only strengthened interpersonal bonds but also served as moments of reflection-in-action for both students and their mentors.

Testing Ideas Through Iteration and Feedback

A key pedagogical feature of the pre-competition period was the emphasis on rapid iteration. Students engaged in frequent sketching, brainstorming, and physical prototyping, especially in the early stages of the projects. The mentor observed how these sketches functioned as mediating artefacts, enabling teams to externalise ideas, negotiate meaning, and arrive at collective design directions. Even teams working in illustration or photography used drawing as a means to ideate or storyboard their concepts, and had intense discussions on how to select and elaborate a common visual project based on individual contributions.

Students appeared largely resilient in the face of feedback or critique, even when ideas were questioned or redirected. This can be attributed partly to the cultural tone of Vietnamese education – marked by humility and kindness – but also to the Festival's framing as a non-curricular learning space rather than a purely assessable one. Although only few prizes were awarded across 25 teams from 29 universities, the atmosphere remained celebratory and inclusive throughout the event. The closing ceremony, while highlighting winners, also reaffirmed participation, camaraderie, and personal growth as central outcomes.

These practices reflect a Design-Based Learning ethos (Kolodner et al., 2003), where knowledge is developed through making, testing, feedback, and revision within authentic contexts. Students' willingness to try new media, adapt their processes, and rethink their ideas in response to suggestions is emblematic of this mindset.

Social and Spatial Learning Conditions

Finally, the Festival's spatial and social setting shaped the learning ecology in significant ways. Hosted in the culturally rich city of Hue, with many activities taking place in historical venues, the festival itself became an experiential classroom. Informal learning occurred not only in conference rooms and classrooms, but also during site visits, meals, exhibitions, and social outings. The absence of rigid institutional boundaries allowed students and mentors to share space and time in fluid, immersive ways.

This open-ended format fostered community building, intercultural exchange, and a sense of collective ownership over the creative process. From the perspective of the reflective researcher, these conditions enabled the emergence of a temporary learning community: a site where shared values, practices, and goals were negotiated and embodied through design.

Insights from Interviews

The analysis of interviews with five participants from the festival – including students and lecturers from Thailand, Vietnam, and Germany – revealed a rich and multifaceted perspective on the learning, collaboration, and pedagogical value of the event. Responses across the 17-question framework underscored how the event fostered experiential learning, intercultural exchange, and professional development. These insights help clarify the perceived benefits and areas for improvement of the festival as a practice-based learning space.

One of the most frequently cited outcomes was the value of teamwork and collaborative learning. Participants across backgrounds emphasized how design solutions emerged not from individual efforts but from group dialogue. A student noted: "Everyone helped and gave a hand with any part they are given." This emphasis on shared responsibility and fluid task distribution illustrates the festival's potential to mirror real-world collaborative design contexts.

The unpredictability of the team formation process became an important factor in shaping participant experiences. As one student recalled, "Even when we arrived, we had no idea who we would team up with. Everything was kept a secret. However, once formed, we interacted openly and supported each other". This element of surprise provided an authentic test of adaptability and collaboration skills, encouraging participants to establish rapport quickly and work effectively with unfamiliar peers.

Several interviewees also pointed to the importance of learning from others, both formally and informally. The lecturer reflected: "valuable insights from other participants at the festival, such as effective teamwork methods, spatial composition thinking, presentation skills, and breakthrough ideas." Such observations show how the festival functioned as a dynamic site of peer learning, where exposure to different approaches and perspectives enriched participants' own thinking.

For some, the event prompted self-discovery and reflection on personal development. One student shared: "Through these interactions and this journey, I gained new quality friendships, and new corridors of knowledge were opened up." Similarly, one of the lecturers observed a cultural contrast in how seriously students and universities approached the competition: "We encourage them to go, network, have a meaningful time... but in Vietnam, it's much more of a competitive market." These reflections highlight both the formative impact of the experience and the different educational expectations across countries.

The interviewees also acknowledged concrete impacts on their professional or academic practice. A lecturer reported adapting to team-based work environments with more openness and awareness of diverse design thinking. Another lecturer indicated that the experience directly informed curricular revisions: "after the festival, we redesigned our programme to emphasise hand drawing skills". Based on the lecturer's experience in

education, there was a trend of shifting towards more technical and software-based education. However, witnessing the festival highlighted the effectiveness of direct visual expression, it inspired a renewed emphasis on these techniques as vital tools for creativity and communication, prompting him to advocate for their reintegration into their university educational program.

Cross-cutting Themes

When juxtaposing the personal reflections offered in Section 4.1 with the interview data analysed above, a series of interconnected themes emerge that cut across roles, national contexts, and experiences. These themes offer a more composite understanding of the pedagogical and socio-cultural implications of the Festival, reinforcing and sometimes challenging insights derived from the author's own participant observation.

The tension between collaboration and competition

A striking theme emerging across the interviews is the dual character of the Festival as both a site of cooperation and a space of institutional prestige. As shown on Figure 3, students brought their institutional pride, as they were a selected minority of their home study centre, by chanting their slogans, waving their flags, and displaying ownership and belonging at any occasion. While on interviews students repeatedly emphasised the importance of collective effort, some lecturers such as interviewee D identified the strong competitive drive embedded in the Vietnamese educational context.

This contrasted with his own university's initial positioning: "We encourage them to go, connect with students, have a meaningful experience. Which is different." This gap between expectations of festivity versus competition mirrors the author's own reflection on the Festival's ambiguous identity, oscillating between celebration and performative pressure.

Figure 3: *Students Waving Their University Flags.* Copyright: author of this research.



The role of intercultural learning

Participants across all roles acknowledged the intercultural dimension of the Festival as one of its most enriching elements. The student interviewee E described the experience as "a connection of intellect and knowledge values," highlighting the informal learning fostered through cultural immersion and shared experience. Similarly, the author's reflection in Section 4.1 stressed how being a non-Vietnamese academic in the Vietnamese context opened unexpected avenues for boundary-crossing collaboration and insight.

Temporal intensity and its pedagogical effects

Many students voiced concerns about the short time frame for meaningful design development. The student participant A noted, “two days might be so short for designing anything with this amount of people in each group,” a sentiment also echoed in the reflective report where the author expressed ambivalence about the accelerated rhythm of events and its implications for deep learning. This temporal compression may enhance bonding and experiential momentum, yet limit reflective scaffolding and critical processing. As shown on Figure 4 and 5, the students distributed the layouts occupying most of the available desks (even the floor) and got fully hands-on, dedicating all their efforts to complete the task on time and polishing the presentation until the very last minute.

Figure 4, 5: *Students Finalising Their Work.* Copyright: author of this research.



Self-awareness through exposure

Several interviewees described gaining clarity about their own abilities and aspirations through the process of working in high-pressure, multidisciplinary, and multicultural teams. The lecturer interviewee C shared that “I became more aware of my own strengths and weaknesses… and gained a clearer vision of my future career path.” This echoes the author’s own insight about "being seen while seeing others," underlining how exposure to alternative ways of designing and presenting work can produce heightened self-awareness and a shift in self-perception.

Learning as relational practice

Both the reflective report and the interviews suggest that the most enduring learning outcomes were relational rather than technical. Several students described how new friendships, team dynamics, and moments of mutual help shaped their understanding of architectural practice. The student participant E articulated this as stepping into "a new phase of confidence," facilitated by collective achievement and intercultural exchange. The author similarly foregrounded relationality as a core mode of participation, in contrast to more hierarchical or task-oriented modes of learning.

Participants consistently highlighted the willingness of team members to contribute beyond their primary skill set. One student reflected, “The thing I learned most was how they listened and discussed together for the greatest idea”. This behaviour illustrates the fluidity of contribution across disciplinary boundaries and aligns with the principles of Expansive Learning, where collaborative processes are redefined through mutual support and shared responsibility.

Implications for institutional change

One of the most powerful cross-cutting observations came from the lecturer interviewee D, who acknowledged that participation in the Festival directly informed curriculum redesign at his university: "We redesigned our programme actually to emphasise hand drawing skills. Artistic skills more." This institutional responsiveness contrasts with some of the author's own frustrations about the difficulty of converting ephemeral event experiences into structural learning reforms, as discussed in Section 4.1. Nevertheless, both voices point to the potential of such Festivals to act as triggers for rethinking design pedagogy and curricular priorities.

Discussion

One of the central observations concerns the coexistence of collaboration and competition as defining logics of the Festival. As highlighted in both the author's reflective practice and interview data, participants were required to shift quickly between roles: performer, peer, competitor, co-designer, and guest. This aligns with the notion of expansive learning, where learning emerged through negotiating contradictions and co-creating new forms of activity. The tension between festivity and institutional rivalry, for example, created a learning environment that was improvisational and situated, where cultural norms and disciplinary boundaries were temporarily suspended or reconfigured.

Furthermore, the Festival exemplified many features of cognitive apprenticeship, particularly through its emphasis on modelling, coaching, and articulation. Senior students, teachers, and even international guests served as informal mentors, while the fast-paced project work required public demonstration of skills, collaborative problem-solving, and iterative feedback loops. The compressed timeframe made these elements highly visible, yet also raised concerns – especially among students – about the depth and sustainability of the learning produced. As one student commented, the two-day design task made it difficult to "gain more insight into what we are trying to solve." Still, the pedagogical value lay not only in the product but in the process, reinforcing the point that design-based learning thrives on active, reflective engagement rather than polished outcomes.

The author's own positionality – as both a participant-mentor and observer – allowed for insight into how institutional goals, interpersonal dynamics, and personal values intersect during such events. The reflective account underscored the importance of relational learning, an element echoed by nearly all interviewees. Students spoke of gaining confidence not just in their technical ability but in their capacity to communicate, adapt, and navigate difference. Lecturers, on the other hand, reflected on how the Festival challenged them to rethink curricular priorities and pedagogical assumptions, particularly regarding the role of affect, informality, and cultural exchange in design education.

Importantly, the events appeared to catalyse transformative experiences for many participants, prompting self-redefinition and a clearer sense of professional identity. These moments were often tied to social and intercultural interactions rather than formal outputs. For example, a lecturer's decision to redesign his programme based on what he observed in Vietnam demonstrates how transnational peer-learning can extend beyond the Festival itself, feeding into broader institutional change. This finding complements the account of analytic autoethnography, where the researcher's subjectivity is not a limitation but a source of critical insight into the social structures at play.

At the same time, the data revealed ambivalences and limits. The Vietnamese context, while rich in energy and collective ethos, also imposed constraints – such as hierarchical expectations, language barriers, and implicit assumptions about roles. These were particularly visible in moments where international guests were both welcomed and subtly positioned as outsiders or symbols of prestige. The reflective and interview data thus suggest that while the

Festival offers moments of authentic collaboration, it also reproduces certain asymmetries and performative tendencies.

In summary, the Festival functions as a microcosm of design education in transition: moving from individual mastery to collective, situated learning; from standardised curricula to experiential formats; and from national isolation to intercultural entanglement. As such, it invites further exploration of how temporary, high-intensity educational events can act as laboratories for pedagogical innovation, identity work, and cross-cultural literacy.

Conclusion

This study investigated the Vietnamese National Festival of Architecture Students as a situated, intercultural learning environment. Through a practice-based and interpretive methodology – combining analytic reflective autoethnography with semi-structured interviews – it examined how the festival serves as a platform for both pedagogical experimentation and identity formation among architecture students and educators. The findings reveal a rich, multilayered educational experience shaped by the interplay of collaboration, competition, cultural exchange, and institutional logics.

Key insights highlight that learning in this context is not limited to the acquisition of design techniques or disciplinary knowledge. Instead, it emerges through lived participation, affective encounters, and shifts in perspective. Students reported developing not only technical confidence but interpersonal and intercultural competencies, often through informal interactions. Educators, in turn, experienced moments of professional reflection that led them to question and, in some cases, revise their own teaching practices. These processes resonate with theories of expansive learning and cognitive apprenticeship, underscoring the Festival's potential as a space of pedagogical innovation.

At the same time, the study acknowledges several limitations. The sample of interviewees was intentionally small to reach deeper understanding, and diverse but not representative, and the researcher's dual role as participant-observer may have introduced bias in interpretation. Moreover, the specific socio-cultural context of Vietnam played a significant role in shaping the learning dynamics observed, meaning caution is needed when extrapolating these findings to other settings.

Nonetheless, the research suggests valuable recommendations. Design educators and institutions might consider integrating similar intensive, experiential formats into their curricula – not as add-ons but as core learning opportunities. Such formats should intentionally foster intercultural dialogue, peer mentoring, and reflective practice, while also creating space to critically examine the structures and assumptions that shape participation. Future studies could build on this work by exploring longitudinal impacts on students' learning trajectories or by comparing similar festivals in different cultural contexts.

Beyond skill acquisition, the festival fostered personal growth and self-awareness. As one participant admitted, "I realised teamwork and collaboration are crucial. It showed me my own weaknesses. I placed too much pressure on my teammates initially". Such reflections underline the capacity of short-term, high-intensity collaborative environments to prompt critical self-evaluation, a process integral to both professional development and ethical practice in design.

In conclusion, the Festival offers more than a showcase of student work: it constitutes an alternative educational space where learners and mentors alike are invited to negotiate knowledge, identity, and meaning in new and transformative ways.

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Open End: Re-Tracing And Re-Reading The Substation Archive — A Acuratorial Methodology Of Activation

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Abstract

This paper examines OPEN END: Resonate, Re-Read and Re-Trace The Substation Archive as a curatorial and research-led project that reactivates the dispersed archive of The Substation—Singapore's first independent contemporary art space (1990–2021). Presented in 2024 at the Rotunda Library & Archive, OPEN END is situated within the wider context of the archival turn in contemporary art, drawing from theoretical insights by Sara Callahan, Diana Taylor, and Hal Foster, while foregrounding the specific institutional conditions of Singapore's art ecology. Through sonic interventions, textual installations, and performative re-readings by artists Chong Li-Chuan, Urich Lau, and the author, the exhibition approaches the archive not as a closed repository but as an open-ended site of resonance, resistance, and relational knowledge together with artistic production.

The paper argues that The Substation's legacy—like many artist-run initiatives in Southeast Asia—has been subject to partial remembrance and bureaucratic containment, particularly during the era of performance art restriction in Singapore. Recalling the landmark 2001 exhibition Open Ends, which was an exhibition that presented documented performance practices during a period of de facto censorship, this essay positions OPEN END (2024) as a continuation of that curatorial impulse: one that challenges dominant historiographies by activating the marginal, the ephemeral, and the affective. Drawing comparisons with Koh Nguang How's Singapore Art Archive Project, the essay reflects on the potential of counterarchives to reframe institutional memory and proposes curating-as-archival-method as a strategy for ongoing public engagement and historical re-imagination.

Keywords: The Substation, Archival Turn, Performance Art, Singapore Contemporary Art, Curatorial research, Counter-archives, Memory.

Introduction: Archival Revisions & Curatorial Research

Since the 1990s, the archival turn has entered contemporary art discourse by repositioning the archive not merely as a source of historical knowledge but as a methodological and conceptual form. Art historian Sara Callahan characterises this shift as a focus on the "notion of the archive" rather than calling it a "concept." This distinction underpins my own methodology, which I elaborate on later in this paper, where I similarly assert an analytical method of cross-reading to reveal "the complexity of the phenomenon of archive art where notions circulate and reverberate between artworks, theoretical frameworks, texts and contexts" (Callahan 2024, 6). This approach is especially relevant to my research into Southeast Asian contemporary art—and, in this project's case, Singapore's art historiography—where the archive is reimagined as a site of epistemic and institutional critique. In this expanded field, archival practice emerges as both subject and method, aligning with post-structuralist concerns about power, memory, and historical construction.

Against this backdrop, *OPEN END: Resonate, Re-Read and Re-Trace The Substation Archive* is a curatorial project that interrogates the fate of Singapore's independent artistic infrastructures, particularly The Substation (1990–2021), the city's first and most emblematic

independent contemporary multi-disciplinary art space. Formally launched at the National Gallery Singapore's Rotunda Library & Archive in 2024, *OPEN END* proposes a curatorial methodology grounded in performativity, collaborative activation, and the re-reading of archival material.[1] Through sonic, visual, and textual interventions by artists Urich Lau, Chong Li-Chuan, and myself, the project reanimates The Substation's dispersed archive across multiple national institutions.

Singapore's cultural landscape in the late 1980s and 1990s was marked by a technocratic consolidation of state power alongside strategic nation-branding as a "global city for the arts." Cultural policy initiatives—such as the 1989 Report of the Advisory Council on Culture and the Arts and the Renaissance City Plan (2000)—sought to legitimize contemporary art within Singapore's economic framework, even as certain forms of expression (notably performance art and political critique) were marginalised. The Substation emerged in this context as a counter-site of experimentation, pluralism, and publicness. Yet its eventual closure of its physical space and the gradual institutional absorption of its archive reflect broader tensions between independent artistic practice and state-managed cultural narritivisation.

OPEN END engages these tensions by refusing to monumentalise The Substation as a closed chapter or draw on nostalgic recollections or accounts. Instead, it aligns with what Callahan (2022) terms the conception of discursive contemporary that utilises the archive—an institutionally embedded matrix of selection, omission, and framing that shapes what is knowable, and by extension, what is visible as art (Callahan 2022, 8–12). In this sense, *OPEN END* is not a commemorative exhibition, but a mode of curatorial inquiry that insists on the unfinishedness and openness of cultural memory.

This essay critically reflects on the curatorial methodology, theoretical frameworks, and institutional conditions that shaped *OPEN END*. It draws on scholarly work within the archival turn—particularly by Callahan, Hal Foster, and Ann Laura Stoler—to situate the project within ongoing debates about the politics of documentation, institutional critique, and the role of artists in reframing and re-reading history. It also offers a comparative reading of artist-run archival initiatives in Singapore, notably Koh Nguang How's *Singapore Art Archive Project* (SAAP), arguing that projects like *OPEN END* operate as counter-archives that contest the logic of closure in official cultural or art historiography, much like how Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* interrogated institutional archives to expose buried histories.

From Institution to Activation: Locating The Substation Archive

The Substation opened in 1990 in a decommissioned power substation on Armenian Street,during a period of significant cultural recalibration in Singapore. Conceived by Kuo Pao Kunas a home for the arts—"not a museum, not a theatre, not a gallery, but **something in between**"—The Substation aimed to nurture experimental, interdisciplinary, and develop artistic practices (Wong 2015).

In its early years, it provided critical infrastructural and *symbolic* space for performance art, independent music, installation, and community theatre, many of which existed outside or at the edge of official cultural narratives.

Yet The Substation's formative ethos emerged in tension with a state-driven model of cultural development that prized artistic excellence, economic value, and global recognition.

By the mid-1990s, performance art had become a flashpoint for moral panic and policy intervention, culminating in a decade-long de facto ban on funding for performance-based practices. The Substation, while not oppositional in a confrontational sense, became a site of "radical ambiguity"—a space where competing registers of legitimacy, community, and experimentation co-existed uneasily within a tightly regulated cultural regime (Lee 2019, 204–210).

The archive of The Substation—comprising photographs, correspondence, administrative files, curatorial notes, and video recordings—is now dispersed across the National Gallery Singapore, the National Library Board, and the National Archives Singapore. This institutional fragmentation mirrors the spatial dislocation of The Substation itself, which vacated its Armenian Street home in 2021 and now operates nomadically, without a permanent physical space. I am currently collaborating with The Substation on related research and curatorial projects. As Pierre Nora (1989) argues in his discussion of *lieux de mémoire*, when "real memory" dissipates, societies construct sites of historical reassurance and recollection. Yet such sites often conceal more than they reveal; they offer a sense of continuity while disavowing conflict. It is these recurring memories and mentions of The Substation in my research that prompted me to focus more closely on it—as a forgotten site and an invisible locale.

OPEN END was conceived as a response to this state of dispersal. Staged in the Rotunda Library & Archive—a former Supreme Court chamber repurposed as a national memory site—the project unsettled the neutralising effect of the archive-as-monument. Drawing on Callahan's observation that contemporary archival art often emerges from "critical practices that aim to expose gaps, **omissions**, and unpronounced knowledge structures by reading texts 'against the grain'" (Callahan 2024, 77), *OPEN END* deployed artistic strategies that foregrounded disruption, noise, and multiplicity.

In this juridical setting, the project introduced multi-sensorial installations and three days of activation that refused archival fixity and enlivened the static repository. The echoing architecture of the Rotunda was inhabited not by silent reverence but by ambient soundscapes, spoken-word re-enactments, and textual interventions. Archival documents were not presented as evidence, but as propositions—starting points for reflection, interpretation, and activation. This move aligns with what Michel Foucault identifies as the archive not as a record of what was said, but as "the system of enunciability"—the rules that govern what can be said, remembered, or forgotten (Foucault 2010, 130).

Thus, *OPEN END* reframes the archive not as a resting place of institutional memory, but as a site of friction and tension—where past, present, and future orientations of cultural practice meet. It challenges the closure of The Substation as a physical space as a historical endpoint and proposes instead an "open-ended" curatorial methodology attuned to affective residue, structural absence, and discursive reanimation.

Methodology of *OPEN END*

The methodological foundation of *OPEN END* is premised on a refusal to treat archives as fixed, self-evident repositories of historical knowledge. Instead, the project mobilises a curatorial mode of inquiry that aligns with what Sara Callahan (2022) terms "artistic practice as critical research"—wherein the archive is not merely excavated but re-performed, fragmented, and challenged as a site of institutional authority and cultural legibility. Central to *OPEN END* is the idea that curatorial practice can generate knowledge by staging the archive as a relational, durational, and affective space of encounter.

This methodology is shaped by several interlocking principles: spatial activation, performative engagement, and collaborative interpretation. The Rotunda Library & Archive was not treated as a neutral display venue but as a juridico-historical site layered with colonial, administrative, and mnemonic residues. This was the space where I spent countless hours researching while working on my doctoral studies between the post-covid years between 2020 and 2022. In contrast to conventional archival presentations that rely on vitrines and controlled atmospheres of reverence, *OPEN END* disrupts such museological codes by inserting works that resonate sonically, unfold textually, and animate documents as performative scripts. I was fortunate to have worked with the gallery on various projects and managed to secure an intervention towards the end of 2023. This curatorial strategy if

intervening in the library or archive draws on Diana Taylor's theorisation of the repertoire as a form of embodied transmission distinct from the archive's fixity—"a scenario that exceeds the limits of the document" (Taylor 2003, 19).

The idea of the "open work," as theorised by Umberto Eco (1989), offers another conceptual anchor. Eco's insistence that the open artwork invites co-creation, interpretation, and semantic multiplicity provides a fitting framework for a project that resists closure and finality. In *OPEN END*, the curatorial form itself is open-ended: works are added or removed during the exhibition; audiences encounter different configurations depending on when they visit; and each iteration is accompanied by public programmes, readings, and discursive events that shape and reshape its meanings.

At the same time, the methodology foregrounds the specificity of Singapore's cultural situation, where archives are often treated as instruments of legitimacy and control within state institutions. As Callahan (2024) observes, the archival turn gained traction in contexts where institutions were perceived to be arbiters of knowledge—deciding what enters history and what remains invisible. In Singapore, this dynamic is intensified by a centralised cultural bureaucracy in which national identity, economic policy, and heritage narratives intersect and power is anchored within the state. Against this backdrop, *OPEN END* proposes a countermethodology: one that approaches the archive as a scene of partiality, contradiction, and possibility.

This approach resonates with Patrick Flores's notion of "de-filing" the archive—not in a literal sense of destruction, but in refusing the seduction of the archive's order, its bureaucratic cleanliness, and its claims to historical coherence (Flores 2017).

Instead, *OPENEND* engages with the archive's messier edges: the unfinished correspondence, the marginalia, the misfiled notes, the ambient noise of the past that resists categorization.

These are not treated as peripheral details but as central materials through which to access the lived, affective, and relational dimensions of the layers behind artistic practice in Singapore.

As an artist-curator embedded in both academic and artistic communities, I approached this project through a research-through-practice lens. My own positionality—as someone who has studied, written about, and lived through the transformations of The Substation and its surrounding ecosystem—became part of the curatorial process. Ethnographic conversations with artists, curators, and former staff; the sorting through of labeled folders and unlabeled documents; the interpretive framing of bureaucratic exchanges as performative scripts—all informed a methodology of care, attunement, and listening. This process started in 2023 and is on-going but for the intervention focus was squarely on The Substation.

This research method follows what Ann Laura Stoler (2009) calls "reading along the archival grain," which attends to both the content and structure of archival material—its gaps, emphases, and silences.

The resulting exhibition and its accompanying texts should not be read as definitive accounts. Rather, *OPEN END* is a proposition: that the archive is never complete; that its meaning lies not in preservation but in activation; and that curating itself can serve as an archival method—one grounded in resonance, resistance, and re-reading.



Figure 1. *Preparation for OPEN END: Visit to the National Gallery Singapore's storage facilities housing The Substation Archive.*

Resonate: Sonic Traces and Ambient Memory (Chong Li-Chuan)

The act of resonance—sonic, affective, and conceptual—forms the first axis of *OPEN END*'s curatorial methodology. To resonate is not merely to echo but to vibrate in sympathetic relation to a prior sound, structure, or silence. In the context of The Substation archive,resonance describes both the lingering traces of past artistic activity and the potential for those traces to produce new frequencies or narratives of meaning in the present. Within the Rotunda Library & Archive—a space marked by colonial architectural symmetry and legal gravitas—Chong Li-Chuan's sound-based work *interstitial* introduced precisely this kind of destabilising resonance.

Chong, a composer and sound artist who has been involved with The Substation since the 1990s, approached the archive not as a textual resource but as a sonic ecology. Drawing from digitised Mini DV footage of performances, artist talks, townhall meetings and gallery walkthroughs, Chong extracted incidental sounds: murmurings, rustlings, offhand comments, applause, and electrical interference. These non-verbal residues—often omitted in archival processes that privilege visual or textual documentation—were recomposed into a sitespecific soundscape intended to filter subtly through the reading room. However, the library did not permit the sounds to be played aloud. As a result, the soundscape took on a slightly different form: it was made available through a series of closed-back headphones, allowing it to be heard privately. In this format, the soundscape functioned as an ambient auditory field that foregrounded the sensorial texture of artistic memory over its factual content.

This compositional strategy aligns with what Callahan (2024) refers to as "alternative strategies of history-making," where artists foreground the microhistorical and the ephemeral over linear, monumental narratives. Chong's work does not illustrate The Substation's history; rather, it invokes what Diana Taylor calls the "repertoire"—a register of embodied memory that exceeds the archive's claims to permanence (Taylor 2003, 20). By situating sound as both content and method, *interstitial* renders audible the informal, the affective, and the ambient—

those dimensions of artistic practice that institutional archives often fail to preserve or resonate.

In the Singaporean context, Chong's work also pushes back against a prevailing technocratic rationalism in which culture is measured by metrics of productivity, excellence, and policy alignment. Since the 1980s, sound and performance art in Singapore have operated in precarious relation to state-sanctioned cultural norms—especially during the performance art funding ban between 1994 and 2003. During this period, artists working with performance art found themselves excluded from public funding structures, with their work often deemed illegible or transgressive by official standards (Tan 2022). By reanimating this marginalized sonic history through artistic composition, Chong reclaims a space for what philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy calls "the listening subject"—a mode of attunement that resists the domination of the visual and textual (Nancy 2007, 13–19).

The placement of Chong's sound work within the Rotunda is itself a curatorial act of resistance. The sonic bleeds into the bureaucratic; the ambient seeps into the juridical. The Rotunda—once a chamber for the pronouncement of law—becomes, in this configuration, a space of indeterminacy and affect. As Callahan notes, archival art often destabilises "the archive as law" by rendering visible (or audible) the infrastructures of institutional knowledge production (Callahan 2022, 203). In *OPEN END*, the archive is not displayed as a grid of references but experienced as a field of resonance—a relational space where memory lingers in frequencies beyond the document.

In contrast to archival aesthetics that centre legibility—vitrines, folders, indexes and catalogues—Chong's work invites a mode of archival listening. This act of listening is not passive reception but critical engagement: a call to attend to the murmurs, feedback, and silences that shape artistic and institutional histories in Singapore. In this way, *interstitial* exemplifies the project's broader aim: to reframe archival material not as the past made permanent, but as a set of contingencies vibrating in the present.



Figure 3b. Li-Chuan producing a new mix of *interstitial* at the heart of the Public Performance featuring myself, Urich and Li-Chuan in November 2024 at the Rotunda Library & Archive, National Gallery Singapore, Singapore.



Figure 2b. Chong Li-Chuan's sound-based work *interstitial* installed at the Rotunda Library & Archive, National Gallery Singapore, Singapore.

Re-Read: Curatorial Scripts and Performative Reading (Urich Lau)

If resonance in *OPEN END* registers through ambient memory and sonic traces, the axis of re-reading offers a critical lens into the discursive architecture of the archive—its language, its logic, and its authority. This gesture is enacted most explicitly in Urich Lau's *Casting Call (The Substation Read-Through)*, a multi-channel video installation in which performers restage historical curatorial texts drawn from The Substation's internal records, press releases, and email exchanges. By shifting the function of these texts from administrative

instruments to performative scripts, Lau engages in what Callahan (2024) identifies as "archival art that interrogates its own conditions of enunciation"—an art that asks not what an archive contains, but how it speaks, and through whom.

Casting Call repositions institutional documents as scripts to be embodied, dramatised, and interpreted. In so doing, the work stages what performance theorist Diana Taylor describes as the "scenario" of the archive—the conditions and choreography through which knowledge is produced, legitimised, and made public (Taylor 2003, 29–30). Lau does not select canonical texts or celebratory moments; rather, he focuses on the personal, choosing to focus on exhibitions in which he participated in, or curated for.

The performers in *Casting Call* read these documents not as neutral functionaries but as actors who inflect each line with tone, emphasis, and affect. Their delivery is deliberately stylised, drawing attention to the rhetoric and power embedded in seemingly mundane language. What emerges is a form of "archival fictioning," where the boundary between documentation and dramaturgy collapses. As Hal Foster argued in his foundational essay on the archival impulse, such practices often seek "to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present" (Foster 2004, 4). Yet Lau's work extends this further—not only re-presenting the archive but re-performing its constitutive operations. In the context of Singapore's bureaucratised art institutions, where curatorial authority is often exercised through policy language and procedural formatting, Lau's intervention is particularly pointed and inconsequential. The act of re-reading becomes an act of *détournement*—a reversal of administrative speech acts into public and performative countertexts. It reveals the archive's latent performativity: its role not just in recording but in scripting the possible, the permissible, and the visible. As Callahan (2022) notes, contemporary archival practices are increasingly self-reflexive, attuned to their own "aesthetic of administration" and its discontents (Callahan 2022, 151).

Moreover, Lau's focus on The Substation's curatorial voice speaks to the shifting role of curators in Singapore's cultural field. From the 1990s onward, curators navigated dual pressures: to facilitate independent artistic expression and to comply with institutional expectations of professionalism and accountability. *Casting Call* brings this ambivalence into view. The work renders visible not only the texts themselves, but the invisible negotiations and affective labour behind them. It animates what feminist scholar Sara Ahmed (2012) calls the "institutional murmur"—the background noise of policy, critique, and compromise that shapes how art is organised and experienced.

Within *OPEN END*, Lau's contribution highlights the archive not as a sealed cabinet of truths but as a script in rehearsal—always open to reinterpretation, never quite final. By performing The Substation's past through the language of its curators, administrators, and collaborators, *Casting Call* enacts a dialogical approach to archival history. It invites viewers not to absorb content passively but to re-read institutional memory as a contested, affective, and unfinished project.

In re-scripting the archive, Lau opens a space where the voice of the institution may be echoed, distorted, or contested—an echo chamber that reverberates with the political conditions of curatorial authorship in Singapore. As a re-reading, this work exemplifies *OPEN END*'s larger thesis: that archives are not monuments to be revered but scripts to be read again—with attention, with doubt, and with care.



Figure 3a. Urich Lau's video installation *Casting Call (The Substation Read-Through)* at the heart of the Rotunda Library & Archive, National Gallery Singapore, Singapore.



Figure 3b. Urich Lau's video installation *Casting Call (The Substation Read-Through)* at the heart of the Public Performance featuring myself, Urich and Li-Chuan in November 2024 at the Rotunda Library & Archive, National Gallery Singapore, Singapore.

Re-Trace: Textual Fragments and Bureaucratic Memory (Adrian Tan)

The third curatorial gesture in *OPEN END—re-trace*—addresses the archive through its textual debris: the discarded, fragmented, and marginal inscriptions that circulate within cultural institutions but rarely find their way into dominant historiographies. In my own installation, *As loose ends, you need not necessarily pick them up*, these fragments—emails, internal reports, performance notes, post-mortem evaluations, and handwritten annotations—were curated as spatial interventions that quietly punctuated the Rotunda Library & Archive. Scaled, repositioned, and inserted into in-between spaces of the reading room, these textual residues invited slow reading, chance encounters, and errant reflections.

This work draws on what Ann Laura Stoler (2002) terms the "epistemic anxieties" of the archive—its attempts to control meaning through classification, and its vulnerabilities when that system is disrupted. By foregrounding the bureaucratic voice of The Substation—the voice of programming teams, administrators, and curators negotiating artist support, budget constraints, and institutional logics—I aimed to expose the archive's underbelly: not the spectacular image of performance or protest, but the quietly conflicted apparatus that sustained those events. As Callahan (2022) suggests, archival art often finds its critical edge "not by monumentalising the lost or the forgotten, but by showing the systems of their forgetting" (Callahan 2022, 83).

The phrase that titles the work—*As loose ends, you need not necessarily pick them up*—was drawn from an email exchange between artist John Low and the late Lee Wen in 2001. The email concerned the setting up and selection of works for the "Open Ends" documentation exhibition of performance art during a period in which performance itself was semi-formally censored in Singapore. The correspondence captured an unease about representation,authorship, and historiography—an unease that persists in how performance practices from the 1990s and early 2000s are selectively archived or excluded. To re-trace these communications was to recognise their speculative value—not as evidence, but as affective and epistemic residue.

In Singapore's cultural milieu, where the institutional archive often seeks to stabilise national narratives and cultural legitimacy, the idea of re-tracing offers a counter-epistemology. It insists on returning not to grand origin stories but to the minor, the fragmented, and the procedural. Following Patrick Flores's provocation to "de-file" the archive—to disorganise, disaggregate, and deconstruct it—this work approached bureaucratic language as an ethnographic artefact, one that reveals the cultural field's operational contradictions (Flores 2019).

The formal strategy of scattering these texts throughout the Rotunda further challenged the spatial norms of the archive. Rather than centralising documentation behind glass, these excerpts invited embodied movement—reading while standing, pausing, doubling back. This approach responds to Michel de Certeau's (1984) idea of "walking in the city" as a tactical disruption of imposed order. The spatial reading of the archive becomes itself a form of wandering—a dérive through institutional memory.

Moreover, the content of the texts underscored how The Substation's ethos of openness and support was continually negotiated in the face of shrinking budgets, staff shortages, and shifting cultural policy. These negotiations were often left undocumented in official accounts but surfaced in informal notes, drafts, and post-event reflections. The recurring motif of the "messy mailing list," the lack of time for post-mortems, or the improvisational programming of artist residencies—these were not signs of failure, but of a dynamic and precarious infrastructure that prioritised care and process over polish.

This installation thus repositions bureaucracy not as dead weight but as a form of lived labour in a poetic and metaphorical manner. It attends to what Sara Ahmed (2012) has called the "non-performative speech act"—the institutional language that gestures toward inclusivity

and support but may not materialise those promises. By magnifying the contradictions embedded in The Substation's administrative voice, *As loose ends* becomes an invitation to reconsider how institutions are remembered—not just for what they did, but how they did it, and what they left unsaid.

Within the broader framework of *OPEN END*, this act of re-tracing affirms the curatorial thesis: that the archive is most alive at its seams—where fragments slip out, where speech falters, and where memory is neither linear nor complete, but errant, affective, and always in motion.



Figure 4a. [Close-up] Adrian Tan's text-based installation *As loose ends, you need not necessarily pick them up* at the Rotunda Library & Archive, National Gallery Singapore, Singapore.



Figure 4b. Adrian Tan's text-based installation *As loose ends, you need not necessarily pick them up* at the Rotunda Library & Archive, National Gallery Singapore, Singapore.

Comparative Reflections: Artist-Run Archives and Counter-Institutional Memory

While *OPEN END* is grounded in the institutional archive of The Substation, it findsproductive resonance in artist-run initiatives such as Koh Nguang How's *Singapore Art Archive Project* (SAAP) and Lee Wen's *The Independent Archive* (IA). These informal, independently sustained collections offer alternative models of archival practice—models that challenge institutional authority by privileging relational, embodied, and processual engagements with cultural memory and private archives. Together with *OPEN END*, they constitute what Callahan (2022) refers to as a "micro-historiographic" response to the dominant forms of art historical narration: one that is specific, partial, and consciously unresolved (Callahan 2022, 84).

Koh Nguang How's SAAP exemplifies an archival impulse that is deeply entangled with artistic practice. As an artist, archivist, and former Substation collaborator, Koh began documenting Singapore's contemporary art scene in the 1980s—long before there were formal institutional frameworks to do so. His collection spans newspaper clippings, exhibition catalogues, personal correspondences, and artefacts salvaged from gallery closures and discarded artist studios. The archive is maintained in his home and studio, where it is made accessible not through curated exhibitions or public programming, but through intimate, dialogical encounters with researchers, artists, and students.

SAAP's structure runs counter to the logics of preservation and access that govern institutional archives. There is little formal cataloguing, no consistent digitisation, and few protocols of conservation. Yet it is precisely this informality that grants it its epistemic value. As Stoler (2009) reminds us, the colonial archive was never a neutral storehouse but a "bundle of epistemological and political anxieties"—its order betrays the very power it seeks to stabilise (Stoler 2009, 233). By contrast, SAAP's lack of order due to the lack of space and constant movement of its storage sites reflects the messiness of cultural life itself, resisting the extractive tendencies of official history and instead foregrounding the rhythms of everyday cultural labour.

Whereas *OPEN END* unfolds within the rotunda of a national monument, SAAP remains at the periphery—spatially and institutionally. And yet both projects share a commitment to archival activation as a living practice. As Callahan (2024) notes, contemporary artists and curators engaged in archival work frequently operate "against the closure and authority of the archive, staging it instead as a space of openness, relationality, and contingency" (Callahan 2024, 79). This is particularly urgent in Singapore, where cultural memory has often been formalized through the language of "heritage" and "nation-building," leaving little room for minoritarian, dissident, or experimental practices to be archived on their own terms.

In this light, *OPEN END* can be seen as a bridge between institutional and counter institutional modes of memory-making. While embedded within the infrastructure of the National Gallery Singapore, it adopts the ethos of projects like SAAP by privileging informal documentation, collaborative authorship, and iterative presentation. The archival material activated in *OPEN END*—emails, soundscapes, curatorial fragments—may not meet the criteria of "important records" in a heritage context, but they are precisely the materials through which alternative histories can be imagined.

Such comparative reflection also prompts critical questions about sustainability and precarity. Artist-run archives like SAAP operate without institutional funding, often relying on the personal labour and resources of individual artists. Their long-term viability remains uncertain, yet their intellectual and cultural contributions are profound. As scholar Susan Best argues, "what matters in archival art is not just what is archived but who archives, and for whom" (Best 2006, 149). This question is central to the curatorial politics of *OPEN END*:

who activates the archive, whose voice is centred, and how can this labour be shared, recognised, and supported?

Finally, these independent archival practices resonate with broader decolonial efforts in Southeast Asia to recover art histories from the margins. As Flores (2019) asserts, the archive in postcolonial contexts must not only collect but contest—must not only preserve, but critique the conditions under which preservation becomes possible. In this sense, both *OPEN END* and SAAP are less about documenting the past than about creating frameworks for its re-interpretation. They offer not closure but openings: material, conceptual, and curatorial spaces in which to reframe what counts as art, as memory, and as history.

OPEN END AS METHOD AND PROPOSITION

As this paper has shown, *OPEN END* is not simply an exhibition about The Substation's archive—it is a curatorial methodology that reframes the archive as a site of resonance, rereading, and re-tracing. Through collaborative artistic practice, spatial intervention, and critical historiography, the project proposes a curatorial response to the epistemological and institutional constraints that often define how cultural memory is preserved, accessed, and interpreted in Singapore. It embraces, rather than resolves, the complexities of working within and against the structures of national heritage.

In a city-state where cultural institutions are often caught between bureaucratic rationalism and nation-building imperatives, *OPEN END* offers an alternative approach: one grounded in affect, incompleteness, and speculative method. It draws from Sara Callahan's articulation of the archival turn as not merely a return to the past, but a turning of attention toward how the past is framed, by whom, and to what ends (Callahan 2022, 3–5). In this sense, *OPEN END* is a proposition for a different kind of archive—one that remains open to reinterpretation, vulnerable to recontextualisation, and attentive to minor gestures.

By focusing on the fragmentary and the performative—whether through Chong Li-Chuan's sonic interventions, Urich Lau's re-reading of curatorial texts, or my own engagement with bureaucratic traces—the project insists that memory is not static but negotiated, embodied, and always under construction. It questions not just what we remember, but how, and why.

As Hal Foster (2004) observed, the archival impulse in contemporary art often emerges from a desire to "make sense of cultural memory," especially when that memory is endangered, dispersed, or repressed (Foster 2004, 21). In Singapore, such conditions are deeply shaped by postcolonial governance, technocratic cultural planning, and the spatial reorganisation of public life.

The closure of The Substation in 2021 exemplifies these broader pressures—and *OPEN END* responds by keeping its legacy alive not through conservation, but through reactivation.

As a curatorial research project, *OPEN END* contributes to the field of archival art by demonstrating how artistic collaboration, site-specific practice, and minor forms of documentation can function as modes of critical inquiry. It aligns with artist-run archives like Koh Nguang How's *Singapore Art Archive Project*, while operating within institutional frameworks in ways that test their limits. It blurs the boundaries between curator, researcher, artist, and participant—foregrounding the dialogical and propositional nature of archival work. Ultimately, *OPEN END* calls for a curatorial practice that is not about closure, mastery, or resolution, but about opening up new forms of listening, reading, and relating. It asserts that archives are not only about the past, but about the futures they make possible—and about the public, pedagogical, and political imaginaries we bring to them. As a method, it offers resonance. As a proposition, it remains open.

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Transforming the Inner Self with Theatre for Learning

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Abstract

This research article presents the experience of using drama knowledge to transform the perspective on life and alter the behavior of male juveniles in the context of a Male Juvenile Observation and Protection Training Center. This is part of a doctoral dissertation on developing a theater program for inner self-learning aimed at enhancing the self-esteem of male juveniles in observation and protection training centers. The content of the article presents experiences in designing drama activities to develop the inner self, delivering methods for using drama activities under the following principles: Drama is an activity that fosters learning to change the internal dimensions of human beings, promoting knowledge, attitudes, understanding, and meaningful behavioral changes through the creation of appropriate learning conditions leads to inner self-change through drama activities. Lessons are presented on the application of drama principles in the learning process, including principles of acting, directing, scriptwriting and analysis, theatre-making, and the use of drama as a tool to understand changes within individuals. The author believes that learning through drama practice will foster a connection to one's own life through emotional experiences. Awareness arises from seeing oneself and others. Learning through drama is like a life journey that helps you define your life and identity through action. This is an examination of what happens to you in a moment, which affects both your conscious and subconscious mind.

Keywords: Inner Self, self-esteem, Theatre Programs

Purpose

This article presents the experience of utilizing drama knowledge to adjust the life perspectives and behaviors of male juveniles in Level 5 within the context of a Juvenile Observation and Protection Training Center. This forms part of a doctoral dissertation focused on developing a drama program for inner self-learning aimed at enhancing self-esteem.

The situation of male juveniles who are repeat offenders in juvenile training centers highlights their emotional and psychological vulnerability, often stemming from family and social experiences that hinder the development of their inner potential. Research by Phuritut Singhaprom (2017) indicates that this group of juveniles has a history of direct and indirect emotional abuse, significantly impacting their self-esteem and contributing to their delinquent behaviors. While training centers implement rehabilitation programs, on-site observations in February 2562 revealed that restrictions on freedom within these centers might lead to a lack of self-confidence and a fragile inner self, particularly among Level 5 male juveniles. This group, characterized by repeat offenses and influence over other juveniles, prompted the center to recognize an urgent need for behavioral modification and to seek effective, innovative program models and learning approaches (Focus Group Discussion, July 22, 2562).

Deep-level human potential development, especially the rehabilitation of the **"inner self"**, is a crucial and essential process. The inner self encompasses consciousness, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and deep-seated desires that influence external behaviors. Achieving

sustainable change at this level necessitates learning processes that impact internal perspectives. **Transformative Learning** offers a framework where learners can explore and alter their **frame of reference** through critical reflection (Mezirow, 2003). This aligns with 21st-century educational goals that seek to foster the "inner self of learners" for holistic growth and stable existence. As Palmer (2557) proposes, learning should commence with the development of the inner self, connecting with the outer world through a "mind moving to the heart," consistent with a holistic learning approach where learners engage in practical application and internal reflection (Wicharn Panich, 2561).

Characteristics of Level 5 Male Juveniles in Khon Kaen Juvenile Training Center

Level 5 male juveniles in the Khon Kaen Juvenile Training Center (Focus Group Discussion, 2562, and Drama Program Activities) are aged 12-21 years. Most have a history of repeat offenses, including tattooing, fighting, attempted escapes, self-harm, and harming others. They often have limited education, with the majority not completing lower secondary school. These juveniles possess basic agricultural skills and come from vulnerable family backgrounds, such as divorced parents, being raised by grandparents due to parents working in large cities, or growing up in children's homes, reflecting a significant need for emotional support.

External characteristics of this group include communication limitations, particularly in reading and writing. They prefer physical activities and exhibit explicit emotional and behavioral expressions, both overt and reserved. They highly value independence and trust. Their external behaviors can be categorized into two groups: the **impetuous group**, who are risk-takers and highly loyal to their peers, and the **lenient group**, who are slow to make decisions and value relationships above all else.

Internally, these juveniles often hold negative self-perceptions, feeling worthless and experiencing sadness, anxiety, homesickness, and a strong desire for freedom. They are highly concerned about social stigma, changes in relationships, lack of economic opportunities, relapse into drug use, and family conflicts.

Key factors contributing to repeat offenses stem from a **survival mentality** within the center, including the need for group belonging, a distorted perception that criminal acts are "cool" or courageous, a sense of defiance against life, coercion from fellow juveniles, and the perception that being in Level 5 is more comfortable than other zones due to fewer required activities during confinement. Overall, this group of juveniles has limited life resources, including their mindset, opportunities, and complex family issues.

When questioned about their desire for self-change, juveniles expressed a need to adjust both their behavior and emotions, focusing on controlling and managing hot tempers to become calmer and happier. They also desired to coexist peacefully with peers and envision a better future, such as setting life goals after leaving the center, generating income, or completing their education. Juveniles also wished to be more assertive, improve their behavior, and be released and return home quickly. Regarding learning processes, juveniles preferred methods that were relaxed, enjoyable, involved in peer activities, and offered opportunities for rest.

Administrators, staff, and youth development workers suggested that any future youth development program should focus on building **inner mental stability**, **self-awareness**, **peaceful coexistence with others**, and **visualizing future pathways**. This includes fostering emotional well-being, self-control, appropriate expression, and self-management. They sought learning processes that were both enjoyable and profound, leading to lasting and sustainable behavioral changes rather than fleeting activities. Challenges identified included the diverse backgrounds and problems of juveniles, such as learning disabilities, abuse, or neglect, which

make it challenging to access genuine information. Staff sought to foster lasting psychological resilience in juveniles to prevent repeat offenses. Psychologists emphasize the importance of building trust and safety when working with juveniles, enabling them to reveal the truth and feel cared for and supported. Therefore, learning through activities and practical application is the most suitable approach.

Drama activities can serve as a tool to stimulate experiential Learning. The art of drama allows learners to explore their emotions, feelings, and perspectives through artistic and meaningful expression, an approach recognized for promoting mental well-being and behavior in vulnerable groups (Fernández-Aguayoa & Pino-Justeb, 2018). In developing the drama program for inner self-learning aimed at enhancing self-esteem in Level 5 male juveniles, the author integrated drama principles, drama activities, group activities, and art for change, as well as Transformative Learning concepts and **Nathaniel Branden's (2016) five dimensions of self-development** for fostering self-esteem: **Self-Exploration** (to be aware of emotions and thoughts), **Self-Acceptance** (to accept and trust in one's potential), **Self-Concept** (to understand one's values and life goals), **Self-Confidence** (to be aware of abilities and areas for development), and **Self-Management**.

This article focuses on the experience of designing drama activities to develop the inner self, applying drama principles to create learning activities that transform human inner dimensions. It details the methods for using the drama program for learning and reports on the study of inner self-change outcomes.

Theatre for Learning refers to a learning process that develops participants through theatrical and artistic activities. It emphasizes experiential Learning through hands-on practice, using drama-based activities to help participants connect with their surroundings.

Theatre Facilitator is someone who designs and manages the learning process. Their role is to facilitate the Learning, guide participants through activities, and observe the changes that occur in the individuals involved.

The Inner Self Theatre for Learning to Self-esteem program is a training program for male youth in Level 5 of the juvenile detention and training center. The program's activities are adapted from drama and art-based activities for self-transformation. It includes actor training, scriptwriting, storytelling, analysis and interpretation, participatory performance creation, drama games, art projects, and group activities. The goal is to build self-worth through practical, hands-on experience.

Approach

Research Methodology

This study is a research and development project employing an action research approach through the "Inner Self Theatre for Learning" program. It gathered both quantitative and qualitative data, with a primary focus on qualitative data.

The research was conducted in three phases:

Phase 1: Exploration and Study of an Appropriate Learning Process. This phase involved searching for and defining a suitable approach for developing the inner self of male youth. This was accomplished in collaboration with the detention center staff, through a review of relevant documents, and via interviews with key individuals. The participants included staff members, Level 5 male youth, and the research team.

Phase 2: Development of the Inner Self Theatre for Learning Program Prototype. Based on data from the first phase and academic literature, a prototype for the program was developed. This involved two development cycles with 20 Level 5 male youth, aged 15-24, as participants.

Phase 3 Study of Inner Self Transformation. The developed program was implemented with a new group of 20 male youth, aged 15-24, to study individual-level internal changes. The focus was on personal dimensions, including self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-confidence.

Participant Selection

The study was conducted at the Juvenile Observation and Protection Training Center, Region 4, Khon Kaen Province, Thailand. Participants were selected using purposive sampling with the following criteria:

1. **Male Juvenile in Level 5**: The inclusion criteria required participants to be male youth in Level 5 with a history of repeat offenses, mentally sound, able to participate continuously for at least two months, and willing to participate in the activities. Exclusion criteria included individuals who were unwilling or unable to complete the activities. A total of 40 participants were selected for the program's development.
2. **Theatre Facilitators:** Five facilitators with expertise in "Theatre for Learning," internal transformation through art, and a strong understanding of positive psychology were selected. They were responsible for facilitating, supporting, and summarizing the activities.

Design and Quality Assurance of Research Tools

This research primarily used qualitative data collection, with additional quantitative data collected in Phase 3 to support the findings on youth transformation. The research instruments underwent content validity checks by five experts using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC).

Data collection methods and instruments were categorized by phase:

- **Phase 1** Data was collected through **focus group discussions** using a set of participatory brainstorming activities, discussion forum records, and initial interviews with youth.
- **Phase 2**: The primary tool was the **Inner Self Theatre for Learning program**. Data was collected using:
    1. **Semi-structured questionnaires** for focus group discussions (5 times per cycle, with 6-10 participants per cycle).
    2. **Learning logs**, where youth freely recorded information and answered open-ended questions. This was complemented by **participant observation**.
    3. A **Youth Behavior Observation Form** to record general behavior, gestures, opinions, self-reflection abilities, interpersonal relationships, and emotional awareness.
    4. A **Self-Esteem Scale**, adapted from a study by Sanyakit and Sanyakit (n.d.) on the psychometric properties of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965). The 8-item, 4-level scale is suitable for adolescents and young adults in detention centers and covers two dimensions: pride and lack of pride.
- **Phase 3**: This phase focused on studying the internal changes of youth. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Quantitative data was gathered using the **Self-Esteem Scale**, while qualitative data was collected through an **Observation Form**, **Learning Logs**, and **in-depth interviews**. All data were then analyzed using a **phenomenological approach** to conclude the youth's internal transformation.

Data Analysis and Verification

Qualitative data from various sources (interviews, focus groups, learning logs, and behavioral observations) were analyzed using **content analysis**—this involved categorizing,

coding, and grouping similar statements to identify relationships and create a descriptive summary.

Quantitative data from the Self-Esteem Scale were analyzed using **descriptive statistics** and presented as percentages to summarize the level of self-worth. This data was used to support the qualitative analysis, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. The data analysis and verification process was conducted in two stages: analysis during data collection to maintain focus and content analysis after fieldwork, followed by verification with the key informants.

Results

The research findings are presented in three parts: 1) the design of the drama activities to develop inner self and self-esteem, 2) the application and outcomes of the drama activities, and 3) the inner self transformation of the youth after participating in the program.

1. The design of the drama activities to develop inner self and self-esteem

Inner Self Development Content The "Inner Self Theatre for Learning" program for Level 5 male youth focuses on rehabilitating repeat offending behaviors stemming from feelings of worthlessness and social stigma. The program aims to promote positive attitudes, self-awareness, life goals, and healthy relationships, as well as creative emotional management, to reduce violent and escape behaviors resulting from a lack of self-confidence and social acceptance.

Principles and Guidelines for Inner Self-Development: Developing a sense of **self-esteem** in youth requires a learning process, activities, and facilitator skills that prioritize the restoration of inner value and confidence. Youth should feel that they are valuable, have life goals, and can improve, all within an environment that supports participation and change. This includes creating new power dynamics and an openness to learning.

Activities were designed to be contextually relevant and aligned with the youth's skills and abilities. The program integrates various disciplines, including psychology, spiritual development, and experiential learning. The process encourages youth to be self-aware, to understand their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in the present moment, leading to deeper reflection. The learning encompasses three forms of intelligence (**3-Base Wisdom**): cognitive, physical, and emotional. It also uses the body and imagination as key tools for perception and expanding learning horizons.

Group activities that allow youth to solve problems and exchange ideas, such as collaboratively addressing open-ended issues, are essential. Additionally, setting future goals, such as imagining their lives after the program, helps effectively build self-esteem and social skills. The facilitator's role is crucial in creating a relaxed and accepting atmosphere, and providing positive feedback, such as actively listening, offering encouragement, and using positive language to motivate sustainable self-development.

Drama Principles for Developing Self-Esteem: The drama principles employed in the program are based on the author's research and experience in the context of a juvenile training center, drawing on the drama principles outlined by Fortier (2016, pp. 194-198):

1) **Drama as Presentation and Performance Training:** This involves presenting thoughts, emotions, and feelings through actions and speech. It emphasizes training the body and mind, emotional awareness, script and character analysis, physical and vocal communication, and collaboration.

2) **Reaction and a Mirror to Life:** Performance is a realistic reaction of a character, with expressions that can be both direct and contradictory to inner feelings. Simultaneously, a dramatic work acts as a mirror reflecting the stories, feelings, and thoughts of the creator, leading to critical thinking, questioning, and a change in perspective for both the creator and the audience.
3) **Making Meaning from Within:** This principle applies cognitive and information processing theories to analyze the internal workings of actors and the audience. Drama activities engage three internal human dimensions:
    - **Drama as a Journey:** Drama opens awareness to confront the unfamiliar and discover the truth of life for oneself.
    - **Conceptual Blending:** Participating in drama activities fosters conceptual blending, a process that engages complex mental processes and promotes self-awareness.
    - **Mirror Neurons:** Drama activities stimulate **mirror neurons**, which are involved in imitation and learning. This helps learners understand the actions, intentions, and feelings of others as if they were experiencing them themselves. It plays a significant role in developing the ability to empathize, allowing participants to "reflect" the actions and experiences of others in their brains.
4) **Drama for Learning Techniques:** This involves using various drama techniques to explore and resolve participants' concerns, such as drama games, tableaux, role-playing, improvisation, and designing participatory performances.

The author integrated these principles—content for inner self-development, guidelines, and drama principles—into an **8-step, 8-activity program** for Level 5 male youth. The curriculum consists of **75 hours** over **five weeks**, with three five-hour sessions per week.

2. Methods and Outcomes of Drama Activities

The five-week program was conducted with the guiding principle that drama promotes learning for internal human transformation.

Week 1: Process and Learning Outcomes. Activities focused on building relationships, fostering trust, and introducing the "self-awareness" tool through the "Open to Change" and "Self-Awareness Begins with Us" activity sets.

- **Relationships and Trust:** Activities such as " Balance doll or Tumbling Doll " and "Lifting a Teammate" helped build trust and rapport, making the youth more willing to participate and share opinions with unfamiliar peers.
- **Awareness and Problem-Solving:** Group activities, such as "Duck on the Pond," encouraged youth to reflect on teamwork and compare it to real-life obstacles, including facing problems and starting over after making a mistake.
- **Expression and Self-Understanding:** Some groups began to communicate more directly. The use of art and storytelling through mask-making helped youth express their inner thoughts and feelings, leading to increased self-awareness and understanding of their peers.
- **Atmosphere and Safety:** The overall atmosphere was warm and relaxed. Youth began to see the activities as a safe space, feeling comfortable expressing their thoughts and needs openly.

Week 2: Process and Learning Outcomes Following the positive relationship-building in Week 1, Week 2 focused on deep self-exploration through activities that emphasized internal perception and experience.

- **Interdependence and Coexistence:** Group activities, such as "Poison River" and "Butterfly and Log," which utilized bodily movement, promoted cooperation and interdependence. The youth realized that mutual help leads to a happier society and that life requires reliance on others.
- **Self-Awareness and Understanding:** Activities like "Four Directions Animal" and "Monster Drawing," combined with role-playing, helped youth learn more about their personalities and personal needs. They communicated their thoughts and feelings more clearly and saw the importance of precise communication.
- **Open-mindedness and Relationship Building:** The week's outcomes demonstrated that the youth gradually gained a deeper understanding of themselves, lowered their defenses, and became more receptive to others. They were able to form new relationships, converse with new friends, and share more of their feelings. The overall learning atmosphere was relaxed and joyful.

Week 3: Process and Learning Outcomes Activities in Week 3 challenged youth to become aware of their thoughts and understand others' perspectives through drama, movement, and various art forms (e.g., clay modeling, storytelling, writing, poetry).

- **Exploring Concerns:** The "Pull and Hold" activity helped youth reflect on past, present, and future anxieties, such as conflicts, fear of punishment, or worries about the future.
- **Understanding Self and Others:** The "Primer Sentence" activity, where participants freely completed sentences, helped them understand their own and others' perspectives, revealing the diversity of identities, hopes, and anxieties.
- **Emotional Release and Group Empowerment:** Collaborative drawing and writing free-verse poetry allowed youth to release inner feelings and realize they could move forward and create new things, even after losing something important. The resulting poems created a sense of group empowerment, reflecting their ability to change their feelings and actions to define their life path.
- Overall, these activities stimulated inner learning and an initial awareness of their capacity for change, even if a clear future direction was not yet established.

Week 4: Process and Learning Outcomes Activities. In Week 4, activities focused on building self-confidence and designing one's life through the concepts of "Self, Thoughts, Feelings" and "Life's Milestones: Rooted and Resolute."

- **Positive and Hopeful Outlook:** Youth learned from the short story "The X-Bear" through a script analysis process. This instilled a feeling that they could find happiness despite past wounds and that they could release past mistakes to pursue a brighter future. Many began to gain self-confidence and recognize their potential to adapt to new situations.
- **Self-Development through Participatory Drama:** Starting with the poems from Week 3, a participatory performance was created that simulated life in the detention center. This allowed youth to work on their inner selves, practice communicating their true feelings, and collaborate. They learned to be patient and realized that some tasks require collaboration with others, even when they are difficult.
- **Designing Clear Life Goals:** An activity involving card selection, drawing, and group storytelling motivated youth to design their own lives. They created "future milestones"

through the "Just Do It" activity, helping them choose and plan their path toward concrete goals.

Week 5: Process and Learning Outcomes. Week 5 focused on communicating identity through a learning exhibition, aiming to help youth see their self-worth, feel capable, and take pride in their work for others.

- **Creative Self-Reflection through Song:** Youth collaboratively wrote a song based on their poems. The song's themes of moving forward, letting go of the past, and discovering self-worth demonstrated the tangible integration of their self, body, and mind.
- **Exhibition and Communicating Change:** The youth prepared an exhibition to showcase their work, featuring zones such as "Masks (Who Am I?)," "Timeline (My Future)," and "Self-Transformation ID Card." This allowed them to select stories and present their changes to a diverse audience, including new youth, friends, and professionals.
- **Expression and Pride:** The participatory performances, poetry readings, songs, and exhibition preparation provided the youth with an opportunity to fully express themselves and take pride in their work and abilities.

The use of drama and art activities revealed the complex dimensions of the youth's behavior and inner feelings:

- **Behavioral and Emotional Reflections in Art:** The drawings and stories showed behavioral expressions related to violence, conflict, and substance abuse. However, they also revealed vulnerability, such as loneliness, a desire for love, and a wish to return to a warm family environment.
- **Discourse of Coexistence and Interdependence:** The frequent use of phrases like "We must help each other, be united" symbolized their need for safety and harmonious coexistence, both inside and outside the facility.
- **Impact of Staff Training on Psyche and Communication:** Youth reflected on the physical fatigue from training, which affected their daily lives and participation in other development activities. This led to a limited communication style, where they would often only answer direct questions in a way they believed would please the listener, especially in closed-ended questions.

3. Inner Self Transformation After Program Participation

After participating in the program, youth showed significant inner self-transformation toward recognizing their self-worth. Group discussions and learning log reviews confirmed that the diverse activities over five weeks were crucial to this change.

A prominent result was increased self-confidence, self-awareness, and self-appreciation. For example, one youth said, "I admire myself for putting effort into the activities with my friends" (Youth 17), and another stated, "I am more confident, I speak better, I dare to make better decisions, and I am more determined" (Youth 1). Youth also developed better relationships and an ability to manage problems, as evidenced by statements such as, "I am a skilled person, I am patient and determined to make everything turn out well" (Youth 5).

These changes align with measurement results showing a significant increase in their life satisfaction, perceived competence, and confidence in creating their future despite past mistakes.

Before participating in the program, most juveniles (52.94%) had a moderate level of self-esteem, with only a small percentage (5.8%) at a low level. However, after participating in the program, the level of self-esteem significantly increased, with 70% of participants at a

high level and 30% at a moderate level. The positive self-assessment questions that showed the most increase were confidence in one's abilities, self-satisfaction, and the recognition that one still possesses good qualities.

The program successfully boosted self-esteem through a developmental process starting with self-exploration, leading to the discovery of potential and the acceptance of both strengths and limitations. Youth learned to overcome these limitations by exploring new thoughts, feelings, and perspectives, and by consciously understanding their self-concept to design their lives with purpose. This resulted in greater life confidence and a belief in their ability to improve.

Conclusion

The theatre program fosters effective Learning, promotes inner self-change, and enhances self-esteem in juveniles, utilizing drama activities that stimulate self-exploration, expression, and interaction with others. Examples include:

1. **Acting and Improvisation Activities:** These activities provided opportunities for juveniles to explore their thoughts, emotions, and feelings through action and speech in simulated situations. Drama served as a "mirror of life," enabling juveniles to see and understand their inner truths (Fortier, 2016, pp. 194-198). By assuming various roles, juveniles can experiment, test new behaviors, and learn to express themselves purposefully without concern for real-life consequences, which is especially crucial for juveniles with a history of repeat offenses and a lack of confidence in communication.
    - **Example:** Creating simulated living situations in the training center and devising dialogue for life in dorms and blocks allowed juveniles to work with their inner selves and practice communicating genuine feelings (Week 4).
2. **Theatre Making Activities:** The process of creating theatre, from plot development and scriptwriting to directing and joint performance, fostered teamwork, collaborative decision-making, and collective responsibility. By being "creators" of the activities themselves, juveniles developed a sense of ownership and pride in the resulting work. This is vital for juveniles who may have felt devalued and lacked social acceptance from outside the system.
    - **Example:** Adapting poetry from Week 3 into performance through a "participatory theatre-making process" and collaboratively organizing an exhibition demonstrated teamwork and the creation of work that juveniles could be proud of (Weeks 4 and 5).
3. **Art-Based Activities and Reflection:** Utilizing various art forms such as clay sculpting of human figures, storytelling, drawing, writing, poetry, or even composing songs served as tools to help juveniles explore and express inner thoughts and feelings that are difficult to communicate verbally. These activities stimulated **critical self-reflection**, which is at the core of transformative Learning (Mezirow, 2003).
    - **Example:** Clay sculpting, storytelling, drawing, and poetry in Week 3 enabled juveniles to reflect on inner blockages and life perspectives, including collaboratively composing a song from poetry, which demonstrated the integration of self, body, and mind and fostered the insight that "life needs a starting point; the beginning is more important, it takes a long time to get to the first sentence" (Weeks 3 and 5).

These drama activities helped juveniles explore, understand, and accept their inner selves, build positive relationships with others, and develop life management skills, all of which sustainably contributed to an increase in self-esteem.

Following participation in the drama program for learning, the youth demonstrated inner self-change, which led to an enhanced sense of self-esteem. The author used focus group

discussions and reviewed learning logs to evaluate the outcomes. The assessment revealed that the diverse activities throughout the five weeks were instrumental in creating this change. The youth showed increased self-confidence, a recognition of their potential, and self-appreciation, as reflected in statements from the youth, such as:

"I commend myself for earnestly doing activities with friends" (Y 17) and "I am brave, more articulate, more decisive in a better direction, more determined" (Y 1). Additionally, juveniles developed better relationships with others and recognized their ability to manage problems, for instance: "I am talented, patient, determined to do everything well" (Y 5). These changes align with measurement results showing a significant increase in life satisfaction scores, perceived competence, and confidence in shaping their future despite past mistakes.

This program fostered an increased level of self-esteem through a developmental process that began with self-exploration and self-discovery, leading to the recognition of potential and acceptance of both strengths and limitations. Juveniles learn to overcome limitations by exploring new thoughts, feelings, and life perspectives, including conscious self-concept awareness to design their lives purposefully. This outcome made juveniles more confident in life and convinced that they could improve, as reflected by their statements:

"I found a new perspective. I used to think I was stuck... I had lost my future; my life was over. However, now I think I can start over. I can control my emotions better and let things go more easily. I do not speak negatively to myself because that would take away my motivation. Now I have more friends and can get along with people more easily" (Y 13).

"From the poetry activity, I want to say that in life, there is good and bad. No one is born good forever or bad forever. Everyone has both good and bad aspects. Even if life before was not good, we can change it" (Y 2).

A significant change was juveniles' ability to overcome fear and the belief that they were worthless or incapable. The program was designed for juveniles to communicate their thoughts through an exhibition they designed and presented, which significantly boosted their self-confidence, as expressed by one juvenile:

"I feel like I learned more about self-expression. I feel like I have changed in many ways. I was so excited and shocked by what I did today. I felt like I could not do it, but once I finished, I knew I could do what others could too. I feel very proud, I never thought I would get here" (Y 8).

The author believes that learning through drama practice creates a connection to one's own life through feelings, fostering awareness by allowing one to see oneself and others. Learning through drama is comparable to a life journey that helps participants define their lives and identities through action, which involves examining what happens to oneself in a given moment, affecting both the conscious and subconscious minds.

Discussion

Drama-based activities that foster self-esteem must begin with an understanding of the youth, particularly the unique characteristics of Level 5 male youth. These individuals often struggle with feelings of worthlessness, a lack of acceptance, and distrust of others, in addition to emotional wounds from repeat offenses and negative self-perceptions, such as "feeling worthless or not worthy enough." This insight guided the program's design, which focused on restoring internal value, creating a safe and respectful environment, and using a multidisciplinary approach. This approach integrated principles of drama, participatory learning, and the practice of "presence–contemplative" to foster self-awareness. Drama's role as a "mirror to life" and its stimulation of "mirror neurons" allowed youth to perceive and understand their inner experiences more deeply (Fortier, 2016, pp. 194-198).

The program's drama activities were crucial in building self-esteem among Level 5 male youth, especially those with a history of repeat offenses who face social stigma. The

program's direct focus on these issues, by restoring inner value through a blend of drama and Transformative Learning principles, yielded precise results. The elements within the drama that enabled youth to see their self-worth can be synthesized into three main factors:

1. Creating a Safe Space for Self-Exploration and Expression.

Drama was used as a tool to create a relaxed, accepting environment where youth could freely explore their complex thoughts, feelings, and emotions. This was vital for youth who had previously been cautious and guarded in their real lives. Drama activities allowed them to "play" with their feelings and bodies through role-playing or improvisation, enabling them to express their "inner truth" without fear of judgment. These activities also encouraged youth to be more "daring in expressing" and "daring in thinking," which led to increased self-confidence, as one youth noted:

> "I feel like I have learned to be more daring in expressing myself. I feel like I have changed in so many ways. I was so excited and shocked by what I did today. I felt like I could not do it, but once it was finished, I realized I could do the same things others could. I am very proud. I never thought this day would come." (Y 8)

This aligns with Chaiwat Wong-asa (2019), who states that activities that lead to self-worth must prioritize a relaxed, accepting environment with positive reinforcement and a space for free reflection of thoughts and feelings.

2. A Process of Self-Reflection and Creating New Meaning for Life

Drama activities stimulated "critical self-reflection" and "critical discourse," which Mezirow (2003) identifies as key tools for transformative learning. Because drama acts as a "mirror to life" (Fortier, 2016, pp. 194-198), youth could see themselves and situations similar to their own lives. Activities such as writing poetry, composing songs, or organizing an exhibition were processes that required young people to reflect on their past, present, and future. This led to a deeper perception and understanding of their inner selves, which helped them shift their negative self-perceptions, as another youth reflected:

"I found a new perspective. I used to think I was locked up, that my future was gone. However, now I think I can start over. I can control my emotions better and let things go more easily. I do not speak negatively to myself because that kills my motivation. Now I have more friends and can get along with people more easily." (Y 13)

This is consistent with the concept of transformative learning, which emphasizes changing internal characteristics, perspectives, and meanings of the world and life. This is achieved through a process that helps dismantle old perspectives and meanings via activities that stimulate thoughts, feelings, discussions, and internal reflection (Chollada Thongthawee et al., 2008, p. 36).

3. Collaborative Creation and Experiencing Success

The program's focus on "participatory learning" and "participatory drama creation" allowed youth to be part of a creative process from start to finish. Seeing tangible results, such as a co-written song or a co-organized exhibition, created a sense of pride and accomplishment. These activities also encouraged them to work with others, build positive relationships, and learn to take responsibility for their roles, which is essential for social integration. The praise and encouragement they received from peers and facilitators, along with the opportunity to share their stories with others, served as positive reinforcement that strengthened their belief in their potential, as one youth expressed:

"I admire myself for being so dedicated to the activities with my friends." (Y 17)

And another:

"I am a good person, patient, and determined to make everything I do turn out well." (Y 5)

The program, designed to develop inner self toward self-worth, emphasizes the level of participation, direct experiential learning, and positive reinforcement. In summary, the drama activities in this program fostered self-worth in Level 5 male youth by creating a safe space for self-exploration, stimulating reflection and new meanings for life, and promoting self-pride through collaborative creation and successful experiences.

Youth Transformation After Program Participation

Youth demonstrated clear changes in both their external personality and inner self. When their inner selves changed, they began to feel self-love, recognized their abilities, felt proud of themselves, and lived more happily with their peers. During the program, they began making decisions independently, became clearer about their needs, realistically assessed their abilities, and felt prepared to face problems without relying on others.

The results from the self-esteem scale showed that they had more self-love, were less self-critical, felt more capable, were more daring in their thinking and actions, could set their own life goals, and were better prepared to face hardship, pressure, and even defeat.
External characteristics also emerged, such as improved communication skills, full participation in activities, and a friendly, easygoing demeanor when living with others.

"At first, he was not very talkative, but I saw him start to speak more, be more daring to speak and think. He became more lively, spoke concisely, and to the point. He started to be more confident in his ideas." (F 1)

"The youth became more daring to express themselves, more reasoned. I saw their smiles return. I saw them talk more, and I saw a determination that bordered on impatience. I saw goals and self-confidence." (G 1)

The youth's attitudes toward their future goals changed, starting with self-confidence and the courage to communicate. They shifted from being afraid to speak to being able to assert their ideas, which led them to feel they could develop and create their future.

The internal transformation of the youth began with feeling comfortable participating in activities and having a positive self-image. This was the first factor for self-change, requiring the courage to accept one's character and past. Often, youth could express "thoughts and concepts about how life should be," but the researcher observed that this was often memorized from past training. When it was merely memorized, it did not lead to behavioral change. The challenging process was making the youth willing to change—changing their feelings (heart), their thoughts (mind), and their body (ready to act)—into a genuine desire to adapt.

What became clear was that new relationships were formed among the youth through group activities. They developed positive feelings about themselves as they reflected on their perspectives and gained new life perspectives through a process that led them to discover their feelings and thoughts. This aligns with the transformative learning approach, which posits that change requires a process of "conscious awareness"—being mindful of one's thoughts and feelings. Therefore, the program emphasized practicing self-awareness, building inner stability, and continuously developing the ability to see oneself.

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Balancing Power(s) in a Community-based Artistic Practice and Education

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Abstract

As the significance of community in artistic practice and educational settings continues to be recognized, shifting power dynamics—often shaped by generations of individual-centered approaches—can create contradictions. These tensions have the potential to jeopardize or frustrate community-led initiatives. Without acknowledging and addressing these areas of conflict, community-based artists and educators may struggle to navigate the balance between individual autonomy and the collective, ultrasocial needs of a community. Shared power does not always translate into shared responsibility, and while cultivating a sense of agency in individuals is essential, it doesn't necessarily foster an awareness of others' autonomy. In art academies, community-centered values can clash with institutional agendas, while in artistic projects, these values often confront socio-economic realities. Human culture is not simply a set of material objects, but is 'a collection of movement patterns' (LaMothe, 2015), learned and embodied through social relationships. Thus, the paradigm shift proposed by community-based artistic and educational projects does not automatically dismantle ingrained patterns of social interaction and learning. On the contrary, introducing new patterns, especially ones in conflict with established norms, may result in miscommunication, resistance, and even conflict. In this paper, I will share insights from my MA research project, *Balancing Powers in Somatic-Informed Dance Class: Pedagogy, Environment, and Capitalism*, as well as subsequent experience of developing the interdisciplinary course *Archives of the Future* for undergraduate art and design students. The discussion will highlight areas of tension within community-based projects and offer reflections on how artists and educators can better navigate and facilitate these complex power dynamics.

Keywords: embodied research, critical pedagogy, social somatics

Introduction

The role of community in education and art has been increasingly recognized since the mid-twentieth century, initially in contexts addressing underprivileged youth and children with behavioral challenges (Visotsky, 1964; Nelson, 1967). In the UK, the Community Arts Movement, rooted in the countercultu ral and grassroots activism of the late 1960s, advocated to democratize culture by promoting art-making *by, with, and for* communities, directly challenging elitist institutions and traditional hierarchies in the arts (Jeffers & Moriarty, 2017). In 1990s, Peter London's *Step Outside: Community-Based Art Education* further bridged art education and community practice, asserting that 'learning is enabled by an intact community and hindered by its absence' (1994, p. xiii). He argued that a curriculum

disconnected from the world outside the classroom is not only irrelevant but inherently limiting in its educational potential.

From the 2000s onward, community-based approaches began to receive increasing attention in both K-12 and higher education, valued not merely for their social and political but also for their environmental impact (Houston, 2005; Smith & Sobel, 2010; Cheesman, 2011; Barr, 2013). In the 2010s, scholarship began to recognize community not merely as a context but as an epistemological entity—framing community-based interventions as a pedagogical methodology (Illeris, 2013; Pedersen *et al*., 2014, Sharkey *et al.*, 2016; Fitzgerald, 2017; Popielarz, 2022; Catalano & Morales, 2022; Popielarz & Galliher, 2023). This shift underscores that the presence of a community alone is insufficient to achieve the learning, social, political and environmental benefits attributed to community-based practice. These outcomes require intentional facilitation. Moreover, community-based pedagogy can extend beyond the immediate context of a particular community, contributing to individual learners and practitioners meaningfully.

My own artistic trajectory has followed a similar arc: from early grassroots performances to community-oriented art and educational initiatives, I gradually came to recognize community not merely as a setting or strategy but as the methodological and pedagogical core of my practice. During my recent MA inquiry (2023), *Balancing Powers in Somatic-Informed Dance Class: Pedagogy, Environment, and Capitalism,* I articulated this intrinsic role of community in my work for the first time. The inquiry led me to understand that it is not only central to my pedagogical and methodological approach, but also lies at the heart of the tensions I encounter—and the transformative possibilities that arise—in both educational and artistic contexts.

These power dynamics are shaped by generation(s) of individual-centered ideology, creating fundamental contradictions with the ethics and processes of community-based practice. Such tensions may jeopardize or frustrate community-led initiatives. Without acknowledging and addressing these areas of conflict, community-based artists and educators may struggle to navigate the balance between individual autonomy and the collective, ultrasocial needs of a community. Shared power does not always translate into shared responsibility. While cultivating individual agency is essential, it does not necessarily foster an awareness of others' autonomy. In art academies, community-centered values can clash with institutional agendas, while in artistic projects, these values often confront socio-economic realities.

While the transformative potential of community-based practice is increasingly acknowledged in academic discourse, much of this scholarship focuses on actual or possible benefits. Less attention is given to its contradictions and potential undesirable outcome—such as ethical dilemmas, misalignment with the socio-economic or political context, and the constraints on imagination imposed by entrenched patterns of thinking and behavior. In particular contexts and among certain groups, applying community-based initiatives can both raise ethical and practical concerns, questioning the assumed universality of such practices and requiring a more precise definition of what we consider ‘community-based.'

My ongoing inquiry seeks to explore these shadowed areas of discomfort, tension and ambiguity within community-based practice. It aims to recognize patterns of relational conflict and investigate how those relationships might be re-patterned in more sustainable and generative ways. Practically, it seeks to identify the epistemological foundations of community-based practice that could guide the facilitation of artistic and educational initiatives with greater awareness and care. It also aims to uncover or articulate the pedagogical and methodological approaches that make such practices possible, shareable, and adaptable by other facilitators. In this paper, I identify four emerging areas of tension: two arise from a misalignment between conceptual ideals and lived reality; one relates to an

intrinsic contradiction of human nature; and one concerns dominant structural frameworks that both oppose and paradoxically enable the ideals underpinning community-based practice.

Theoretical framework and methodology

The conceptual models informing my inquiry draw from theories of embodiment within new materialism, sociocultural constructions of the body, and somatic frameworks. Central to my perspective are Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's proposition (2011) that movement is a primary way of knowing, and Kmerer L. LaMothe's view that matter itself is a variation of movement (2015). Rather than perceiving individuals, communities or practices as fixed entities, my inquiry seeks to recognize patterns of movement—actions and responses—as they emerge in lived experience, rather than as static abstractions constructed through language.

While language itself may be seen as a communicative pattern grounded in bodily experience (Abram, 1996), it also filters perception of reality through culturally specific lenses (Burkitt, 1999), shaping both what we notice and how we interpret it. Ian Burkitt's emphasis on the social formation of embodied subjectivity through practices and structures is further extended—and partially deconstructed—by Karen Barad's theory of 'agential realism' (2003) which dissolves boundaries between entities and actions, proposing that intra-actions, rather than interactions, are the generative basis for both matter and meaning.

Kimerer L. LaMothe's proposition of the intrinsic paradox between individual and ultrasocial dimensions of humanity (2015), together with Jill Green's social somatic theory (2015), offers a framework to navigate the apparent contradiction between viewing the body as a site of agency and identity grounded in first-person perspective, and its socially constructed nature. While the sense of the self as a distinct, bounded individual is subjective, it also arises from one's psychophysiological structures (Damasio, 2000), influencing how we act and relate—and in turn shaping the reality beyond the body.

From the ethical perspective, I drew upon the framework of Indigenous research articulated by Shawn Wilson (2008) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021), which emphasizes the importance of balancing the acquisition of knowledge with its consequences. Community-based practice, in this context, inherently involves cultivating reciprocal relationships, where the role of facilitator, artist or researcher is to support rather than lead. This approach entails both responsibilities and limitations.

The methodological approach of my MA inquiry, *Balancing Powers in Somatic-Informed Dance Class: Pedagogy, Environment, and Capitalism,* was grounded in ethnographic and embodied research. Data collection included six semi-structured interviews, primary documents related to somatic-informed dance educators (webpages and social media platforms), and my own reflective journaling. Embodied ethnographic fieldwork (Thanem & Knights, 2019; Martin, 2019) positioned me as both an insider and outsider in the research process, allowing to navigate the subtle boundary between the reality I aimed to observe and my subjective perception, shaped by both previous and immediate experiences.

Using an inductive thematic analysis, themes were not pre-established but emerged from the data collected with a focus on embodied experience rather than conceptual interpretation. This process allowed to recognize 'community' as a key theme and provided a new lens which to reframe the inquiry's guiding questions in terms of community-based practice. In turn, this shift began to influence both my educational methodology and ongoing practice-based inquiry.

The subsequent interdisciplinary course, *Archives of the Future—Embodying Technologies of Augmentation,* developed in collaboration with Petra Johnsonand Liu Yingchuan for art and design undergraduate students of China Academy of Art (CAA) in 2024, was informed by insights from my MA thesis. It allowed me to consciously experiment with community-based pedagogical frameworks. However, these experiments were tempered

by the need to meet the expectations and curricular requirements, as well ethical considerations—radical interventions could compromise students' learning outcomes.

Within the course, I explicitly emphasized relationships as the foundation of artistic practice and invited students to explore their interconnectedness with people, environments, more-than-human world, and ideas. This approach drew on the notions of Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony* (2008) and included the introduction to reflective writing, somatic-informed improvisation and embodied research methods. Ethical considerations limited data collection to my own observations and reflective journaling. As it was my fourth course I had devised and facilitated for CAA undergraduates, I was able recognize the impact of this methodological shift by comparing it to previous iterations.

Some community-based pedagogical tools were also employed in non-institutional settings—such as workshops and open sessions. While these environments lacked the structural consistency of a university course, however, they offered a valuable counterbalance through the diversity of mixed-group participation outside institutional constrains. These settings challenged conventional definition of community and made visible relational dynamics between participants and facilitator that extend beyond the hierarchical frameworks typical of academic institutions.

Emerging themes

Between community imagined and perceived

Community-based is an umbrella term encompassing a range of educational and artistic practices rooted in diverse theoretical traditions. While community-based education and art are frequently situated within the frameworks of transformative education and civic engagement (Parrish, 2009; Smith & Sobel, 2014; Fitzgerald, 2017)—often drawing on the legacy of Paulo Freire (Cohen-Cruz, 2005; Bumiller, 2013; Pompa, 2013), and sometimes with a particular focus on marginalized and oppressed groups—they can also be understood in terms of broader engagement with communities and ecosystems (Smith & Sobel, 2014; Popielarz & Galliher, 2023). Despite the variability in context and emphasis, what unites these educational and artistic practices is a shared departure from individualist paradigms of learning and creativity. This shift away from individual-centered approaches is further underscored by the use of the term community-centered or -oriented, which is more commonly associated with pedagogical methodologies (Illeris, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2017).

As a counterpoint to individual-centered models, community-oriented educational practice is often grounded in the idealization or romanticisation of 'community' itself. While it challenges modernist assumptions about the existence of an authentic individual, it frequently draws on poststructuralist theories of subjectivity, which offer more dynamic models of the learning 'self' and emphasize the collective (Illeris, 2013). Yet, these approaches may inadvertently reinforce a parallel myth of community—as an authentic, coherent entity (*ibid.*). In such imaginaries, community becomes a 'warm place 'where freedom is exchanged for security, leaving little room for 'reflection, criticism, or experimentation' (Bauman, 2001, p. 12). Such perspectives often presume that communities are grounded in shared interests and needs (Smith & Sobel, 2014), built upon unquestionable truths (Cohen-Cruz, 2005), or founded on genuine principles of justice and equity (Ladson-Billings, 2001, cited in Popielarz & Galliher, 2023, p. 100)—assumptions that frequently conflict with the complexities, tensions, and contradictions of real-world community-based practices.

In the context of the arts, 'community' is often understood as an alternative to the 'mass' in a popular culture of an industrial-age society or as a collaborative framework involving both artists and non-artists who contributes to the creation of work (Cohen-Cruz, 2005). It may also signal the inclusion of individuals positioned lower in cultural or social hierarchies—

those who are marginalized or oppressed. However, just as the idealization of community can obscure its complexities, limiting the concept to specific groups (such as non-professionals or ethnic minorities) risks overlooking the existence of community within more individual-centered contexts, as well as the capacity of educational or artistic practices not only to express community but also to produce it (*ibid.*, p. 100). Community-based practice does not presume the preexistence of 'binding sentiment' (Bauman, 2001, p. 10), nor does it discover community as an internalized relationship. Rather, it approaches community as a dynamic movement of 'being-in-common′. In this view, community emerges as a social situation of coming together or becoming exposed to 'togetherness' (Nancy, 1997, 2000, cited in Illeris, 2013, p. 81).

The perception of a group as a community is often shaped by one's positionality, particularly that of an outsider. When entering a classroom, I am inclined to assume a preexisting familiarity among students from the same institution. However, such an assumption may obscure the fact that relationships within the group may be just as emergent as those between the students and myself. Facilitating time and space to develop rapport and to acknowledge our varying intentions for engaging with the course is a crucial step toward 'togetherness'. Articulating community guidelines may constitute another step. While such rules often reflect aspirational rather than fully realized behavioral norms, the practice of reflecting on how one may influence others—both within and beyond the immediate group—and of acknowledging shared values, remains vital to cultivating communality.

Recognizing relationships

In community-based practice, the pre-existence of community is not a prerequisite; rather, the practice itself cultivates the conditions for an exposition to togetherness. Community, understood as a social situation, can emerge in various educational and artistic frameworks—including those that are individual-centered or hierarchical. What may distinguish community-based practices, however, is their explicit commitment to acknowledging, inquiring, and nurturing the relationships both within the forming community and beyond. These practices resist the idealization of community or the imposition of fixed patterns of what Kimerer L. LaMothe refers to as 'relationality' (2015, p. 134). Instead, they frame the class or artistic project as a relational space in which relationships are more perceptible, their viability is examined, and their potential for transformation is explored.

One of the frequently cited principles in community-based art and education is reciprocity (Cohen-Cruz, 2005; Smith & Sobel, 2010; Pedersen *et al*., 2015; Fitzgerald, 2017; Popielarz, 2022). Often described as a mutually nourishing relationship (Cohen-Cruz, 2005, p. 93), the practical enactment of reciprocity remains under-defined, and sometimes entirely absent. In artistic contexts, it may be illustrated through joint ownership between community members and artist(s), or by the ethical imperative for artists to suspend their tendency to 'impose their own aesthetics and ideology ' (*ibid*., p. 96). Within Indigenous research paradigms, reciprocity is further recognized as a core principle of healthy relationships (Wilson, 2008; Kara, 2020; Smith, 2021). Here, reciprocity does not equalize the differences but insists on mutual, non-exploitative interaction (Kara, 2020), and is inseparable from the principles of respect and responsibility (Wilson, 2008, p. 99).

From the perspective of new materialist philosophy, reciprocity acquires an ontological dimension—as 'the very structure of perception' (Abram, 2010, p. 111). The proposition that 'whenever we touch any entity, we are also ourselves being touched by that entity' (*ibid.*) recognizes reciprocity as an underlying dynamic of all interactions. The more attuned the perception, the more response-able the reciprocity becomes. In community-based practice, empathy emerges as a mode of perception intrinsic to human interaction—enabling participants to sense and respond to relational dynamics as they unfold. Cultivating

attentiveness to others, and attuning empathy within a group makes it possible to calibrate and deepen the reciprocity of relationships.

In hierarchical settings, attentiveness tends to be unidirectional—typically oriented toward those in positions of authority, with subordinates anticipating their intentions. Dance improvisation practice, by contrast, deliberately disrupts fixed roles, fostering fluid shifts between leading and following, where dynamic exchange becomes a source of new ideas and creativity. Leader–follower exercises help participants recognize and challenge their relational habits. Those inclined to lead may struggle with trust and the loss of control, while habitual followers may feel uneasy making decisions or initiating movement. With sustained practice, however, moving between roles becomes more fluid, enhancing one's capacity to respond to relational dynamics.

The process of cultivating the reciprocity among participants of community-based practice is neither immediate nor uniform. Differences in perception can lead to dissonant interactions, increasing tension or even triggering conflict. As David Abram (2010) observes, to experience something, one must render himself vulnerable. Yet, when such vulnerability is not reciprocated, it can come at a cost. In the context of community-based education or art-making, facilitators are often the first to step into this vulnerability, exposing themselves to the risk of secondary trauma and 'compassion fatigue'—consequences extensively recognized in the caring professions as 'the cost of caring' (Slocum-Gori *et al*., 2013, cited in Pellegrini *et al.*, 2021, p. 370).

The potential for conflicts in community-based practice is also under-acknowledged. Some authors, however, do recognize its likelihood (Fitzgerald, 2017), while others stress the need for facilitators to obtain training in conflict resolution (Cohen-Cruz, 2005, p. 102). In a more authoritarian settings, conflicts are often masked by externally imposed rules, supporting a facade of harmony. In contrast, community-based frameworks seek to render relational dynamics visible—requiring ongoing negotiation and reconciliation. Yet, what patterns of conflict resolution are compatible with the ethics of community-based practices remain an open question requiring further investigation.

While community guidelines may outline individual and shared responsibilities, they often omit the processes of navigating conflict and reconciliation—largely due to entrenched expectations, drawn from hierarchical models, that assign the role of mediator solely to the teacher or facilitator. A shift toward more horizontal, community-centered approaches cannot be imposed; it requires the cultivation of patterns of attunement. This includes explicitly acknowledging the potential for discord—not only between individuals, but also between the ideas with which they strongly identify. These attachments are often intimate and identity-defining, which can make it difficult to engage critically when one's ideas are challenged within a group. Thus, the reflective practice of detaching identity from one's ideas is essential—not only for reconciliation, but for generating more responsive and vital concepts.

Between individual and ultrasocial

An emphasis on relationships in community-based practice reveals a persistent tension between individual autonomy and the collective needs of the community. In more individual-centered educational or artistic frameworks, social awareness tends to be subdued, with individual knowledge and autonomy prioritized (Dragon, 2015, p. 28). Community-based approaches, however, often seek to resolve the human paradox of 'being both singular and ultrasocial' (LaMothe, 2015, p. 130) by shifting focus toward communal expression. This inclination affirms 'collective genius' over that of 'individual genius' (Cohen-Cruz, 2005, p. 92-93), often diverting attention away from individual learning processes (Illeris, 2003, p. 79). While some scholars recognize the individual in community-based frameworks as a subject of empowerment (Houston, 2005, p. 169) or transformation (Kuppers, 2007, p. 6), the

reciprocal interdependence between individual and community remains insufficiently recognized and underexplored.

Positioning community-based paradigms as a response to modern culture's overemphasis—if not obsession—with individuality, which serves as 'the basis conceptual unit for nearly all forms of social organization and knowledge' (LaMothe, 2015, p. 110), may provoke a reactive swing toward a romanticized notion of ultrasociality and the devaluation of the 'self' as ego (Fraleigh, 2018, p. 31). Yet, insofar as 'the sense of self' is integral to human psychophysiology (Damasio, 2000, p. 59), such a displacement of individuality risks undermining the vital roles of autonomy and self-actualization in the cultivation of reciprocity.

Community, therefore, is not dispersed by excessive individualism, just as the individual does not vanish within collective frameworks—they become obscured. Early progressive educators such as John Dewey acknowledged the necessity 'to cultivate [one's] own garden' (1929, cited in Bannon, 2018, p. xii) as integral to engaging with broader social dynamics. Yet, in community-based practice, the notion of the individual as inseparable from ultrasociality is rarely articulated. Within Indigenous research paradigms, the individual is often regarded as a constitutive element of the communal whole. Still, knowledge is not attributed to individuals, but rather asserted as communally owned—'because it exists within relationships' (Kara, 2020, p. 81).

To some extent, the underrepresentation of individual autonomy within Indigenous frameworks can be related to their romanticized portrayal as alternatives to the malfunctions of post-industrial society. However, even anecdotal ethnographic inquiries challenge this idealization. For instance, in the tradition of personal songs among the native peoples of Northeast Asia and the Arctic North—particularly the Nanai—songs are composed by individuals and cannot be performed by others without explicit permission; some may never be shared publicly at all (Bulgakova & Nabok, 2021). The longstanding disregard of this tradition by anthropologists until the twenty-first century underscores the ideological bias that has shaped our understanding of the individual within community.

The example of personal songs illustrates how our understanding of the interdependence between the individual and the ultrasocial in art remains shaped by post-industrial concepts. While fields like art therapy and community-based practice have begun to challenge the dominant notion of art as the production of exceptional objects or elite entertainment—where the idea of 'individual genius' is most justified—alternative forms of art-making still struggle to establish appropriate methodologies. This is often due to interrupted or absent traditions; after all, we tend to teach as we were taught (Feldman, 1993, p. 103).

Among the arts, performing arts—particularly dance—have retained a distinct interplay between individual and collective dimensions (LaMothe, 2015, p. 116), even within more individual-oriented forms. Somatic-informed improvisation offers an embodied inquiry into these dynamics, circumventing the abstraction of language. Kinesphere-based exercises, for instance, cultivate awareness of personal space and the ability to perceive that of others. The kinesthetic experience of improvising with a group—moving independently yet in relation—enacts the interplay between individuality and ultrasociality. When deepened through reflective writing and group discussion, such practices become epistemological tools, offering pathways to reimagine the relationship between autonomy and collectivity across other domains.

Institutions

Community-based practice inevitably generates tensions with and within institutional frameworks. In K-12 and higher education, institutional hierarchies and the emphasis on performativity (Olssen & Peters, 2005) and individual achievement (Kara, 2020, p. 103;

Fitzgerald, 2017, p. 6) often conflict with the intrinsic relationality of community. In artistic context, this incompatibility with the institutional frameworks of contemporary art may be less perceptible, however, it nonetheless jeopardizes underlying principles of community. The web-like, non-hierarchical structure of communities resists simply incorporation into the vertically organized systems typical of art and educational institutions. Moreover, although communities are often listed alongside individuals and institutions, they are rarely recognized as equal legal or structural entities.

In educational settings, the focus on individual student performance is most evident in assessment systems (Fitzgerald, 2017, p. 7), which typically do not account for collective efforts. While some educators incorporate collective elements—such as peer review or group-assessed contributions—the emphasis still tends to fall on individual achievement. Students who excel independently but struggle with collaboration may question assessments that prioritize collective efforts, particularly if they are accustomed to being valued solely for individual achievement. Conversely, some students may benefit from collective work without offering reciprocal contributions. In artistic practice, the value of community-based collaborations may be overshadowed by an emphasis on outcomes, which can obscure the importance of context, process, and ethical considerations.

Institutional structures also shape the spatial and temporal dimensions of community-based practices. Many institutions inherited a 'fixation in space and time' (Federici, 2020, p. 121) as a structural logic. Despite technological advancements that support self-paced and remote learning, educational systems tend to preserve conventional frameworks. Ironically, such temporal and spatial rigidity undermines both individual and communal learning. Individual learning benefits from autonomy—including self-pacing and self-directed inquiry—particularly in art education where independent decision-making is expected. Community-based collaboration, on the other hand, thrives in shared time and space. Yet institutional constraints such as age grouping and departmental divisions often impede the recognition and attunement of relationships.

Another under-recognized tension lies in the intermediary role of artist-facilitators, who often mediate between emerging community and institutional structures. Whether in educational or artistic contexts, these practitioners bear dual responsibilities and frequently carry the burden of resolving institutional-community conflicts. As revealed in my MA inquiry, facilitators learn to 'walk around' or operate outside institutional systems, but the triangular relationship among facilitator, institution, and community is rarely reciprocally attuned—leaving the facilitator as the most vulnerable party.

Conclusion

My ongoing inquiry into the relationships between powers that inform community-based practices has evolved from an idealized perception of community as an authentic, coherent entity (Illeris, 2013) or a counterpart to individual-centered frameworks, to understanding it as a dynamic process of 'being-in-common' (Nancy, 1997, 2000, cited in Illeris, 2013, p. 81). This perspective reframes community not as a preexisting group bound by shared sentiment and grounded on genuine principles of justice and equity, but as a relational process—formed and reformed through continuous acts of attunement and shared practices.

One of the apprehensions of this inquiry has been a reframing of 'reciprocity': not merely as a mutually beneficial exchange, but as an ontological dimension—cultivated through awareness, empathy, and response-ability. The tensions that emerge—whether interpersonal, intrapersonal, or systemic— are not accidental disruptions, but vital expressions of underlying contradictions often concealed or suppressed in individualist and hierarchical

settings. Navigating these tensions is integral to the community process and demands an ongoing recalibration of conflict resolution patterns.

Although community-based practices tend to overemphasis collectivity, it it crucial to recognize that the interdependence between the individual and the ultrasocial is not a problem to be solved but an inherent and ongoing negotiation—defined by a central paradox of human existence (LaMothe, 2015). This dynamic requires ongoing attunement and is arguably one of the most complex challenges in praxis of community-based education and art.

Another significant tension lies in the structural misalignment between community-based practices and many institutional frameworks. Most educational and artistic institutions remain grounded in the ideology of the authentic and autonomous individual, prioritizing hierarchy and individual achievement. Community, by contrast, is rarely recognized as a legal or structural entity, which renders it inherently unequal in relation to both individuals and institutions. Consequently, facilitators may find themselves in a precarious position—mediating between institutional demands and community needs—while carrying a disproportional share of emotional and ethical labor in cultivating and sustaining reciprocity.

The further development of the inquiry will focus on the interconnectedness between the individual and the ultrosocial, as well as methodological approaches for cultivating reciprocity. Two possible, mutually enriching pathways are emerging. One direction involves expanding the ethnographic research to include more community-based facilitators working in contemporary art context. While this would deepen the data and offer a broader range of individual perspectives, such inquiry may remain limited as these practices are shaped by similar sociocultural frameworks and often informed by individual-centered environments.

The second pathway is to investigate how the contradiction between individuality and collectivity—and the attunement of reciprocity—are addressed within some Indigenous cultures, which are grounded in alternative principles of social organization. I propose that many of the challenges currently encountered in community-based practice have been recognized and addressed in such cultures, some of which may offer models that align with the ideals of community that are emerging in contemporary discourse.

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Algorithmic Interpretations of Epirote Silverwork: Digital Evolution of Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

This paper presents "Algorithmic Interpretations of Epirotic Silverwork," a collaborative digital art project that transforms traditional Greek silversmithing patterns into dynamic computational experiences. Developed through a partnership between the University of Ioannina School of Fine Arts, Tongji University's College of Design and Innovation, and the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation's Silversmithing Museum, the project addresses the critical challenge of preserving and revitalizing endangered craft traditions through digital innovation. Fourteen artists created interactive generative artworks using Processing and p5.js, each offering unique algorithmic translations of traditional motifs. Through embodied interaction design—incorporating hand tracking, face detection, and audio reactivity—these works transform passive viewers into active participants in cultural heritage. The project's impact extends beyond the digital realm through projection mapping installations in Ioannina's historic buildings, creating distributed cultural experiences that engage the broader community. Our findings demonstrate that computational approaches can extend rather than replace traditional craftsmanship, creating new pathways for cultural transmission while maintaining authentic connections to historical practices. This model offers valuable insights for similar heritage preservation initiatives globally, suggesting that the intersection of algorithmic thinking and traditional craft knowledge can generate innovative forms of cultural expression relevant to contemporary digital societies.

Keywords: digital heritage preservation, generative art, computational craft, interactive installation, Epirotic silversmithing, embodied interaction

Purpose

The traditional craft of Epirotic silversmithing, with its intricate geometric patterns and centuries-old techniques, represents a significant component of Greek cultural heritage. However, like many traditional crafts globally, it faces existential challenges in the 21st century. The number of practicing silversmiths has declined dramatically, apprenticeship systems have weakened, and younger generations often perceive such crafts as disconnected from contemporary life (Creative & Cultural Skills, 2011; Heritage Crafts Association, 2023; UNESCO, 2003). In response to this crisis, "Algorithmic Interpretations of Epirotic Silverwork" emerges as a collaborative endeavor that bridges the seemingly disparate worlds of computational creativity and ancestral craft knowledge, offering an innovative pathway for cultural preservation and renewal.

The project emerged from a fundamental question: How can algorithmic thinking and generative art practices create new pathways for engaging with, understanding, and extending traditional craft heritage? Rather than pursuing mere digitization or archival documentation, we sought to develop a methodology that would translate the underlying principles of silversmithing—its mathematical precision, iterative processes, and embodied knowledge—into computational forms that could inspire new creative practices while maintaining authentic connections to tradition.

Our approach involved fourteen artists from the University of Ioannina and Tongji University working collaboratively to create interactive generative artworks. Each piece offers a unique algorithmic interpretation of traditional Epirotic silverwork patterns, employing various computational strategies including particle systems, pixel sorting, fractal recursion, and audio visualization. The resulting digital exhibition demonstrates how computational art can serve as a bridge between historical craft practices and contemporary creative expression.

This paper contributes to the growing discourse on digital heritage preservation by presenting a model that moves beyond documentation toward active reinterpretation and evolution. We argue that successful cultural preservation in the digital age requires not just recording traditional practices but creating new contexts for their principles to be explored, understood, and extended by contemporary practitioners. Through detailed analysis of our methodology, individual artworks, and community engagement strategies, we demonstrate how computational creativity can revitalize endangered crafts while fostering new forms of cultural expression.

Background and Context

The Heritage of Epirotic Silversmithing

Epirus, located in northwestern Greece, has maintained a distinguished silversmithing tradition since at least the 17th century (Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation, 2016). The craft flourished particularly in Ioannina, where skilled artisans developed distinctive techniques and motifs that synthesized Byzantine, Ottoman, and local aesthetic traditions (Ballian, 2009; Makris, 1982). Epirotic silverwork is characterized by its intricate geometric patterns, delicate filigree work, and the harmonious integration of functional and decorative elements. Common motifs include spirals, rosettes, interlocking circles, and complex tessellations that demonstrate sophisticated mathematical understanding encoded in material practice (Johnstone, 1998; Papadopoulos, 1988).

The Silversmithing Museum of Ioannina, operated by the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation (PIOP), houses an extensive collection documenting this tradition. Established in the western bastion of Ioannina's castle, the museum not only preserves historical artifacts but actively engages in educational programs aimed at maintaining craft knowledge. However, despite these institutional efforts, the living tradition of silversmithing faces significant challenges. Economic factors, changing consumer preferences, and the intensive apprenticeship required have led to a sharp decline in practitioners.

Digital Heritage and Computational Craft

The intersection of digital technologies and traditional crafts has generated considerable scholarly attention in recent years. Projects ranging from 3D scanning of artifacts to virtual reality reconstructions have demonstrated various approaches to digital heritage preservation (Bekele et al., 2018; Levoy et al., 2000; Pietroni & Ferdani, 2021; Remondino, 2011). However, much of this work has focused on documentation and visualization rather than creative reinterpretation (Rahaman, 2018; Remondino, 2011). Our project builds on emerging scholarship that positions computational methods not merely as preservation tools but as creative media that can extend traditional practices into new domains.

The concept of "computational craft" has gained traction as artists and researchers explore how algorithmic thinking relates to traditional making processes. Both domains share fundamental characteristics: iterative refinement, pattern recognition, systematic variation, and the translation of abstract principles into material form. This conceptual alignment suggests that computational approaches might offer particularly appropriate methods for engaging with craft traditions, not by replacing physical making but by revealing and extending the underlying logics that inform traditional practices.

Generative Art as Cultural Practice

Generative art, which employs autonomous systems to create aesthetic outputs, provides a rich framework for reinterpreting traditional patterns. The field's emphasis on rule-based creation, emergent complexity, and systematic variation resonates strongly with the repetitive yet nuanced processes of traditional crafts. Artists like Casey Reas, Marius Watz, and Saskia Freeke have demonstrated how generative systems can produce works that balance computational precision with organic variation, qualities also found in handcrafted objects.

In the context of cultural heritage, generative art offers unique advantages. It can capture not just the surface appearance of traditional patterns but their underlying generative logic—the rules and relationships that guide their creation. This approach aligns with anthropological understandings of craft knowledge as embodied practice, where patterns emerge through the interaction of materials, tools, techniques, and cultural conventions. By translating these interactions into algorithmic form, generative art can preserve and transmit craft knowledge in ways that static documentation cannot achieve.

Approach

Collaborative Framework

The project's methodology centered on fostering meaningful collaboration between multiple stakeholders: traditional craftspeople, digital artists, museum professionals, and academic researchers. This interdisciplinary approach was essential for ensuring that digital interpretations maintained authentic connections to the source tradition while exploring innovative computational possibilities (Bell et al., 2014; Curran & Zimmermann, 2022; Hirsenberger et al., 2019).

The collaboration began with intensive workshops at the Silversmithing Museum, where participating artists studied the collection, learned about traditional techniques, and engaged in dialogue with museum curators and, when possible, practicing silversmiths. These sessions emphasized understanding not just the visual qualities of silverwork but the processes, tools, and cultural contexts that shaped its creation. Artists documented patterns, analyzed geometric relationships, and discussed how computational methods might capture the essence of various techniques.

Technical Framework

We selected Processing and p5.js as our primary development platforms for several reasons. First, these environments lower barriers to entry for artists without extensive programming backgrounds, crucial for enabling diverse creative voices. Second, their emphasis on visual output and real-time interaction aligned well with our goals of creating dynamic, responsive interpretations. Third, the web-based nature of p5.js ensured broad accessibility for the final works.

Each artist was encouraged to explore different computational strategies based on their interpretation of traditional patterns. This diversity was intentional, reflecting our belief that cultural heritage benefits from multiple perspectives and approaches. Technical workshops introduced participants to relevant algorithms and techniques, including:

- Particle systems for capturing the granular quality of metalwork
- Recursive algorithms for exploring self-similar patterns
- Image processing techniques for analyzing and transforming visual patterns
- Physical simulation for modeling material behaviors
- Signal processing for creating audio-visual relationships

Design Principles

Several key principles guided the artistic development process:

Translation, not replication: Artists were encouraged to identify underlying principles in traditional patterns rather than creating literal digital copies. This approach required a thorough analysis of source materials to understand their generative logic.

Embodied interaction: Recognizing that traditional crafts involve bodily engagement, we emphasized interactive elements that would involve viewers physically. Hand tracking, face detection, and audio input created opportunities for embodied participation.

Temporal evolution: Unlike static decorative patterns, digital interpretations could evolve over time. This temporal dimension added new expressive possibilities while referencing the time-based nature of craft production.

Material consciousness: Despite working in digital media, artists were encouraged to maintain awareness of the material qualities of silverwork—its reflectivity, malleability, and the traces of hand labor.

Cultural sensitivity: Throughout the process, we emphasized respectful engagement with tradition, avoiding appropriation or superficial borrowing of motifs.

Community Engagement

Beyond creating digital artworks, the project included significant community engagement components. Public workshops introduced diverse audiences to both traditional silversmithing and creative coding. These sessions, held at the museum and university, attracted participants ranging from schoolchildren to elderly craft enthusiasts, creating intergenerational dialogue around heritage and technology.

Projection mapping installations extended the project's reach beyond gallery contexts. By projecting interactive patterns onto historic buildings in Ioannina, we transformed public spaces into sites of cultural engagement. These installations made heritage visible and accessible to broader audiences who might not typically visit museums or galleries.

Results

The fourteen artworks created for the project demonstrate diverse computational approaches to interpreting traditional silverwork. Each piece offers unique insights into how algorithmic thinking can engage with craft heritage. Here we analyze key works to illustrate the range of strategies employed.

Particle-Based Interpretations

Anastasia Tsitsou's "Explosive Particles" exemplifies how particle systems can capture the granular, accumulative nature of metalwork. The piece transforms static images into dynamic particle fields that respond to hand gestures tracked via webcam. Horizontal gestures trigger explosion or convergence of particles, while vertical movements switch between source images. This interaction model creates a metaphorical connection to the silversmithing process: just as craftspeople manipulate raw material into finished forms, viewers reshape digital matter through gesture.

The technical implementation employs a sophisticated particle class system where each particle maintains position, velocity, color, and size attributes. The explosion algorithm uses polar coordinates to create radial dispersion from the screen center, with noise-based variations ensuring organic movement. During the convergence phase, particles return to their original positions through interpolation, creating a breathing rhythm between order and chaos that mirrors the tension in decorative patterns between regularity and variation.

Geometric Transformation

Christina Spyropoulou's "Arabic Geometric Transformation" takes a different approach, focusing on the mathematical relationships underlying ornamental patterns. The work progresses through three distinct phases: IMAGE → DOTS → PATTERN, creating a narrative journey from representation to abstraction. This progression mirrors the conceptual process of analyzing traditional patterns to extract their essential geometric principles.

The piece demonstrates sophisticated use of Islamic geometric principles, particularly evident in its octagonal and hexadecagonal forms. The transition between phases employs careful timing and alpha blending to create smooth metamorphoses. Color sampling from source images generates dynamic palettes, ensuring visual coherence while allowing for variation. The automatic pattern evolution, changing every 30 seconds, creates a living system that continuously generates new configurations within established parameters.

Recursive Structures

Eleni Mantzari's "Fractal Hand Tracking" explores how recursive algorithms can generate patterns reminiscent of traditional metalwork's self-similar qualities. The piece creates fractal patterns whose depth and complexity respond to hand position, tracked through computer vision. This creates an intuitive interface where gesture directly controls visual complexity.

The fractal generation algorithm recursively subdivides space, creating patterns at multiple scales. Hand position influences both the center of pattern generation and the recursion depth, allowing for real-time exploration of mathematical structures. The implementation includes sophisticated performance optimization, dynamically adjusting rendering quality based on frame rate to maintain responsive interaction even with complex geometric calculations.

Material Processes

Georgia Vosou's "Melting Silverwork" takes inspiration from the physical processes of metalworking, particularly the fluidity of molten silver. The piece applies a "melting" effect where horizontal strips of an image flow based on Perlin noise patterns. This creates an uncanny effect where solid forms appear to liquefy and reform, capturing the transformative moment when raw material becomes a finished product.

The technical approach segments the image into horizontal strips, each displaced by noise-driven offsets. Active zones trigger the generation of color-sampled blocks, creating a dialogue between dissolution and reconstruction. This process metaphorically represents the creative destruction inherent in crafting, where materials must be transformed, often radically, to achieve desired forms.

Computational Etching

Katerina Tzortzi's "Pixel Sorting Segments" employs pixel sorting algorithms to create effects reminiscent of etched or engraved surfaces. The work divides images into segments, applying different sorting criteria (brightness, hue, saturation) and directions (horizontal, vertical, diagonal) to each area. This creates structured chaos that recalls the controlled irregularity of hand-engraved patterns.

The implementation shows a thorough understanding of image processing, with multiple sorting modes and careful handling of edge cases. The segment-based approach allows for complex compositions where different areas follow different rules, similar to how traditional decorative schemes might employ varied patterns within a unified design.

Interactive Mirrors

Michalis Semoglou's "Silversmithing Mirror" conceptualizes a digital interpretation of the decorated reverse sides of mirrors, as commonly observed in traditional silverwork. Using face detection, the piece generates mandala-like patterns that evolve from simple circles to complex 16-sided polygons based on viewing duration. This temporal evolution rewards sustained attention, encouraging contemplative engagement.

The geometric progression from circle to octagon to hexadecagon mirrors increasing complexity found in traditional Epirotic patterns. The metallic color palettes—including silver, oxidized silver, copper-silver, and gold-silver combinations—directly reference material traditions while exploiting digital media's capacity for dynamic color transformation.

Harmonic Relationships

Nikos Konstantinou's "Audio-Reactive Golden Spiral" connects visual pattern generation to sound, creating synaesthetic experiences. Dots arranged according to the golden ratio, a proportion found in classical art and architecture, respond to audio input by coalescing into spiral formations. This work elucidates the correlations between mathematical harmonies in the visual and auditory realms.

The use of the golden angle for positioning creates naturally pleasing distributions, while audio amplitude drives the transformation between grid and spiral states. This creates a breathing, responsive system where sound literally shapes form, referencing ancient beliefs about the relationship between music and geometry.

Temporal Sequences

Peiwei Zhang's "Digital Ornament Slideshow" introduces time-based viewing, cycling through images with progressive reveal mechanics. Each click reduces distortion and zoom, gradually clarifying the image through user interaction. This mechanic creates anticipation and rewards engagement, similar to how traditional patterns reveal complexity through sustained observation.

The distortion algorithm employs wave functions and scan lines to obscure images, creating interference patterns that reference both digital glitches and the linear marks of engraving tools. The 12-second automatic progression ensures accessibility while the manual interaction provides agency.

Rhythmic Patterns

Yi Jin's "Dynamic Scan Sequencer" transforms visual patterns into temporal sequences, creating an instrument where drawn forms trigger musical events. A scanning line traverses the canvas, playing notes when encountering active cells, creating a direct translation between spatial pattern and temporal rhythm.

The melodic generation uses pentatonic scales to ensure harmonic coherence, while the visual feedback of the scanning line creates anticipation and understanding of the system's logic. This piece effectively demonstrates how traditional patterns, though static, embody rhythmic qualities that can be revealed through computational interpretation.

Digital Filigree

Thodoris Kalagias's "Organic Silver Swirls" most directly references traditional silverwork techniques, particularly filigree. The piece features 46 precisely positioned swirl motifs that toggle between different metallic finishes when clicked. Bezier curves create organic flowing forms, while subtle animations add life to what would be static decorations.

The implementation demonstrates careful attention to material qualities, with color palettes precisely chosen to evoke different metal finishes. The pulse effect on interaction provides satisfying feedback while the continuous subtle movement prevents the patterns from feeling static, addressing a key challenge in translating physical crafts to screen-based media.

Dimensional Transformation

Vasilis Makris's "3D Pattern Evolution" extends pattern interpretation into three dimensions, creating hexagonal sphere grids that morph between configurations. Audio reactivity adds another layer of responsiveness, with bass frequencies driving geometric transformations.

The transition between 2D patterns projected onto 3D forms creates compelling visual effects while maintaining clear connections to source imagery. The technical implementation balances visual complexity with performance, demonstrating how computational power can enable explorations impossible in traditional media while maintaining aesthetic connections to historical forms.

Digital Tools

Viktor Minas Karamanlis's "Digital Etching Tool" takes a different approach, creating an instrument for pattern creation rather than a finished artwork. Users can copy sections between canvases, building compositions through iterative selection and placement. This process directly parallels traditional pattern transfer techniques while offering digital advantages like infinite undo and precise scaling.

The tool's design emphasizes immediate visual feedback and intuitive controls, making pattern creation accessible to users without technical expertise. This democratization of pattern-making tools suggests how computational approaches might lower barriers to creative engagement with traditional forms.

Technical Innovation and Implementation

Interaction Design Strategies

The project's emphasis on embodied interaction required innovative approaches to user input. Traditional mouse and keyboard interactions, while functional, failed to capture the physicality inherent in craft practices. Our artists explored alternative input methods that better aligned with the project's conceptual goals.

Hand tracking, implemented through TensorFlow.js and Handpose models (MediaPipe Team, 2020; Smilkov et al., 2019), enabled gesture-based control that echoed the hand movements of craftspeople. The technical challenges—including lighting variations, hand detection accuracy, and performance optimization—required sophisticated solutions. Artists implemented confidence thresholds, motion smoothing, and predictive algorithms to create responsive yet stable interactions.

Face detection, using libraries like clmtrackr (Lundgren, 2016), offered another avenue for embodied control. The face's position and expressions could drive pattern generation, creating intimate connections between the viewer and the artwork. This approach is particularly suited to works exploring symmetry and reflection, common themes in decorative arts.

Audio input opened possibilities for temporal and rhythmic interpretations. Using the Web Audio API, artists could analyze frequency spectra, extract rhythm, and map sonic qualities to visual parameters. This created synaesthetic experiences that revealed hidden musicality in visual patterns.

Performance Optimization

Creating smooth, responsive experiences requires careful attention to performance optimization. JavaScript's single-threaded nature and browser limitations presented challenges when rendering complex geometric patterns in real-time. Artists employed various strategies to maintain acceptable frame rates:

- **Level-of-detail rendering**: Adjusting geometric complexity based on current frame rate
- **Efficient data structures**: Using typed arrays and object pooling to minimize garbage collection
- **GPU acceleration**: Leveraging WebGL through p5.js for computationally intensive operations
- **Temporal optimization**: Spreading expensive calculations across multiple frames
- **Spatial culling**: Only rendering elements within the visible viewport

These optimizations improved performance stability across different computing environments, though the artworks were primarily designed for desktop viewing. The interactive nature of the pieces, particularly those requiring gesture tracking, complex visual processing, and detailed pattern manipulation, necessitated larger screens and more powerful processors to deliver the intended experience. While basic functionality could be maintained on tablets and high-performance mobile devices, the full aesthetic and interactive potential of the works was best realized on desktop computers with adequate screen real estate and processing capabilities. This technical constraint, while limiting mobile accessibility, reflected a conscious design decision to prioritize the richness and complexity of interaction over universal device compatibility.

Web Technologies and Accessibility

Choosing web-based technologies reflected our commitment to accessibility. Unlike native applications that require installation, web-based artworks can be experienced immediately through any modern browser, lowering barriers to engagement and facilitating sharing.

Progressive enhancement techniques resulted in different degrees of functionality depending on the device used; however, to access the complete interactive features, modern hardware with adequate processing power was necessary. While the web-based platform could technically be accessed on various screen sizes, the intricate nature of the digital interpretations, with their detailed patterns, real-time interactions, and computational complexity, was fundamentally designed for desktop viewing environments. Fallback mechanisms were implemented for cases where advanced features like camera access were unavailable, offering alternative interaction methods such as mouse or keyboard controls. However, these accommodations represented compromises rather than equivalent experiences. The project thus faced an inherent tension between the democratizing promise of web technologies and the practical requirements of delivering computationally intensive, visually rich cultural experiences that could meaningfully convey the intricacy of Epirotic silverwork.

Cultural Impact and Community Engagement

Museum Integration

The project's integration with the Silversmithing Museum created unique opportunities for cultural dialogue. Digital artworks were not presented as replacements for traditional objects but as contemporary responses that could coexist with historical artifacts.

This positioning avoided false dichotomies between tradition and innovation, instead suggesting continuity and evolution.

The integration of digital artworks within the museum environment was achieved through the strategic placement of an interactive screen in the exhibition's lobby area. This central location served as a digital gateway, introducing visitors to the computational interpretations of Epirotic silverwork before they encountered the physical artifacts within the gallery spaces. Despite resource and time constraints that limited the installation to a single screen, this positioning proved effective in creating a transitional space where visitors could engage with dynamic, interactive representations of traditional craft patterns. The lobby placement offered practical advantages—providing an accessible point of engagement without disrupting the contemplative atmosphere of the artifact displays, while also managing visitor flow during busy periods. This pragmatic solution demonstrated how even modest technological interventions, when thoughtfully positioned, could enhance the museum experience.

Educational Workshops

Workshop programs bridged generational and cultural divides. Participants include traditional craftspeople with digital artists, fostering a bidirectional exchange of expertise. Older artisans shared insights about pattern construction, symbolic meanings, and technical processes. Younger participants introduced digital tools and computational thinking. These encounters often revealed surprising commonalities between traditional and digital making.

Workshops for school groups introduced creative coding through the lens of local heritage. Students grasped fundamental programming concepts by replicating traditional patterns, transforming abstract computational ideas into tangible forms through cultural connections. This approach proved particularly effective in engaging students who might otherwise feel disconnected from both programming and traditional crafts.

Public Space Interventions

Projection mapping installations transformed Ioannina's historic architecture into canvases for digital silverwork. Building facades became responsive surfaces where patterns evolved based on environmental data, pedestrian movement, or scheduled programs. These interventions made heritage visible in everyday spaces, reaching audiences beyond museum visitors.

Technical challenges included weather resistance, ambient light compensation, and architectural mapping. Solutions involved high-luminosity projectors, computer vision for automatic calibration, and weather-sealed equipment. The spectacular nature of large-scale projections generated significant public interest and media coverage, amplifying the project's impact.

Digital Platform Development

The project's web platform (https://epirusgenerative.art) serves multiple functions: exhibition space, educational resource, and creative tool. In addition to hosting the fourteen artworks, it provides contextual information and will soon include artist statements as well as technical documentation. This transparency encourages others to build upon our work, fostering a community of practice around computational heritage interpretation.

The platform's architecture emphasizes modularity and extensibility. New works can be added without disrupting existing content. Analytics track engagement patterns, revealing which pieces resonate most strongly with different audience segments. This data informs future development and helps understand how digital heritage projects achieve impact.

Discussion

Redefining Preservation

Our project challenges conventional notions of heritage preservation. Rather than treating tradition as fixed and requiring protection from change, we position it as a living system capable of growth and adaptation. This shift from preservation to cultivation acknowledges that cultural practices survive not through stasis but through continuous reinterpretation by successive generations (Harvey, 2001; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998; Loulanski, 2006; Smith, 2006).

Digital interpretation offers unique advantages for this cultivational approach. Unlike physical conservation, which must balance access with protection, digital works can be experienced without degradation (Ashley-Smith, 2013; Cameron & Kenderdine, 2007; Muñoz Viñas, 2005; Pye, 2001). More significantly, computational media's generative capacity means each interaction can produce unique variations, ensuring the work remains fresh and engaging over time.

Algorithmic Craft Knowledge

The project reveals how algorithmic thinking can encode and transmit craft knowledge. Traditional apprenticeship relies on embodied learning through repetition and gradual skill development (Downey et al., 2015; Marchand, 2008; Polanyi, 1958; Wood et al., 2009). While digital interaction cannot replicate the tactile dimensions of physical crafting, it can convey underlying principles—proportion, rhythm, variation, and systematic transformation—that inform traditional practice.

This suggests new possibilities for craft pedagogy. Computational models can explicitly make the implicit rules governing traditional patterns explicit. Interactive systems can provide immediate feedback, allowing rapid experimentation with parameter variations. While not replacing traditional instruction, these tools offer complementary pathways for understanding craft logic.

Cultural Hybridity

The collaboration between Greek and Chinese institutions created productive cultural hybridities. Artists brought diverse cultural perspectives to Epirotic patterns, revealing universal qualities while respecting specific contexts. This cross-cultural dialogue suggests how local traditions might find global resonance without losing distinctive characteristics.

The project demonstrates that meaningful cultural exchange requires more than surface-level borrowing. Deep engagement with source traditions, sustained dialogue between participants, and mutual respect create conditions for authentic hybrid forms. These new expressions neither diminish originating traditions nor create rootless pastiche, instead suggesting how culture evolves through encounter and exchange.

Future Directions

Expanded Collaboration Networks

The project's success suggests potential for expanded collaborations. Other craft traditions—ceramics, weaving, woodcarving—could benefit from similar computational interpretation. International partnerships might explore how different cultural contexts shape algorithmic approaches to heritage. These expansions would test our methodology's transferability while revealing new possibilities.

Advanced Technologies

Emerging technologies offer new avenues for exploration. Machine learning could analyze large pattern databases, revealing hidden relationships and generating novel variations. Virtual and augmented reality could create immersive craft experiences, allowing users to manipulate virtual materials with haptic feedback. Blockchain technologies might enable new models for attributing and trading digital pattern rights, creating economic sustainability for digital craftspeople.

Sustainable Communities

Long-term impact requires sustainable communities of practice. This involves developing educational curricula, creating maker spaces equipped for digital craft, and establishing economic models that support computational artists engaging with heritage. The project's open-source approach provides a foundation, but sustained effort is needed to nurture growing communities.

Conclusion

"Algorithmic Interpretations of Epirotic Silverwork" demonstrates how computational creativity can revitalize endangered craft traditions without diminishing their authentic character. Through collaborative development involving traditional craftspeople, digital artists, and cultural institutions, we created a model for heritage engagement that balances preservation with innovation.

The project's key contributions include:

1. **A methodology for translating craft knowledge into computational form** that respects traditional practices while enabling new creative expressions
2. **Fourteen diverse artworks** that demonstrate varied approaches to algorithmic interpretation, from particle systems to audio visualization
3. **Community engagement strategies** that bridge generational and cultural divides through workshops and public installations
4. **A theoretical framework** positioning heritage as a living system requiring cultivation rather than mere preservation
5. **An open platform** enabling continued experimentation and community development

Our findings suggest that successful digital heritage projects require deep engagement with source traditions, meaningful collaboration across disciplines, and commitment to accessibility and community building. The intersection of algorithmic thinking and traditional craft knowledge creates fertile ground for cultural innovation that honors the past while embracing future possibilities.

As traditional crafts worldwide face similar challenges, our model offers hope that computational approaches can create new contexts for appreciation, understanding, and creative extension. By revealing the mathematical beauty and systematic logic underlying traditional patterns, we make heritage relevant to contemporary digital culture. More importantly, by enabling active participation through interactive technologies, we transform passive appreciation into creative engagement.

The project ultimately argues for a vision of cultural heritage that is neither frozen in the past nor severed from its roots. Instead, we see tradition and innovation as complementary forces that, when thoughtfully integrated, can produce new forms of beauty and meaning. In an era of rapid technological change and cultural homogenization, such models for sustaining and evolving local traditions become increasingly vital. Through the algorithmic interpretation of Epirotic silverwork, we glimpse how computational creativity might help ensure that humanity's diverse cultural expressions continue to flourish in the digital age.

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Prototyping Principles for Humanizing Technologies: Preliminary Research in Artificial Intelligence and Mixed Reality for Migration Studies

Annie Wan

Abstract

This paper presents the foundational inquiries of the interdisciplinary project Humanizing Technologies: A Survival Toolkit Navigating the Artificial Intelligence Era in Migration Studies, which seeks to address systemic challenges faced by first- and second-generation immigrants through innovative technological solutions. By integrating mixed reality (MR), artificial intelligence (AI), oral histories, and qualitative methodologies, the larger project aims to foster cultural resilience, bridge generational divides, and mitigate barriers such as communication gaps, career inequities, and multifaceted struggles within migrant communities. While this paper documents decision-making processes in early-stage research—such as formulating interview questions aligned with socially engaged design and MR storytelling—this work establishes provisional guidelines for scholars navigating similar interdisciplinary terrains.

Keywords: Mixed reality (MR), artificial intelligence (AI), migrants' history, cultural resilience, inclusive storytelling, research-creation

Introduction

This paper involves the preliminary research inquiries of the larger scale project **Humanizing Technologies: A Survival Toolkit Navigating the Artificial Intelligence Era in Migration Studies,** while the more significant is an interdisciplinary project that leverages mixed reality (MR), artificial intelligence (AI), migrants' oral history, and qualitative research to develop innovative solutions for multifaceted challenges faced by first- and second-generation immigrants. These challenges include cultural differences, generation gaps, communication barriers, career struggles, family dynamics, loniness and alienation. The research focuses on enhancing cultural resilience and fostering stronger connections among different generations within migrant communities.

The key research questions include: How can we build resilience using novel ideas and technologies, especially in mixed reality (MR), to support the storytelling of migrants' stories? How do we create new AI large language models (LLM) that produce more diverse and inclusive text-to-video footage and engage AI technologies meaningfully and ethically? Moreover, how can we develop a role model (or a 'survival toolkit') for fellow academics to use the heated debate technologies in migration studies and for social good with less or no bias? MR encompasses a range of technologies that blend the physical and virtual worlds, finding applications in various fields. These technologies offer new ways to visualize and interact with data and environments, including Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR).

Our MR research-creation methodology seeks to present new storytelling methods, which can enhance how we tell the migrants' stories, their emotions, and their mental images. While AI text-to-video technologies used in film production received polarized responses from both the industry and the general public in the last two years, my timely and utmost concern is to research in a non-mainstream, diverse, non-discriminational, and inclusive LLM and hence manipulate different existing text-to-video AI tools to create video footages for the MR application.

While in this paper, I am going to outline the principles of prototyping the research and preliminary tasks, such as the research background, how to generate interview questions and the relationship among the methodology, the research creation and interview questions. The purpose is to provide a documentation of my decision making during the preliminary research and for other academics working on similar disciplines, establishing a 'guidelines' or 'principles' for scholars in similar fields.

Hong Kong Migrants Oral History, Methodology and Interviews

The socially engaged design research methodology concerns real-world social issues and research through participatory and collaborative frameworks, often involving communities or stakeholders in designing the research approach and methods. Apart from addressing social issues, the methodology allows us to co-design the MR experience with the stakeholders in research-creation output.

In addition, we will conduct interviews with migrants and study their perspectives on migrants' experience. Another concern of the methodology emphasizes the role of social considerations in the design process. Unlike traditional design approaches that may focus primarily on functionality, aesthetics, or user experience, socially engaged design places a strong emphasis on social impact, ethical considerations, and community involvement; hence the research team will conduct one on one confidential interviews with migrants communities. Those interviews will be very crucial and form the base of our research creation. We have seen a lot of work and research done on exploring Chinese migrants during the Gold Rush, Chinese as slave workers, injustice and inequality about head tax, etc (Li 1988, Roy 1989). However, not much research has been done about migrants from Hong Kong to Canada from 1970 to 1997. Since 1967, Canada imposed a points system to rank potential immigrants for eligibility, and such migration from Hong Kong boomed, especially after 1984 when the British government and the Chinese Communist Party signed the Sino-British Joint Declaration, which confirmed the Handover of Hong Kong to China. Vancouver even earned the nickname "Hongcouver" due to the influx of around half a million Hong Kong migrants during 1970-1997.

According to Levy, Pisarevskaya, and Scholten (2020), migration studies emphasizes two contrasting approaches to cultural adaptation: integration and assimilation. Integration emphasizes migrants maintaining their original cultural identity while participating in the host culture. In contrast, assimilation occurs when migrants gradually lose their original cultural identity as they adopt the new culture. This dynamic often creates dilemmas in communication across migrant generations, potentially leading to generational conflicts. These challenges are vividly portrayed in films such as *The Joy Luck Club (1993), Song of the Exile (1990), and Everything Everywhere All At Once (2022)*.

The recent heated debate around immigrants, international students, the housing crisis, and living costs in Canada, in contrast with the country, well known for its immigration policy, inspires me to look for the meaning of 'Diaspora, 'a term originally meant the dispersion of Jews among the Gentiles after the Babylonian Exile in 70 AD. According to the 2021 Canadian census, Asian Canadians form approximately 20.2% of the population, while many of them were born in foreign countries. Canada has long served as a preferred destination for Hong Kong immigrants, most notably in anticipation of the city's 1997 transition from British to Chinese governance. As per Statistics Canada's 2021 Census data (Statistics Canada, 2023), more than 215,000 individuals residing in Canada self- identified as ethnically Chinese originating from Hong Kong. It is important to note that this statistic needs to be considered, failing to account for the subsequent influx of students, temporary residents, and immigrants catalyzed by the evolving political climate in Hong Kong post-2019.

In order to study migrants ’oral history and generating appropriate interview questions, I first studied two interesting documentaries which were made between 1970s to 1980s, depicted a ‘typical ’Hong Kong immigrant family and cultural conflicts between them and the ‘ mainstream' Canadian society. In a Youtube video, “快閃香港：回歸前的移民潮（二）”(Flashback Hong Kong: The Immigration Wave before the Handover (Part 2), translated by Google), produced by Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) in 1986, Mr. Wu, a former industrial entrepreneur in Hong Kong, owned and operated three manufacturing facilities with a combined factory space exceeding 100,000 square feet over two decades.

Renowned for his business acumen and social adaptability in Hong Kong’s competitive landscape, he initially sought to continue his entrepreneurial endeavors in his after immigrated to Canada in 1980s. However, systemic challenges emerged: large-scale industries here were predominantly monopolized, leaving limited opportunities for immigrants beyond niche sectors such as small-scale restaurants and modest commercial enterprises. While Mr. Wu speculated that this dynamic may shift, the socioeconomic structure at that time constrained immigrant entrepreneurs to these domains.

Before migration, Mr. Wu’ s professional life was characterized by stability and affluence. His factories can be operated on their own, which only required him to manage and oversee, and he owned three Mercedes-Benz sedans. In preparation for relocation, he sold his residential property at a reduced price, while his wife, accustomed to a lifestyle supported by two domestic workers in Hong Kong—sparing her from daily chores and enabling her to focus on corporate affairs—transitioned to assisting in their small business abroad. This shift required significant adaptations in their daily routines and socioeconomic roles.

When reflecting on the implications of migration, Mr. Wu acknowledged the family's tangible sacrifices, particularly the giving up of a thriving business and middle class privileges in Hong Kong. However, he framed these losses against compensatory gains: familial cohesion, personal resilience, and an appreciation for Canada’ s lifestyle. Despite the challenges of navigating a monopolistic market and altered social status, he emphasized the family’ s collective adaptability and optimism, underscoring a nuanced balance between sacrifice and fulfilment in their migratory journey.

While another unknown source documentary on YouTube (self-claimed created 36 years ago) “加拿大温哥华老外居民：最恨你们香港移民！”(Foreign residents in Vancouver, Canada: We hate you Hong Kong immigrants the most!, translated by Google) highlighted the sociocultural and urban tensions arising from Hong Kong immigration to Vancouver at that time. One of the immigrants Mr. Cheng chose 6-8-2-8 as house number for their house in West Vancouver. There are three Hong Kong residents living next door. The house numbers are changed to 10-28, 10-68 and 10-88. Now, when ‘Canadians' see 8 in house number, they know the family came from Hong Kong. Two anonymous interviewees commented that Hong Kong immigrants coming in and basically destroying our neighborhoods. And the city has not done anything to stop it by ripping down some beautiful homes, absolutely gorgeous homes, and putting up houses that are five, six, seven, eight bedrooms and taking the whole of the property. So they're destroying possibly the oldest area of Vancouver.

Another anonymous interviewee from a school mentioned that ‘My parents won't buy me a BMW. I'm going to work for my own money. And they're coming in here. Their parents are buying them everything. And, you know, it's just not fair. It's not the way they should be raised. ’ Another said, 'In our society, yeah they should speak English because English is spoken in this country, but Cantonese and Chinese are their native languages, well then move back, it's good practice to speak it. ’ The other anonymous interviewee responded, 'What I'm saying is, you can't say, just because I'm new, I'm not going to speak it. Everyone came here

new. My parents came here new. Everyone came here new. ’While a Cantonese-speaking interviewee said ‘If you went to Hong Kong and you knew someone else who spoke English, wouldn't it be easier for you to speak in English? It's the same as with them.’

Interviewees at the school contrasted their values of money with perceptions of immigrant peers receiving money from their parents, framing this as a breach of egalitarian principles. Language practices also emerged as a contentious issue. While some argued that immigrants should communicate in English, even among themselves, and prioritize English proficiency, others defended multilingualism as a natural adaptation, noting that all migrant groups, including earlier generations, initially relied on their native languages.

There was certainly misleading information, cultural appropriation, and even racist content in the interview. However, my concern is how to avoid getting similar answers, which are generic for many migrants' experiences, so I decided to ask the interviewees three sets of questions which the first one is more generic and understand their emotional responses as first-generation immigrants. Those generic questions include: How did living in Canada influence your sense of cultural identity, especially in the years leading up to the 1997 handover of Hong Kong? Did the prospect of Hong Kong’s transition back to China shape your feelings about settling in Canada? Were there any significant events in Canada or Hong Kong that profoundly impacted your life during that 1970–1997 period? How did those events shape your decisions, priorities, or outlook on your future? In retrospect, how do you feel about your decision to migrate during that particular era? What advice would you give someone researching Hong Kong immigrants' experiences from 1970 to 1997? Were there any generational differences in how family members felt about the move or adapted to life in Canada? What opportunities did you or your children have for education and work once you arrived? How did these opportunities compare with what you had in Hong Kong?

However, questions above may also trigger memories, in a less visual form, hence I found two important visual and cultural heritage in Hong Kong during that 1970–1997 period and structured more detailed interview questions around them, while one is Kai Take airport and the other one is gradually demolished signs. While rationales are provided about the choices in next few paragraphs.

Kai Tak Airport and Interview

Kai Tak Airport was in operation from 1925 to 1998, and it served as a profound symbol of Hong Kong’s colonial history, economic importance, and complex cultural identity. However, under British colonial governance, Kai Tak became a cornerstone of Hong Kong’s infrastructure. During the Japanese occupation from 1941 to 1945, the airport was repurposed for military use, reflecting the era's geopolitical struggles. After World War II, as Hong Kong became a global trade and manufacturing hub, the British colonial government expanded Kai Tak into a civilian airport, aligning with the territory’s strategic role until its closure (Civil Aviation Department 2025).

The construction of the runway in 1958, extending into Kowloon Bay, as a critical node in global aviation, the airport facilitated Hong Kong’s integration into transnational networks of commerce and migration. (France) However, cultural nostalgia for Kai Tak transcends its physical infrastructure, especially for those immigrants who used the airport for their last flights leaving Hong Kong before the Handover. For many Hong Kongers and diaspora communities, the airport evokes a visceral connection to the territory’s pre-1997 cosmopolitanism and modernity. Its neon-lit terminals, a cacophony of dialects, and the world's famous dangerous landings became ingrained in collective memory as markers of a uniquely Hong Kong ethos—resilient, adaptive, and globally oriented. (hongkongfp 2016)

The airport’s cinematic portrayal in films like Chungking Express (1994) and its romanticization in Cantopop lyrics reflect its mythologization as a site where local identity

coalesced amid rapid globalization. For diasporic communities, Kai Tak symbolizes a lost "home" frozen in time, its closure paralleling their dislocations. In diasporic contexts, Kai Tak's memory operates as a cultural touchstone. As the airport relocated to Chek Lap Kok one year right after Handover, some posits that nostalgia for the airport articulates a collective mourning for the territory's autonomy, a project initiated under British rule but realized under Chinese sovereignty. The airport's contested redevelopment, oscillating between commercial ventures and grassroots demands for heritage preservation, mirrors broader struggles over who controls the narrative of Hong Kong's past and future. In diasporic contexts, Kai Tak's memory operates as a cultural touchstone. The legacy of Kai Tak highlights it as a symbol of colonial modernity—captures the complexities of Hong Kong's historical consciousness, where nostalgia becomes a dialectic between loss and reclamation.

Surprisingly, the video gamers community shared similar interests as the Hong Konger diaspora. In-flight simulation games like Microsoft Flight Simulator and X-Plane, Kai Tak Airport is frequently celebrated as one of aviation's most demanding virtual landscapes within the community. Its infamous landing approach—requiring pilots to turn at low altitude over Kowloon's dense urban sprawl—has been meticulously recreated, transforming the airport into a ludic artifact of technical prowess.

Mary Flanagan's concept of "critical play" (2009) reminds us that games can be platforms for questioning societal norms, fostering reflection, and engaging with complex issues through interactive experiences. Applying this framework to Microsoft Flight Simulator and its digital recreation of Hong Kong's obsolete Kai Tak Airport reveals a nuanced interplay between simulation, cultural heritage, and player agency. Kai Tak's notoriously difficult landing approach, requiring pilots to navigate dense urban terrain, contrasts sharply with today's safety-first airports. By simulating this challenge, Microsoft Flight Simulator invites players to critically reflect on the homogenization of aviation infrastructure and the loss of localized, skill-based flying. Flanagan's "critical play" emerges here as players engage with the mechanics of flight, in addition to with a historical artifact, prompting reflection on urban development, cultural erasure, and the tension between progress and preservation.

Hence, an important set of interview questions is structured around Kai Tak Airport, diaspora, and nostalgia. Sample questions include: Can you share the memorable experience you had at Kai Tak Airport when you left Hong Kong before 1997? For diaspora communities, does Kai Tak Airport symbolize specific about Hong Kong's history or culture? If so, what? How does the closure of Kai Tak resonate with broader changes in Hong Kong's urban and cultural landscape? How do younger generations in the diaspora perceive Kai Tak when compared to yours? Do you think video games like Microsoft Flight Simulator or X-Plane keeps its memory alive? Do you see connections between the challenges of Kai Tak's landing approach and the experiences of adapting to life as a diaspora? How might the redevelopment of the Kai Tak site affect its legacy for future generations, both locally and abroad?

Neon Signs and Interview

As a science fiction subgenre, cyberpunk navigates the complexities of technologically advanced but socially fragmented futures. In this context, Hong Kong's unique architectural density, technological landscape, and cultural pluralism are fertile grounds for the creative imagination, influencing many cyberpunk media, including literature, film, and video games. However, this relationship is fraught with the pitfalls of Techno-Orientalism (Roh, 2015), a term that elucidates the Western tendency to depict Asia—particularly East Asia—as a simultaneously futuristic and exotic "Other." This dialectic becomes particularly salient within cyberpunk and science fiction genres, where East Asian settings are frequently deployed to conjure high-tech yet culturally inscrutable worlds. Such representations often perpetuate Western hegemonic paradigms by flattening the complexities of Asian cultures into

monolithic, exotic stereotypes. For instance, iconic animated feature films like Ghost in the Shell (Oshii, 1995) explicitly derive visual inspiration from the bustling cityscape and neon signs of Hong Kong. Similarly, films such as Blade Runner (Scott, 1982)—though not explicitly modeled on any Asian city—evoke a vision of a dense, neon-lit urban environment evocative of Hong Kong's iconic streets. Video games like Sleeping Dogs (Sleeping Dogs, 2012), Stray (Stray, 2023), and Wanted: Dead (Wanted: Dead 2023) further perpetuate these Techno-Orientalist tropes. While Sleeping Dogs does offer a visually captivating rendition of Hong Kong, incorporating elements of local culture such as language, food, and tradition, it still raises questions about the authenticity of such portrayals and the potential for cultural reductionism and appropriation.

Given these considerations and critical engagement with Techno-Orientalist paradigms within these narratives, it is indisputable to acknowledge how cyberpunk culture relates to East Asian landscapes aesthetically and thematically—most notably, the proliferation of neon signs. However, the iconic neon signs in Hong Kong have been gradually disappearing due to multiple factors like government policy, potential environmental hazards, cost efficiency, and urban development (Kwan, 2022). Although this shift is not unique to Hong Kong, the authorities recently adopted stricter regulations to ensure public safety (Leung, 2023). Neon signs, especially older, poorly-maintained ones, can be hazardous if they fall or catch fire. As a result, many signs that do not meet current safety standards have been taken down. Newer technology, such as Light-Emitting Diodes (LED), are more energy-efficient and require less maintenance. They are being used to replace the iconic neon signs of Hong Kong. This makes LEDs more cost-effective in the long run, contributing to the phase-out of neon signs. In addition, Hong Kong is constantly undergoing urban renewal and development. Often adorned with classic neon signs, old buildings are frequently torn down to make way for new structures, which are more likely to use modern forms.

The significance of these neon signs in Hong Kong's visual culture has been acknowledged across various disciplines, from popular art exhibitions (Kongkee, 2023) and scholarly publications (Kwok, 2020, 2021, 2023) to cinematic representations and international news coverage (Chan, 2023) (Kwan, 2022) (Le, 2023) documenting their decline. Consequently, their ongoing removal represents a loss of visual landmarks and an erosion of an integral component of Hong Kong's unique cultural and visual heritage. The relationship between diaspora and cultural memory assumes heightened significance in Hong Kong, a complex urban landscape characterized by intricate historical legacies and fluid sociopolitical conditions.

Hence, another important set of interview questions is structured around this material culture, memory, and heritage. The qualitative results will form the base of part of our research creation. Sample interview questions include: How do neon signs function as symbols of cultural memory or nostalgia? Have you observed efforts to recreate or reference Hong Kong's neon aesthetics in diasporic spaces (e.g., restaurants and art installations)? If so, what meanings do these recreations hold? How does the decline of neon signage in Hong Kong impact diasporic connections to the city's heritage? From your point of view, does the erasure of neon signage parallel other forms of cultural or political change in Hong Kong? What do you think about the younger generation of diaspora perceiving neon signs compared to older generations? Do you have a personal memory or story linked to a specific neon sign in Hong Kong? How does its presence (or absence) affect you?

Another concern of the methodology outlined emphasizes the role of social considerations in the design process. Unlike traditional design approaches that may focus primarily on functionality, aesthetics, or user experience, socially engaged design places a strong emphasis on social impact, ethical considerations, and community involvement.

Research Creation Prototypes and Future Directions

The team experimented with different existing text-to-video tools and compared which models and/ or platforms will be the best in term of production quality, better handling with our prompts, the interpretation of image of Kai Tak airport, and especially in producing videos that feature accurate Chinese text and neon signs.

Figure 1., 2., 3. Generated in Google Veo 3 by the research team



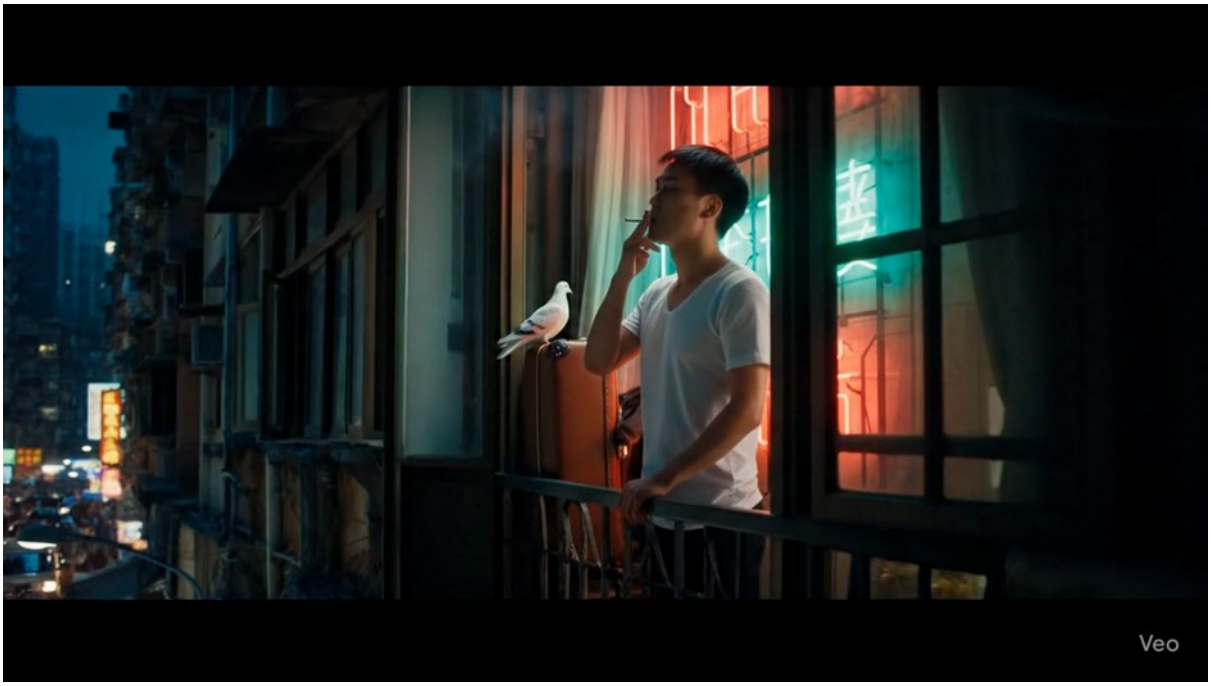




Figure 4., 5. Generated in Runway Gen-4 by the research team





Figure 6., 7. Generated in Tencent's Hunyuan by the research team





Figure 8., 9. Generated in Luma AI by the research team





While our team concluded that the most 'powerful' existing, as of May 2025, is Google Veo 3, there are still many inaccurate representations of Chinese text. In terms of a generic representation of a cityscape in Hong Kong, e.g., densely populated skyscrapers, busy and crowded streets, fruit stalls, and small restaurants, all tested models and platforms are pretty well handled. Hence, the most challenging aspect of this research creation will be the manipulation of Chinese text, regardless of whether it is for neon signs, road signs, or other objects. Hence, we see that there is a need for the team to work on more sophisticated models and edited versions of existing open-source text-to-video AI tools

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Intersubjective methodology for the interaction between traditional and contemporary practices

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independent dance artist and researcher

Abstract

This presentation concerns a research methodology utilising 'intersubjectivity' as a principle of practice-as-research where traditional and contemporary artistic practices interact for knowledge generation or innovation. Focusing on the discipline of performing arts, this presentation refers to practitioners-scholars Joanne 'Bob' Whalley and Lee Miller who argue that a research project must be embedded with some form of 'intersubjective exchange'—a bodily and cognitive encounter between performer and watcher—in order to test new knowledge and innovation. This cognitive/bodily approach can bring the collaborators' attention to the actual process of the encounter. This presentation will examine an intersubjective methodology in my PhD practice-led research project *Improvising Time* in collaboration with Butoh-trained solo dancer Janette Hoe, culminating in a dance film *Solo Dialogue* (2021). In a series of shared practice sessions, Janette and I took turns to be performer and watcher. My practice of the repertoires from Noh theatre and improvisation witnessed by Janette catalysed a crucial somatic shift in my perception of temporality while performing. In this presentation, I will argue that, despite the complexity associated with artistic/cultural/philosophical differences, the intersubjective encounter can lead to a process of 'inching' towards the shared objectives of the participants. While this encounter might not yield a concrete knowledge generation or new innovative art form, the framework of intersubjectivity provides a research condition that brings about cognitive, somatic and paradigmatic shifts in the collaborators' experience. In addition, the methodology enhances peer-to-peer interpersonal relationships and enables further intersubjective experience for subsequent creative encounters.

Keywords: artistic encounter, cognitive exchange, inching, intercultural practices, somatic shift

Introduction

This presentation examines the notion of intersubjectivity as a methodology for the interaction between traditional and contemporary dance practices which are often seen in opposition to each other. This interaction or collaboration is conventionally implemented through frameworks of production for performance events. On the one hand, traditional dances transmit and foster long-standing customs and practices while upholding the values of the people and their communities who practice them. On the other hand, contemporary dances—often presented as "concert dance"—are seen as experimental and "capable only in 'modern' societies, challenging the boundaries of and expectations about concert dance itself" (Foster, 2011, p. 196). Inevitably, the context of colonialism and modernisation surfaces through such intercultural dialogue. Work such as critically acclaimed *Pichet Klunchun and Myself* by Thai classical dancer Pichet Klunchun and French choreographer Jérôme Bel exemplifies a juxtaposition of traditional and contemporary practices while exposing the underpinning context of "the histories of privilege, wealth, and access to the

global circulation of products and ideas" (Foster, 2011, p. 197). Through the short period of their encounters, in essence, *Pichet Klunchun and Myself* is presented as a task for the two artists to find out about each other, a work of dialogue-as-performance. During the performance, Klunchun demonstrated his Khon practice in response to Bel's questions while Bel took the role as a watcher. In turn, Bel performed excerpts from his choreography witnessed by Klunchun. In my view, the work has shown the process of two artists sharing their practices with each other in spite of their differences. They were the witness of each other's practice, exemplified by the ways in which they respected each other's practice; they listened, observed, empathised and immersed themselves in the experience of perceiving each other.

While this work of dialogue-as-performance did not produce a new form of dance where the traditional and contemporary combine, in my view it presented an "intersubjective exchange" at the very heart of this intercultural dialogue (Whalley & Miller, 2019, p. 2). In the article *Somatic / Intersubjectivitiy: 'Moving Thoughts on Intersubjectivity',* practitioner-scholars Joanne 'Bob' Whalley and Lee Miller (2019) investigate "the bodily experience of intersubjectivity" in the context of performance and argue that bodily encounters—between performer and audience and/or between collaborators—generate cognitive shifts while sharing "space between bodies, as [they] craft / tell / show / make / perform / interrogate / reflect, then do it all over again" (p. 2). Admittedly, this notion of intersubjective exchange is predicated upon phenomenology, a branch of Western philosophy, and somatically-informed practices. Importantly, from this perspective, intercultural practice is understood as 'research' – a way of finding out about things and processes. Whalley and Miller note that the processes of intersubjective exchange, like artistic research, cannot be viewed as stable or steady. On the contrary, they argue that:

> *"[these processes do] not, and cannot, aim for equilibrium, being contracted and imbedded in the commitment to seek out new knowledges and/or substantial insights. And yet, these are messy practices, and ones which have the capacity to mess you up, and mess you around" (p. 3).*

To me, this acceptance of a messy and complex nature of artistic practice liberates practitioners from feeling the need to innovate or produce groundbreaking work. Instead, it allows them to immerse themselves in the process of encountering one another. According to Whalley and Miller, the encounters between bodies can generate cognitive, somatic and paradigmatic shifts which are invaluable as a process of "inching" towards new understandings, new perspective, and potential for further encounters (p. 4). Importantly, the notion of intersubjectivity as an approach for artistic research enables a new understanding and acceptance that the body, its action, perception and experience, constitutes a site of knowledge generation and yields research 'data' without objective analysis (pp. 4–5).

To understand the intersubjective methodology, I will begin with a background of my artistic practice, which leads to the context of my PhD research project and followed by a brief clarification of the characteristic of intersubjectivity according to French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. I would argue that even when one is not familiar with French phenomenology, there are practices and ideas that align with Merleau-Ponty's intersubjectivity, including the practice of 'seeing detached perception', or *riken no ken* 離見の見, in Japanese Noh theatre, which is underpinned by Buddhist philosophy. I will discuss the practice of *riken no ken* in the studio research of my PhD project and key insights arising from the practice.

Background of my artistic practice

Born in Bangkok, Thailand, I am a dance artist based in Melbourne, Australia. After graduating with a Bachelor of Dance in 1997 from the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA), University of Melbourne, I have been practicing as an independent artist while collaborating

with fellow dancers as well as practitioners across various disciplines, including visual arts, theatre, dramaturgy, fashion, and animation. I briefly studied Butoh with Yukio Wakuri in 1997 and later worked with a prominent dance artist and BodyMind Centering (BMC) practitioner Alice Cummins. From 2007 – 2017, I practiced BMC and performed movement improvisation with a performance group 'Footfall Ensemble', founded by Alice. In 2009, I travelled to Kyoto to study with the late Master-actor Udaka Michishige, a leading Noh performer of the Kongō Noh School with the support from a Skills Development grant from the Australia Council Dance Board and Arts Network Asia (Singapore). Michishige-sensei established International Noh Institute (INI) where dance and theatre practitioners from all over the world can study and practice Noh according to the traditional pedagogy. From 2019 onwards, I have continued studying Noh with Michishige-sensei's son Tatsushige, also a Noh performer of the Kongō School who specialises in the roles of lead actor/protagonist (*shite* 仕手).

With the influence of Noh, BMC and post-modern dance improvisation, my PhD practice-led research project *Improvising Time* (2023) brought age-old Noh performance concepts, such as *jo-ha-kyū* 序破急, *ma* 間 and *riken no ken,* into a dynamic interaction with contemporary dance improvisation.Despite being a traditional art form for aristocrats, the performance theory and practice of Noh is underpinned by Confucianism and Zen Buddhism. In *The Noh Theatre: Principles and Perspectives* (1983), Noh practitioner Kunio Komparu states that the interrelationship between performer and audience is understood as mutual, defined by an egalitarian view of an "encounter", or *de-a-i* 出会い (p.19). Komparu *denotes de-a-i* as "respect for those you meet", not only applicable as mutual relationship between performer and aristocratic audience in the front row, but also "the bystander" further away from the stage.As Noh concepts for performing and composing are predicated upon "how best to engage audience" (Quinn, 2005, p. 202), my investigation of how these concepts could be embodied in my improvisation would inevitably involve an approach that provided insights from the perspectives of both performer and audience. That is, my embodiment of the Noh concepts must involve a relationality to an audience. The further I investigated Noh concepts and practiced the Noh repertoire, the more I uncovered the intersubjective aspects of Noh, even though they are not necessarily articulated in terms of subjectivity or intersubjectivity. In my view, using phenomenological terminology can account for the actions and functions of the body along with its perceptual experience, which in turn, leads to the articulation of the embodiment of Noh concepts as substantial data in my research practice.

What is 'intersubjectivity'?

In this presentation, intersubjectivity refers to a phenomenological concept based on the work of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty who furthered the work of German philosopher Edmund Husserl. Husserl's phenomenology focuses on the consciousness of subjectivity, defined as the state of being a subject in the world, where he emphasises the subjective awareness of the other to account for intersubjectivity (Sanders, 2014, p. 144). Differently, Merleau-Ponty approaches phenomenology through the notion of "the lived body", that is, phenomenology is the study of anything perceivable by the body (Rothfield, 2021, p. 19). By shifting the focus of one's awareness and thought to one's body, Merleau-Ponty gives subjectivity an embodied turn with the emphasis on the first-person perspective of the lived body. Philipa Rothfield, a dance philosopher, sees the lived body as blurring the subject-object and writes that the lived body "is subjectively felt and objectively discernible". Merleau-Ponty's account of intersubjectivity pertains to "an internal relation" between one's embodied subjectivity and that of another as arising from "the reciprocity of a shared corporeal existence" (Sanders, 2014, pp. 144–5).

While it is understood that the capacity to empathise makes intersubjectivity possible, this does not mean that intersubjectivity is merely about feeling for and identifying with other embodied subjects. There is a Thai saying 'เข้าเมืองตาหลิ่ว ให้หลิ่วตาตาม', translated as 'when entering a city where everyone squints, one must do the same.' This seems to signify that the identity of self and that of the other is no longer distinct as one identifies with the other through the same activity and, thus, the boundary between self and other is dissolved. In contrast, Merleau-Ponty rejects this notion and maintains that the boundaries between self and other are distinct but permeable (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 368). While self and other is viable through "internal relation" of shared bodily existence, the reciprocity between self and other is situated in the background of "the perceptible, historical and cultural world" (Sanders, 2014, p. 174). That is, much like oneself, the other is presented in shared experience with their own unique cultural world, historicity, perception and corporeality.

This is precisely what Klunchun and Bel did in *Pichet Klunchun and Myself.* They recognised and respected each other's cultural worlds, historicity and corporeality, but refrained from blending into each other's cultural world. If one were to blend into the other's cultural world, one would have to dissolve aspects of one's own cultural world, habits, customs, and/or belief system. However, by recognising and respecting each other's cultural worlds, Klunchun and Bel shifted the mode of collaboration from merging their practices towards the actual process of their encounter – listening, observing, learning from, and questioning each other's practice. In this way, their encounter is an intersubjective one where the audience can experience the process in which they became increasingly empathetic to each other's practice and artistic visions. In so doing, they inched towards successive collaboration while "determined to keep listening to one another", emphasising the process of encountering rather than forging new forms of dance or staging political and cultural arguments between East and West (Foster, 2011, p. 207).

The intersubjective methodology in the research project *Improvising Time*

Whalley and Miller argue that, for an artistic practice to claim a status as research, it "must have the capacity for some form of intersubjective exchange built in" to test how insights or knowledge the research may generate (2019, p. 3). This is because the presence of an audience critically impacts upon how artist-researchers perform a task and thus is an active part of performance outcomes (pp. 3–4). In my research project, as mentioned in the previous section, intersubjective exchange was so crucial for the investigation that it needed to be built into the methodology. To do this, I devised a series of studio research involving "praxis", the interweaving of theory and practice where the creative processes pertain to the cycles of doing, reflecting, articulating, reading and doing again (Nelson, 2013, p. 29). As mentioned earlier that artistic research could be messy, the studio research might not give decisive answers to our investigation through the cycles of praxis. As Henk Borgdorff's doctoral dissertation (Leiden University) argues, artistic research can never be completely empirically transparent and often lacks structural completeness (2012, p. 194). Yet this structural lack of completeness is at the heart of artistic practice where palettes of ideas are assembled through praxis, and the incompleteness of each cycle invites practitioner-researchers to fill the gap of what is unclear or unknown – leads to further enquiry – the processes of "unfinished thinking" (p. 187).

For the studio research, I invited solo dance artist Janette Hoe to join me in the series of studio research from September 2018 – February 2021, culminating in the filming of the performance *Solo Dialogue* (2021). At the early stage of the research, the principal research question was how *jo-ha-kyū* and *ma* could be utilised as a framework for temporal organisation when improvising. To explore this research question, the studio research was designed for me to examine the improvisational, temporal and intersubjective experience as

both improviser and audience. Janette and I took turns to be improviser and watcher as well as reflecting on and discussing our experience in light of the research question. As improviser, I explored how *jo-ha-kyū* and *ma* could be embodied as apparatuses of temporal organisation in front of an audience (Janette); as watcher, I observed Janette's temporal organisation, allowing me to gain first-hand experience of her improvisation. Our shared objective, biased towards my research question, was to investigate temporality generated by the dancing body when witnessed by an audience.

Trained in Butoh and completed her MFA at the VCA in 2016, Janette is familiar with the genealogy of somatic practices such as ideokinesis and BMC, but not with Noh theatre. While the lineage of my improvisation practice follows somatic practices and post-modern dance improvisation, Janette's improvisation practice follows the lineage of Butoh and Body-Weather. She does not identify with the discourse of post-modern dance and prefers to situate her practice in the Asian diaspora as she has explored aspects of Asian philosophy in her improvisation. Interestingly, in terms of improvisation, I am on the hegemonic Western contemporary side and Janette identifies with the Eastern lineage of 'improvisation'. However, in terms of Asian performance traditions, I am on the traditional side through Noh, and Janette contemporary through Butoh. Understanding the cultural backgrounds of our practices, we began the studio research with the discussions on the history of colonialism and its impact on our practices; our own historicities embedded in our dancing bodies; our habits, bias and preferences of what constitutes a great performance. At first, Janette expressed her apprehension about the intellectualisation of dance practice through the inclusion of philosophical references as she said she prefers to access her intuition to generate performance. We agreed to meet half-way by minimising theoretical discussion and focusing on the process of intersubjective exchange—the experiential aspect of our corporeal encounter—and its implications. In addition, we discussed how we articulated our experience of each other's improvisation. Instead of merely giving feedback to each other, we agreed to focus on the experiential level of our encounter, the first-person experience—following Merleau-Ponty's idea of experience prioritising a first-person perspective—and the reading of each other's improvisation. To discuss each other's improvisation, we tried to avoid words with positive or negative connotations.

My improvisation a priori

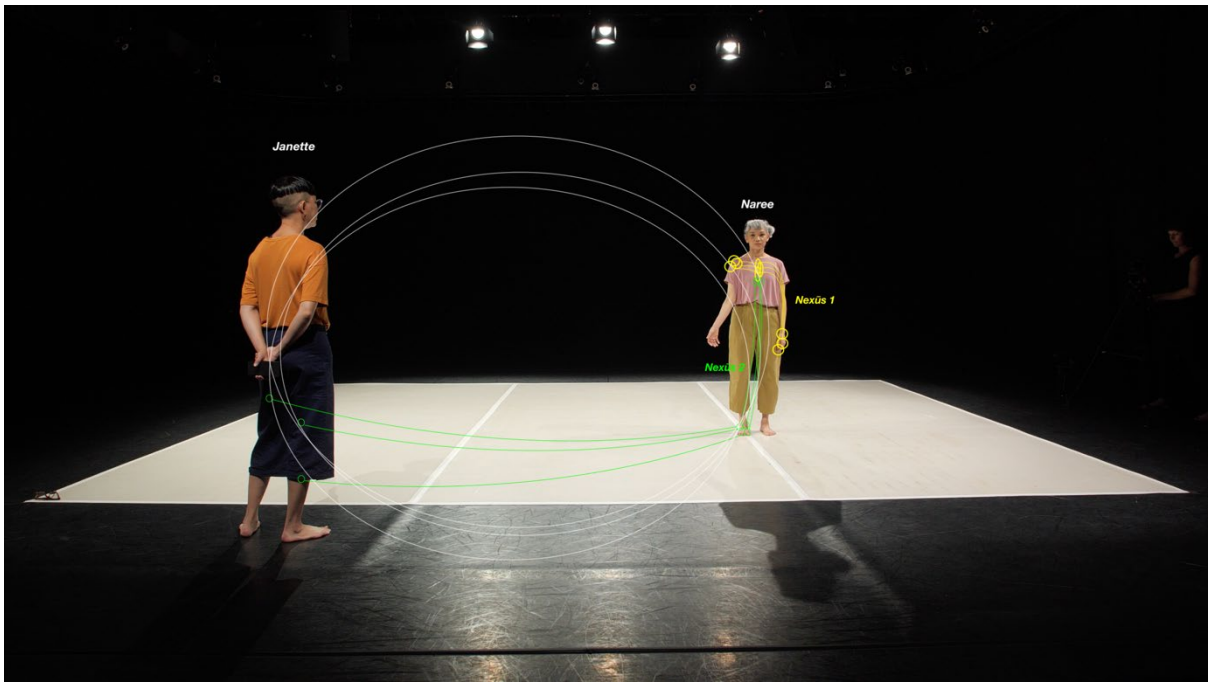
As I mentioned to Janette that one of my favourite choreographers is William Forsythe, we decided to attend the performance of *A Quiet Evening of Dance* by The Forsythe Company at the Victorian Arts Centre, in October 2018. In a subsequent studio research session, I reflected on the influence of ballet and contemporary dance on my embodied temporality and how I organised the flow and sequencing of my improvisation. At this point, I embodied *jo-ha-kyū* in my improvisation as a wave-like flow, influenced by Forsythe's idea of sequencing: before one movement ended, another movement was already underway (Manning & Massumi, 2014, p. 40). Janette reflected that she did not see the difference between when I embodied *jo-ha-kyū* and when I did not. Inherent in my Western dance training, the wave-like flow was my habitual mode of temporal organisation based on my action of catching weight due to gravity. To Janette, this flow of my improvisation was experienced as one long continuous sequence of movement – there was *jo* and *ha,* but where was *kyū*? Further, the wave-like flow rendered my improvised movement as temporal texture with a dissipated quality. She was uncertain if our connection could be maintained during such flow.

The wave-like flow was a clear contrast to the articulation of *jo-ha-kyū* when I practiced Noh as Janette watching. Due to Janette's queries, I returned to the writing of the Noh treatises written by Zeami Motokiyo 世阿弥元清 (c.1363 – c.1443) to deepen my

understanding of *jo-ha-kyū*. According to Zeami, one of the most important features of *jo-ha-kyū* is its fulfilment or *jōju* 成就 (Zeami, 1984, p. 137). It is the finishing—*kyū*—that makes *jo-ha-kyū* an arc. Once an arc of *jo-ha-kyū* is fulfilled, there is an interval between two *jo-ha-kyū* modulations, which can be understood as *ma,* an interval of space and time

Fig. 1: A screenshot from the performance of *Solo Dialogue* (2021), showing Naree commencing her improvisation while Janette watched. The image illustrates Naree's fields of attention to Janette's body as she drew specific parts of her body to that of Janette. Performer: Naree Vachananda and Janette Hoe; Videographer: Cobie Orger.

between performance elements. As I realised this, I practiced fulfilling *jo-ha-kyū* in the Noh repertoire through my study with Tatsushige-sensei in Kyoto, during the northern Summer of 2019. I brought my kinaesthetic sensibility of fulfilling *jo-ha-kyū* when I returned to the studio reserch with Janette in Melbourne.



Somatic and paradigmatic shifts: the disruption of the flow

To embody *jo-ha-kyū* in my improvisation with the emphasis of *kyū*, the habitual flow of my movement was disrupted in favour of fulfilling each arc of *jo-ha-kyū.* As a result of small pauses between *jo-ha-kyū* modulations, the wave-like flow seemed to subside from my improvisation. During the pause, or *ma*, the intensity of Janette's gaze was intensified in my perception and this instance was where I experienced time more vividly. The presence of Janette witnessing my improvisation activated a somatic shift in my felt sense of temporality. That is, each *jo-ha-kyū* modulation pertained not only to my impulses or capacity of weight bearing, but also to the time it took for me to field my attention and include Janette in my perceptual uptakes. While my previous habitual flow diluted the relational field with Janette over time, embodying *jo-ha-kyū* and *ma* as movement process, with the emphasis of its fulfillment, enabled this relational field to gradually thicken; the tensility of the space between Janette and I seemed more palpable.

Implementing the fulfillment of *jo-ha-kyū* marked a paradigmatic shift in my research. Previously, my temporal experience was influenced by the kinaesthetic sensibility of Western dance where time was believed to flow smoothly, according to the temporal

paradigm arising from scientific discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton in the 17th century through to Albert Einstein in the 20th century. Practicing the fulfillment of each *jo-ha-kyū* arc meant that my temporal experience as an improviser could be described as discrete or 'lumpy' but also ongoing – time no longer flowed smoothly in my experience. Further, my acknowledgement of Janette's presence was not merely an idea that she was there, rather, her corporeal presence activated a cognitive exchange perceptually and speculatively between us. The approach from the perspective of bodily encounter turned my awareness of Janette's presence into tangible sensorial and perceptual experience which impacted my embodied temporality and my bodily organisation towards her. For Janette, this paradigmatic shift also occurred in her embodied temporality. In one improvisation, she reported a staccato rhythm in her improvisation as she practiced the fulfillment of each movement arc, as if it was deviated from her 'regular pattern'. While initially uncomfortable, she felt that she was more attentive to her movement processes and able to allow me (the watcher) to attend to such processes. As I watched this improvisation, I felt the shift of Janette's temporality and the way in which her body was organised. Through attention to movement and other embodied processes, perception became more palpable for and between us.

In *Action in Perception,* philosopher Alva Noë posits that perception is action as he writes, "It [perception] is something we do…the world makes itself available to the perceiver through physical movement and interaction" (2004, p. 1). He illuminates Merleau-Ponty's bodily approach to perception by arguing that perception is not only what we think about but it is also something we *enact* to gain experiential access to the world. The presence of Janette became more available to me, and mine to her, because we mobilised our sensory motor skills to enable the thickening of the space between us. Through thickening space and perceptual uptakes, I felt that, not only my movement, but also my attention was made available for her to perceive – an imposition of my perception onto Janette's positionality. Could this be possible as a kind of intersubjective exchange between us?

Intersubjectivity according to Noh

My felt perception as though my attention was made available to Janette prompted an examination of a Noh practice of "the seeing of detached perception" or *riken no ken* 離見の見, a practice of perceiving oneself as if from a distance (Yusa, 1987, p. 331). Noh scholar Yusa Michiko writes that, as Zeami deepened his Zen practice during his exile in Sendai later in his life, he conceptualised *riken no ken* through the Buddhist precept of "no-mind" (*mushin* 無心) where the mind is clear of attachment and conceptualisation (p. 333). Zeami's idea of *riken no ken* is a selfless detached perception, in opposition to "ego-perception" (*gaken* 我見), a "self-centred and attached mode of seeing" (p. 335). He likened the high calibre of Noh performers who practiced *riken no ken* to the highest attainment of Zen practice (pp. 333–41).

While I am not a Zen practitioner, my practice of *riken no ken* went some ways to decentralise my sense of self. To elaborate on my experience of practicing *riken no ken* while Janette watched, I drew upon aspects of Merleau-Ponty's notion of phenomenological reflection. For Merleau-Ponty, philosophical reflection prioritises "the pre-reflective" to account for "the character and content of actual experience" – the immediate experience prior to analysis or evaluation (Rothfield, 2021, pp. 17–18). Similarly, *riken no ken* is practiced in the realm of pre-reflection, that is, by attending to experience as it emerges. It was poignant in my practice as Noh repertoire requires practicing repeatedly, yet it should be performed as if the performer experiences it for the first time. To me, *riken no ken* is one of the practices that enables the freshness of experience in practicing the repertoire because it requires the performer to attend to the immediate experience of performing.

In the studio research, I practiced *riken no ken* in my improvisation when Janette was watching. *Riken no ken* shifted the perception of my dancing body towards a perception all around my body. As my somatic attention thickened, practicing *riken no ken* enabled a sense of porousness of my body, as though Janette's gaze could penetrate right through my body. This perceived porousness destabilised my sense of self—a kinaesthetic felt sense of indeterminacy—as if I was letting go of the certainty and fixity of my subjectivity. However, I did not completely overcome my sense of self. The practice of perceiving myself as if from a distance can only be employed—in the words of Rothfield—as "an asymptote", or "a movement towards", rather than actually being outside of myself (2021, p. 182). Since practicing *riken no ken* in the studio research, I often gave Janette time to accommodate her observation of my embodied processes. This suggests a shift of my perspective towards a possible point of view of Janette which, in turn, impacted my embodied temporality.

As the improvisation proceeded, my porous dancing body turned into a "body-as-thickness" as my perceptual experience intensified (Vachananda, 2023, p. 119). This gradual bodily/perceptual intensification signified a noticeable somatic shift in my improvisation in the presence of Janette. Thus, the practice of *riken no ken* activates a specific rendering of my improvising body—dispersed then thickened—and broadens the field of my attention to Janette's body. By drawing together *riken no ken* and Merleau-Ponty's intersubjectivity, there was a key insight emerging from the studio research: As Janette is an embodied other, she is not merely an abstract 'audience'. As the embodied other, her historicity, habits, bias and perceptual experience are uniquely hers. As the boundary between her lived body and mine is clearly distinct, her perceptual world is of course not converted to mine, or mine to hers. Yet, there is a collaborative reciprocity contributing to our perceptual experiences in our own unique ways. When practicing *riken no ken,* as a result of our uniqueness but with mutual reciprocity, as soon as I felt that I had taken Janette's perspective, it became mine and no longer hers. As Fred Evans writes about Merleau-Ponty's uniqueness of self and other, "we can only be outside of each other's inside, not the inside of each other" (2014, p. 192). Thus, our intersubjective exchange occurred at a cognitive and embodied level substantial enough for somatic and paradigmatic shifts in our bodily and temporal organisations and contributions to our improvisational outcomes.

The studio research culminated in the filming of the improvisational performance, *Solo Dialogue* (2021). The structure of this work mirrors the structure of the studio research: Janette and I took turns to perform short improvisations 'in dialogue' with each other. In *Solo Dialogue*, like in the studio research, Janette and I co-created a generative milieu for each other, contributing to our performance. Each of us made our dancing more available to the watcher. This reciprocity contributed to the way we watched each other dancing, and in turn, informed our subsequent improvisations. In this way, while not conforming to each other's cultural worlds or dance lineages, we were 'inching' or "centimetring" towards each other through our corporeal encounter as we both played a role in shaping each other's improvisation (Whalley & Miller, 2019, p. 4).

Concluding thoughts

In intercultural practices and collaborations, the intersubjective methodology offers an approach where collaborating artists respect one another's boundaries and do not take for granted one another's cultural worlds and historicities. This methodology activates a sense of



Fig. 2: Janette and I in one of our subsequent creative encounters. Image from NOW PIECES #6, curated by Gretel Taylor. Dancehouse, Melbourne. September 2023. Photo: Laki Sideris.

relationality or matrix in which cognitive, somatic, or even paradigmatic shifts can take place. In the words of Whalley and Miller, it allows the collaborating artist to 'inch' or 'centimeter' *towards* potential significance, meaning, or even artistic form, co-created by one another. As discussed in the case of my PhD project *Improvising Time,* the methodology enabled cognitive, somatic and paradigmatic shifts in Janette's and my practices through our corporeal encounters while activating the sense of relationality and generative milieu where we allowed each other to shape our improvisational outcomes.

One of the paradigmatic shifts through this methodology means that the creative outcomes do not belong to one sole author who stakes the claim for originality (Foster 2011, p. 207), as in the model of Western concert dance, but a co-creation of the work. Another paradigmatic shift is that through the framework of *jo-ha-kyū* in relational to the witness (Janette), my temporal perception in improvisation became lumpy rather than flowing smoothly. As I embody *jo-ha-kyū,* I attend to the process of movement from beginning, developing and ending. To emphasise the ending, there is a small interval between movement, or *ma.* This radically shifts the paradigm of temporality away from the hegemonic temporality manifested as continuous flow of movement in Western dance.

The intersubjective methodology brings the attentions of the intercultural collaborators to the process of the encounter at an experiential level. With the analogy that if a performance practice is an iceberg, the style or design of staged production is the tip of the iceberg whereas the experiential part of the practice represents the large volume of the iceberg below the water surface. While the collaborators acknowledge one another's cultural background, performance lineages and historicities, the methodology allows the collaborators to attend to much of what comprises their practices, often hidden 'behind the scenes.' These hidden experiential aspects of performance practice may not be uncovered in a straightforward manner and may emerge intermittently. The intersubjective methodology

allows the collaborators to keep track of this aspect as it surfaces and enables time and space for inviting transparency in encountering one another's different perspectives. Despite the messy process of artistic practices, particularly intercultural ones, being transparent to one another as much as possible can enhance peer-to-peer relationships and enable potentially favourable experience in subsequent encounters. It is conceded that the focus on the intersubjective exchange between the collaborators may not yield finished or polished productions, or solve every problem arising from the encounters, exemplified by *Pichet Klunchun and Myself* and *Solo Dialogue.* This methodology calls for valuing the unfinished, work-in-progress or the potentiality of collaborative efforts, without which true collaborations or deepening understandings between cultures cannot occur.

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The Hear Us Through… Collective: A Student-Driven, Community-Based Cacophony

Mike Hansen

Abstract

To create an eco-futuristic community-based art project, PhD student Mike Hansen collaborated with high school art teacher June Sulley, and six of Sulley's students, to form The Hear Us Through… Collective, (HUTC). HUTC collectively developed ideas and constructed visual components to build The Cacophony Project – kinetic sound sculptures depicting a dystopian scenario in which the university's protected Arboretum acreage is rezoned for urban development. Prioritizing the mounting important of such protected areas in the face of climate change, the collective constructed works that are relatively eco-friendly, constructed with found, thrifted, and re-used materials. Ultimately, The Cacophony Project became a vehicle of caring that culminated in an expression of the students' environmental rights. This project allows the students a public art platform to express their own climate change stories through publicly displayed kinetic sound sculptures. The result is a kind of eco-futuristic fable. As H.J. Bickham stresses in *The Fable as Literature*, "a fable gets past the garrison of resident assumptions, the mind's defenses, to bring home its point or raise its questions: it is a tactical manoeuvre to prompt new thinking." (Bickham p. xi) In The Cacophony Project, HUTC presented an acoustemological approach to knowing that expanded the understandings of both the participants, and those who viewed the work. Incorporating an auto-ethnography methodology, by developing a Practiced Based Research (PBR) based on R. Lyle Skain's 2018 paper *Creative Practice in Research* model. The research is built on a process of documenting the process of the art works' developmental stages, as well as close scrutiny of my past works, through capturing the development of the sculptures through video recording, and interviews of the participants. Some of this material was included in a documentary video that chronicles and archives the project. These sculptures are a reflection of the reality these students are experiencing in the face of a provincial government bent on destruction of preserved areas in their home city.

Introduction: The LP as a Locus of Artistic Research and Practice

I'm a visual artist who creates and exhibits paintings and sculptures. I am also a musician who uses sound as a medium. In fact, I consider sound to be the foundation of my research.

I have been exhibiting sound works since 1992: they are typically participatory. I have a special fascination with (vinyl) records as a medium for art production. In his essay "Noise for the People," Toronto arts curator and writer Earl Miller writes of my use of LPs (long-playing records): "He transforms them into objects whose meaning extends beyond the music played on them… At the same time, by having the records appear to hold no use value, that is, appearing unplayable, he satirizes their commodity status (Miller p.4)."

For me the record is an *objet d'art* that stores much more than just sounds. It is a vehicle for art production outside, as Miller writes, their "commodity status."



Figure 1 - Examples of Mike Hansen's records as "Objet d'Art".

My practice investigates not only records, but also the machines that play them. By 1992, the record player had been effectively expunged from its decades-long role of providing domestic entertainment. I undertook a project of reclaiming the record player, giving it a new status as an important element of participatory arts practice.

This venerable entertainment unit had been replaced, first by the CD player and then by the virtual (even ephemeral) format, the MP3 (in recent years of course, with renewed interest in vinyl records, both the LP and the record player are enjoying a major renaissance). I chose to reclaim and rehabilitate the record player as an all-important tool for my own art research and production. It is an invention of considerable haptic appeal: a modern object with many moving parts that has been designed in many different forms. At the same time it is a vessel for nostalgia, representing, as it does, a comfortable familiarity in fast-changing times. For many years now, my artistic practice has incorporated the record player and its shell – its shapes and forms – as bases for a number of works that place it at the centre of the act of witnessing, both passive and participatory.

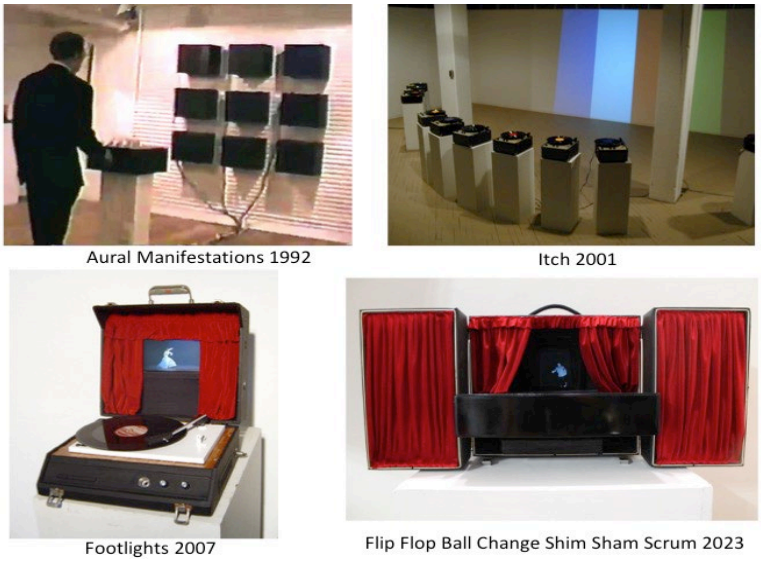


Figure 2 - Examples of record players used in Mike Hansen's practice.

In our digital times, the information we store is a kind of abstraction: it exists in CPUs and microchips, in a reality separate from our everyday existence. When I look at a vinyl record, however, I see its information by the grooves cut into the object: it is a concrete thing. The vinyl record is a physical object that is capable of holding and distilling information within an aural context. Its content is visible, solid, stored in a foundation of, in most instances, vinyl. It possesses a body, a physical substance that is essential to its operation. It demonstrates that we exist.

The importance of the player and the record is ritual: there is a performativity involved in the vinyl record and its playback. Beverland and Fernandez write that the physicality of vinyl facilitates:

> The notion that performativity is repetitive. This is because it is the repetitive, ritualistic physical interactions between possessor and possession that bind them together. Physical interactions with a material object create strong, intimate connections between the object and a person. (Beverland & Fernandez p. 4)

I Studied It, Now I Had to Do It!

My story of building a community through the art collective model reflects the democratic pedagogical ideals of Paulo Friere. His thinking can be fundamental to both the concept of relational aesthetics in forming co-authorship, and to the development of an acoustemological relationship between viewer and object.

In spring 2025 I was in the second year of a PhD program at the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation at the University of Guelph in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. To complete my coursework for IMPR*6020: Arts-Based Community-Making, I was required to create a community-based artwork.

So far in the semester, we had focused on more conventional academic areas such as pedagogy and archiving, but the course also foregrounded community building, and its importance in fighting oppression. To launch and undertake the project I needed, as a researcher-artist, a definitive research question. As my brain stewed, stirred by the comprehensive readings that I was required to digest over the past year as part of the arts-based community-building class work, I devised a combination of the elements around me. The project came to incorporate a group of students from the John F Ross Collegiate

Vocational Institute in Guelph, as well as an *in situ* exhibition location, the University of Guelph's Arboretum.

The Arboretum is a 400-acre tract of land, largely wooded, that has long been essential both as a site for the university's various conservation, education, and research programs, and as a public park. I began to devise a way in which a protected area used for university research could be developed into a comprehensive project to reflect a research question that examines an unfortunate possibility:

What would happen if the Arboretum were to be developed?

The question evolved from a current provincial governmental scandal. The Premier of Ontario, elected through campaigns generously funded by property developers, opened for development nominally protected lands in the province's Greenbelt. If this went through (and it has been stalled by mass protests), would it follow that any desirable plot of land could be confiscated and sold for development projects? How would these practices affect my children's (secondary school-aged) generation and their cohort? At the same time, when natural areas are being increasingly recognized as buffers against the forces of climate change, how would such exploitation of these areas affect the prospects of upcoming and future generations?

Just prior to this assignment, I was invited to produce a whirligig for an exhibition at a contemporary art gallery in my hometown of Hamilton, Ontario. The work was to function kinetically, but as the show took place indoors, during the winter, it would use an electric fan to propel the sculpture. I wanted this work to reflect my practice so I finally was able to design and construct a whirligig that propelled a record player.

The Whirligig and Folkloric Tradition

Before I tell the story of the Hear Us Through… Collective – and how these young student collaborators helped improve on my initial concept – let's examine the whirligig and its centuries-long history. According to historian and whirligig enthusiast Ander S. Lunde,

> Middle Age tapestries show children playing with hobbyhorse whirligigs with 4-bladed propellers at the end. George Washington, riding back to Mt. Vernon at the conclusion of the Revolution, brought some "whilagigs (sic)" for Martha's grandchildren in his saddle bags (sic). In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, human figures waving their arms, swords, shovels, and other implements, were popular whirligigs. (Lunde p.8)

The whirligig is seen as a folk art toy, as Lunde continues in their essay, "Essentially the whirligig is a wind toy or wind machine. It twists and turns in the wind, and there is a propeller connected with it somewhere, either as a power source or as a decoration." (Lunde p.8) The whirligig has basically been seen as a decorative accessory. Lunde also expresses the variety of whirligigs and the essential components:

> Historically, there are four identifiable types of whirligigs. Arm-wavers twirl their arms while twisting in the wind. Winged whirligigs, birds real or imaginary, spin their wings in opposite directions while remaining sideways to the wind. Weathervane types always point into the wind; a propeller or other moving part makes them whirligigs… Mechanical whirligigs use propellers to power an activity through drive shafts, gears, and connecting rods. (Lunde p.8)



Figure 3 - A variety of Whirligigs

The Hear Us Through… Collective - The Beginning

Working with the Arboretum, as a non-resident of Guelph, I asked for secondary school recommendations with comprehensive art programs. This fortunately led to John F. Ross Collegiate Vocational Institute and art teacher June Sulley. A wonderful community was formed for this project, made up of five volunteer grade 12-art students along with art teacher June Sulley and myself.



Figure 4-John F. Ross Collegiate Vocational Institute

Evening the Playing Field

In preliminary discussions with June, I stated that a key objective was to dismantle the hegemonic structure of the classroom; between the elders – June and myself – and the grade 12 students. We both agreed that Friere's educational "non-banking" ideals were best applied through mutual knowledge sharing: student to teacher, teacher to student.

> Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (Friere p. 80)

In my own teaching over the years I have always used this kind of pedagogical thinking, believing it to be a democratic way to create a post-secondary classroom, in fitting with my practice of co-authoring; although, until my PhD experience I didn't know its provenance.

The primary objective of this endeavor is to create agency in all the participants, including myself, through the successful completion of the work. We hope that the work's beholders discover a sense of agency through the messaging presented in the installed artworks. Sara, a grade twelve student in the collective stated; "I think that–what good art pieces do is make them think about something… I hope they come up with their own ideas a little bit. But I really hope that we kinda get the same message across to people."

This process of sharing knowledge is much about an equal footing in the project, allowing all the participants' voices to be heard loud and clear through their contributions to the work. Our strategy to do so was to become a community of dedicated artisans to develop a publicly displayed series of sculptures that will stand up to the outdoors, and to what was becoming a turbulent spring in Ontario.

The Ups and Downs of Tech and Time

For the five students, the workshops qualified as the extracurricular volunteer hours that they needed in order to graduate. Our initial meeting took place February 5, 2025, shortly after the start of the high school's winter semester.

It began with a failed presentation of the proposed project. Everything that could go wrong went wrong. The computer didn't work so we couldn't show the PowerPoint presentation. It was the end of the school day, so all the students were restless. I ended up trying to explain the project with assistance of June. Thank goodness for the cell phone as I was able to take the students to my website to view and watch my prototype in action. Out of the meeting ten students volunteered, and in the end five became members of the collective.

The project itself had a tight deadline, as we had agreed with the University of Guelph Arboretum to exhibit April 5, 2025. June and I constructed a timeline with the students. In our first meeting we discussed shared responsibilities: the sounds to be collected, and the aesthetic visual symbols as part of the sculptures to help beholders understand the sounds.



Figure 5 - Flourishes used to add symbolism.

I also shared the process and timelines needed to physically cut the sounds onto the records need to fulfill the project. We would also need to glean the materials needed to build the whirligigs. All of these issues were solved within a 7-week period, as March break, a week-long student holiday, aka spring break, needed to be taken into consideration. We ended up with a meager 10.5 hours of collective working time.

Once the students had joined the project, I proposed that the group including June and I become an art collective. The students were asked to name the collective and together we became the Hear Us Through… Collective. We named our goal The Cacophony Project.

Here we are:



Figure 6- Sarah, Rebecca, Tana, Maggie, June, Mike, Maya

Methodology

We used an auto-ethnography methodology, developing our own Practiced Based Research (PBR) based on the model of R. Lyle Skain's paper *Creative Practice in Research* (Skains 2018). The research is built on a process of documenting the process of the art works'

developmental stages, as well as close scrutiny of my past works through capturing the development of the sculptures through video recording and interviews of the participants, concluding in a documentary. My initial thought was to use social media as a documentation tool, though The Brant District School Board where the school is located has a strict policy regarding social media use that prohibited it as a tool for documentation. To replace this, I used my phone to record video of the processes leading to and including both the works *in situ,* and a research presentation. The video recordings were beneficial as the process of witnessing as a form of qualitative data collection. Skains notes that scholar Harold Garfinkel in his 1967 text, *Studies in Ethnomethodology,* favors observing activities… essentially, activities that are familiar and practiced, even those with significant cognitive loads – then making the activities visible by applying a 'special motive' to make them of 'theoretic interest.' (Skains p. 82-97) In this instance, the choice of climate change action through environmentally sensitive kinetic sculptures qualified as a "special motive" re. Garfinkel; we also felt that this messaging could foster public interest in the project.

As shown in the documentary https://www.mikehansenart.com/hear-us-through-documentary, I developed qualitative research methods through interviews with each of the participants in the collective. I formulated open-ended questions that gave interviewees room to state opinions, and to express their thoughts about what effects the project and the resulting artworks might have on themselves, along with the hope of effective messaging to the community at large. My story plays a large role in my research methodologies. My story and history are portrayed through auto ethnography, using a history of my practice through past writings, video documentation and critical critique through public reviews and publications. These descriptions of my works reflect cognitive processes, though the works' development or as Skains points to, as 'long term memory'. (L. Flower and Hayes, Skains p. 82-97)

As I stated in the "I Studied It…" section of this paper, this was a culmination of a two-semester-long class in community arts building. Throughout the process I presented a number of essays and presentations, both to my cohort and to a group of scholars and community members, who critiqued the project and the research. This all concluded with a final paper, a presentation and screening of the documentary to my cohort and professor. I'm happy to say the project got an "A".

How to Build a Community When You're a Lone Wolf?

I see myself as the lone wolf artist. I have been working alone for over thirty years, creating works in my studio away from the collaborative ideas of others. My work is largely self-, un-government funded; besides teaching, I have worked menial jobs such as retail sales, or physically difficult jobs such as building and renovation, in order to finance my work.

This solitary work environment has generated a form of self-reliant critique, creating and aestheticizing my autonomous production. This leads to self-directed solutions formed through research, improvisation, and what we might call keeping your wits about you.

At the same time, although I work alone, the idea of collaboration is profoundly important to me as an artist, improviser and educator, and I often create temporary communities through the shared experiences of my participatory works, (I also perform as an improvising percussion and electronics artist, and have recorded with touring UK saxophonist John Butcher and the Hamilton-based ensemble Ghost Variables). A number of my installations and sculptures ask beholders to co-author the works through their participatory actions. Some of these works are performative: the beholder can be asked to scratch a record or walk to the adulation of fans and the paparazzi through the spectacle associated with the red carpet.

Participation is Key

Nicolas Bourriaud stresses his philosophy of co-authoring in contemporary art making as a democratization of the aesthetic ideal of "give everyone their chance" (Bourriaud p. 58). This idea of giving everyone the opportunity to play a role is a democratic ideal that is reflected in my participatory sound art works. In her 2012 book *Artificial Hells,* Claire Bishop also examines the act of co-authorship. She argues, "the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of *situations*… while the audience, previously conceived as a 'viewer' or 'beholder', is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant.*" (Bishop p. 2)

Through the examination of my practice, and these acts of co-authorship, I was surprised to discover that I may not have been the lone wolf that I considered myself to be. My work allows for democratic actions and the co-authoring that forms a community.

I started to understand community outside of empirical experiences through the Gerard Delanty text, *Community;* specifically the chapter "Postmodern Community," with its ideas of sharing and its constructive nature in community building. Delanty refers to the *Communitas* of Roberto Esposito to help express the notion of the liminal community and its base in reciprocity. Esposito's thinking reflects the Latin term *Munus* or the giving of gifts: "What predominates in the *Munus* is, in other words, reciprocity or "mutuality" (Delanty p. 164).

This concept of reciprocity or mutuality represents a form of co-authoring, as the act of giving and in turn, its reciprocity builds a communal space of shared values and equal input. William Corlett reinforces this in his discussion of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida: "community is neither individualism nor collectivity, but it is based on sharing." (Delanty p. 164)

In my practice, sharing expresses a core value in the act or facilitation of co-authoring and the resulting community built through its outcomes. Co-authoring brings democratic positioning to the forefront through equality of critical thought and democracy. This results in a built community.

Collective Thinking

Nevertheless, being asked to create an art-based community project for The Cacophony Project was not in my wheelhouse; it actually frightened me, although the idea of the collective meant a sharing of responsibility, and the nurturing of a democratic space for dialogue, industrious input and communal authorship. As Kim Charnley writes, "The emphasis on group authorship involves a challenge to the bourgeois individualism enshrined in the figure of the artist." (Charnley p. 245). The idea of the collective eliminated a sense of hierarchy and lone authorship in my role in the project. I have to admit, even if it is my idea and research, putting it on the table to be discussed, critiqued, and improved is always a bonus, even to the lone wolf persona I seem to have adopted. As one of the elders in the room, I was able to force myself to sit back and promote an open and free dialogue around the work and its construction. As Bishop writes,

> … advanced art of the last decade has seen a renewed affirmation of collectivity and a denigration of the individual, who becomes synonymous with the values of Cold War liberalism and its transformation into neoliberalism, that is, the economic practice of private property rights, free markets and free trade. (Bishop, p. 12)

I soon found that the student/artist collective was not as new and alien to me as I anticipated since, after all, I had already experience in devising participatory artworks, where I would act as facilitator, sharing authorship with the participants.

John Zarobell's *Global Art Collectives and Exhibition Making*__depicts the Impressionists as possibly the first art collective (Zarobell, p. 38). Grant Kester's *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* puts the collective in a more contemporary context: "Many artists since then have taken the collective idea much further, not only organizing exhibitions but also working together to make art with collective authorship" (Kester p. 38)

The work of the collective is about a formation of community along with aesthetic beauty. Pressure on the artist is relaxed, as the process is about collective thinking and community, as well as building agency in the collective's students. Bishop reinforces this thinking, "Consensual collaboration is valued over artistic mastery and individualism, regardless of what the project sets out to do or actually achieves." (Bishop p. 20)

This project and community engagement reflects my art and research practices. The students and I produced a series of sound-based works. These works followed my research of how to create agency through the creation of sound art works that redefine both noise and sound through acts of co-authoring.

Noise is Everything to Me

Noise is defined by what it isn't, such as unacceptable, unnecessary, unwanted. Metaphorically you walk into a restaurant for breakfast and you want a vegetarian meal. On the menu you see a breakfast titled Meatless: it is defined by what it isn't. In this instance meat is the noise.

Now, sound is understood to have context, is identifiable and it works within the environment it is being heard. My practice invites noise to be redefined into acceptable sounds through a participatory creation of the artworks. Through participatory acts of co-authoring, agency is found, as the noises created by participants become sounds. In this project the works are related to the kinetic folkloric art form of the whirligig. The students and I built a collection of whirligigs escaping the folkloric history of the naively constructed wooden sculptures that blow in the wind.

The Hear Us Through Collective spent every late Friday afternoon for 7 weeks to create the Cacophony Project. On our first meeting, I supplied every member including both June and I, with a sketchbook and a sharpened pencil to take notes and sketch ideas.

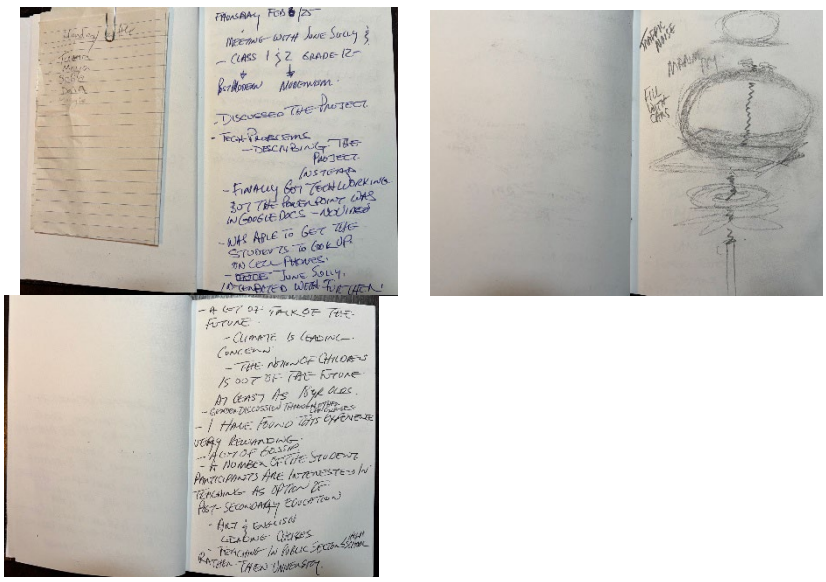


Figure 7- Examples of the notebooks; notes and sketches by the members in the collective

At our first meeting, we discussed and decided what themes the works would tackle. We came up with four sound and sculptural concepts. The collective would build an ocular addition to the sculptures, as well as collecting sounds to build the aural themes reflecting the imagery. We decided to portray domestic home building, clear-cutting of the environment, traffic congestion, and overpopulation of humans in this protected area. We discussed the political realities of being a teenager in this time of climate change and possibly the first generation to be wholly affected by climate disaster. Rebecca an 18-year-old member of the Hear Us Through Collective at University of Guelph Arboretum's Research Days presentations validated this;

"Climate change has always been a huge part of our generation; whether we wanted it to be or not it always has been. We have had no say in the matter: from the day we were born it has been a major factor in our lives from politics to education it's always been there. No generation before has to worry the way we do and unfortunately many still don't. We see it as an obligation to speak out and protect what we have left for the next generation. Some don't see the mass issue; they see a few acres of land instead of seeing the beauty of the trees and animals they see room for expansion and want more. By the time I'm thirty there won't be any more to take."

Aesthetic Values

June took us to a number of locations through the school where we were able to find objects to help in the building process, as we had decided to use found and thrifted materials. In the school's woodshop, the instructor gave us a table saw blade that we decided to use as the base for our clear cut. He also supplied us with a constructed wood frame house model that became the focus of our sculpture for housing construction. Our depiction of traffic congestion came to be built from children's toy cars. Overpopulation was demonstrated with a replica of an urban crosswalk filled with a variety of dolls walking across it.



Figure 8-The Cacophony Project; the flourishes constructed for each sculpture

The student-directed sculptures lent an aesthetic visual component to complement the sounds we collected and produced to complete our messaging. The ocular aesthetic of the sculptures plays an important role complementing the viewer's acoustemological understanding. This idea is being reinforced in Jean-François Lyotard's understanding of a visual aesthetics-based epistemology:

The heavy-duty ones are obvious: to be liked, to be persuasive, and to be just. What I mean to say is that the object … gives pleasure to the gaze; that the object induces a disposition in the viewer to buy into (in the double sense of going there and believing in it) the demonstration, the exhibit, the institution, etc.; that the object is faithful to the thing (institution, exhibit, etc.) it promotes, faithful both in the spirit and in the letter.

-You mean to say that by targeting the pleasure of the eyes...

-Of those eyes that engage thought not in knowing, but in enjoying...

- By targeting this pleasure, the object falls into the realm of aesthetics; by targeting belief, it derives from rhetoric. And by respecting the truth of the thing...

- Or by revealing it...

- The truth of the thing promoted, the graphic object takes on the value of testimony, it belongs to the art of proving, to inquiry, to history, to the establishment of knowledge." (Lyotard p. 33-4)

Origins of Process

I have given a brief synopsis of two important elements of my art practice. Both the record player and the record itself are key components in the community-based work our collective constructed. This work incorporates both the kinetic ideals of the whirligig and my passion for sound and its playback.

I have mentioned how the collective expanded on a project I had created a year earlier. I exhibited the prototype to show how it differs from what might be our usual expectations of the whirligig: Pop, Skip, Chirp, the prototype of a contemporary whirligig, is a wind-powered record player. The wind propels adhered fan blades to spin a record. A vintage coned speaker projects the sound. In many ways I feel it is a reinvention of the record player and at the same time, continues my exploration of the record and its place in sound art.

This prototype whirligig plays a record of birds' songs, in response to its urban environment placement in an art gallery in downtown Hamilton. This responds to the sterility associated with a downtown art gallery and its inability to interact with genuine nature in its busy urban space.

Pop, Skip, Chirp was born out a series of experiments that started in 2015 when I developed a (eventually failed) work, Resonant Spin. I attempted to create a kinetic sculpture that would hang from a branch in a tree. Instead of spinning the fan, the wind instead blew it every which way, and the needle just scratched the record instead of playing it.



Pop, Skip, Chirp 2023,
47"x 12"x 12", mixed media

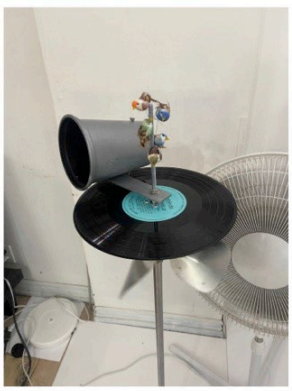


Figure 9 - Pop, Skip, Chirp, 2023, 47”x 12”x 12”, mixed media, You Me Gallery, Hamilton.

Resonant Spin incorporates a number of the elements later used to create Pop, Skip, Chirp. The latter was a stationary sculpture, so that the record would remain stable and could be spun by the wind, rather than the full unit and the unsatisfactory (but illuminating) results of the Resonant Spin experiments.



Resonant Spin Experiments

Figure 10-Resonant Spins prototype, 2015, 20”x 12”x 12”, mixed media.

Eco Futurism

I have found that the whirligig’s history represents, through its manufacture, a potential for abstract storytelling. The Cacophony Project was exhibited in the University of Guelph Arboretum, using sounds that would take over the space if the Arboretum were to be developed for urban use. This made-up scenario can be told through the storytelling ability of the Whirligig. The threat may be make-believe; in fact, the University of Guelph held a student referendum to fund the Arboretum, helping secure its status as a research and natural environmental hub for the university and the community. The Arboretum is still under threat, as it is being encroached on by development. Our government’s attempted illegal development of protected lands has become known as the Greenbelt Scandal in Ontario.

Even with funding secured, the threat is real. The present Ontario provincial government is hell bent on securing protected lands to feed the developers who funded their election victory. This was uncovered by the publications *The Narwal* as well as the *Toronto Star:*

> …a prominent Ontario developer paid $80 million for two parcels of land that could not be developed. Totalling nearly 700 acres, they sit entirely within Ontario’s protected Greenbelt. Weeks later, that investment by Michael Rice is set to pay off. The seemingly untouchable swath of fields and trees in King Township, just north of Toronto, is now on the Ontario government’s list of lands it wants to remove from the Greenbelt. (McIntosh et al, 2022).

If Ontario’s most fragile and protected areas are up for development, why wouldn’t the Arboretum? Then I became aware that, in fact, there is a massive development project at the

eastern border of the Arboretum (Vivian, Jun 14, 2024) including apartment buildings, town homes and retail shopping.

Can our style of whirligig be a form of eco-futurism as, through a kinetic wind powered aural technology, we present an unwanted future as a warning? Iovino, Cesaretti and Past bring forth Marinetti's Futurist manifesto:

> Futurism's intuition that subjectivity and objectivity merge through the mediation of landscape indicates at least an aesthetic interest in the environment, whereby human beings and the world in which they live would aim to coexist symbiotically in a new, in-between artistic reality, which is neither the traditional work of art nor the environment.
> (Iovino, Serenella, Cesaretti, Past. p. 216).

Reuse

The Cacophony Project's sculptures are primarily constructed of found items. This idea of using the found, or reused, object was born out of previous artistic recontextualisation – such as the scandalous "readymades" that Marcel Duchamp introduced over a century ago – then adapted into the use of what can be seen as garbage; as the old saying goes, one man's garbage is another man's gold. Picasso was also one of the first contemporary artists to incorporate garbage/ found materials or other previously unacceptable media into his sculptures:

> Picasso was famous for transfigurations of the commonplace. He had made the head of a chimpanzee out of a child's toy; a goat's thorax out of an old wicker basket; a bull's head out of bicycle parts; a Venus out of a gasjet – and so why not the ultimate transfiguration, an artwork out of a thing? (Danto p. 46)

Ideas about crossing the boundaries of acceptable art materials also filtered into twentieth century composition. Citing Calvin Tomkins' *The Bride and the Bachelors: Five Masters of the Avant Garde,* Emilie Mears includes composer John Cage's work in *Recycling As Creativity:*

> Some of the objects Cage introduced as instruments were "automobile brake drums, hub caps, and so on" (Tomkins p. 87-88). Cage insisted that this method would redirect the listener's attention to what existed in the environment rather than search for a meaning generated by the artist. (Mears section16)

Like works by these artists, our work on The Cacophony Project recycled objects in its construction: the speakers are floor pots, the fan blades came from old home fans or HVAC waste. The stands we used are ski poles. The aesthetic decorations were primarily thrifted, found toys and other objects.



Figure 11- thrifted found and reused materials

Secondly, the use of these resources animates the sculpture with the spirit of the wasteful social environment that it critiques. In The Cacophony Project, an assemblage of waste creates an artwork as an ironic commentary on the landfill outcome generally associated with objects that are cast away, or taken for granted as everyday items of western society.

The use of detritus to construct their work, according to Gillian Whitely, makes of the artist a *bricoleur* (Whiteley p. xii), a word that in English can translate to handyman or even the label "do-it-yourselfer." In my own career as a working artist this is most apropos since, as explained earlier, I funded my artist life as a handyman. Whitely writes, "Steven Connor comments on *bricolage* as the improvised juxtaposition of incompatible or heterogeneous fragments, often for ironic or parodic effect, as opposed to the principle of unity or 'match'." (Whiteley p.28) In this project, the members of HUTC all became *bricoleurs* as we devised, researched, collected and constructed the work.



Figure 12-The Hear Us Through… Collective in the studio

Like the prototype I describe above, our works produced sound in response to the research question demonstrating what could happen within the *in situ* placement. There is more to our collective-based sculptures than sound. As a collective, we discussed how to present the visual component that compliments these aural structures. We needed visual signifiers to add signs to contribute the message being transmitted, be it sociocultural, political, phenomenal and/or geographical. In this case with the University of Guelph Arboretum it became environmental fragility. How can we express through these flourishes our message, and at the same time, make it more than a message?

Once Upon a Time…The Fable

As collective members discussed the project in its early stages, we speculated as to how to express a story, to devise a form of eco-futuristic fable: perhaps one that incorporated an anti-technological approach and played with notions of Afro or Indigenous futurism. We discussed how such futurism is portrayed in apocalyptic or sci-fi movies. Afrofuturism is portrayed in *Black Panther* through the technological world of Wakanda where science and tech advancements outweigh those of the white world, and therefore protect the nation's integrity. Similarly in Percival Everett's novel *James*, the African American slaves speak uneducated "slave talk" to the white masters, but communicate among themselves in articulate and intellectual prose. Indigenous futurism is portrayed in the film *Blood Quantum*, where indigenous characters are immune to a zombie like disease that consumes white people but to which indigenous genetics makes First Nations people immune.

What the HUTC's Cacophony Project is developing is a postmodern fable: one that uses the mechanics of the moral through the storytelling associated with the whirligig and the communication abilities of the record player. If the fable is a story of moralistic values,

then must it not also be a literary tool to reinforce the rights of the individual and society as a whole?

H.J. Bickham stresses that the fable promotes critical thinking. It breaches the garrison of resident assumptions, the mind's defenses, to bring home its point or raise its questions: it is a tactical manoeuvre to prompt new thinking (Bickham p. xi). Lyotard writes in *A Postmodern Fable:*

> The fable is realistic because it tells the story of a force which makes, undoes and remakes reality. It is also realistic because it records the fact that this force has already greatly transformed reality and its art and that, except for a catastrophe, this transformation must continue." (Lyotard p. 242)
>
> The possibilities are opened; the Cacophony Project reflects this postmodern view of the fable.

The project reflects acts of caring and rights building through artistic agency and environmental activism. Van Baarle et al state, "artists have investigated what an aesthetics of care could be, and have sought ways to take care of one another during the creative process, even extending that care well beyond the boundaries of their work and of the communities they assemble (Van Baarle p. 1)." The Cacophony Project is a vehicle of caring that culminates in an expression of the students' environmental rights.

This project has given its student participants a concrete platform to express a climate change story. These works were collectively built, and by doing so democracy is reflected in this caring and collaborative environment. Everyone in the collective has had input. Environmentally the students now have a voice presented through the archive, in this instance the publicly displayed kinetic sculptures. This work is built of found and recycled materials emphasizing the need for a constructed system of sustainability, while the aural message of the work secures the story in combination of the visual component.

In my reflection the fables were delivered and built in an abstract way – not through text but with sound and image – to portray what may happen if the Arboretum became an urbanized building site. The purpose of our messenger, the whirligig, is to remind beholders of the threats that may persist.



Figure 13- The Cacophony Project's completed works

Conclusion

This is a conclusion to a not-concluded project. It can be said to be a conclusion in the process I have presented through the paper, but the thinking doesn't conclude. I'm an improviser in almost all of my processes, from repairing a fence for a client, to musicking, and to my art making. My thinking is continual. How can I open and extend my own thinking as well as my ideas to garner a greater involvement of the participants in the development of these sculptures, and form a greater sense of community?

My practice has evolved around my lone wolf nature of production, where I was able to incorporate co-authoring the completion of my works to create a temporary community through the participants' activation of the works. In the formation of the Hear Us Through… Collective my lone wolf self has been set aside and I have participated in the co-authoring of the works production. The collective is the community, a community built from a cohesive aesthetic ideal and shared message making. The students, the teacher and I all have become a democratic entity that used critical thinking, open communication and respect towards a shared purpose. Our community was to achieve a strong message for the beholders of the sculptures along with a challenge, and hopefully a triumph, for each of us, as students, teacher, the Arboretum and myself. The students in the collective exercised the agency that was developed both within themselves and the community at large through the constructed works. Maya states in the Hear Us Through Documentary, "They (the beholders) will start to realize the affect of urbanization on the environment and how it affects not just us but nature" June Sulley, the art teacher in the collective, summed up the found agency, " …making people just more aware. I think any time you have discussions and or art pieces and or reflections, that's an opportunity for growth."

This was accomplished. The works were displayed at the Arboretum for the month of April into May. During that period of time there was an extreme snowfall, 100 km per hour winds, and extensive rain; the works held up with minimal damage.



Figure 14-The Cacophony Project installed at the Arboretum, The University of Guelph

We placed QR codes to accommodate the sculptures for non-windy days. When the works were taken down, each of the QR codes had generated over 200 hits on their sounds for each of the four sculptures. We also edited a short documentary video as an archival tool for the project. *Hear Us Through… Collective Documentary* continues to be watched. There is a possibility of the works being exhibited at The New Adventures in Sound Art (NAISA) Gallery in South River, Ontario.



Figure 15-The QR codes that active to play the sounds of each sculpture and the documentary

It is not about the achievement of the finished objects, but building a community and working towards collective success. As I wrote previously, agency for both the students, and me, is the overall goal of this project. The goal of this project is not about the product, but practising the strength of creating a work that alters its beholders' thinking by conveying message-making in abstracted forms; like Lyotard, a different or a new sort of fable.

I could see and feel the pride and excitement of the students as the project progressed. Rebecca, the collective's student representative for The Cacophony Project, took the podium at Research Studio at the Arboretum; in her speech she presented the agency this opportunity presented, "Truly it has been such an amazing experience to be a part of. I hope our messages and art will spark deeper thinking and creativity for so many others in the future." These words demonstrate the agency and caring found through the project and the community it fostered in the students and myself.



Figure 16- Research Studio - Rebecca from Hear Us Through…Collective Presenting

The Hear Us Through Collective's Cacophony Project lives on through a documentary about the project, and its goals, and through the works themselves (Hear Us Through, 2025). We are in discussions about having them exhibited in other gallery settings. These actions and words illustrate the sustainability of this project, and the power of community through collective art making.

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Breathe Kritisk: Ambiguous control to materialise entangled agency between human, body and technology

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Abstract

This paper presents *Breathe Kritisk,* an inflatable installation that explores the negotiation for control among clinical practitioners, clinical apparatus, and patients in medical settings. The installation aims to materialize the patient's experience of uncanniness and entanglement in agency at the encounter with biomedical technologies. It seeks to provoke visitor reflection on their personal experience and discussion among critical medical humanities and human-computer interaction (HCI) communities.

This article presents my process of creating a functional prototype that manifests a tangible experience of entangled control with an artificial self. The installation results from my practice-led research, which applies contesting control — a technique of estrangement in interaction design. The piece focuses on creating ambiguous control by switching between giving users control and giving it away to machines and internal organs that users do not have complete control over. Through interaction tests, I observed that this installation aesthetically constructed a poetic interaction, where users could not tell apart when they were in control of the inflatables and when they were not. Within this liminal territory, ambiguous control produces a never-ending grappling for control. Lastly, I reflected on ambiguous control as a framework for reflection and materialization entangled agency for practitioners working closely with tangible, participatory experiences.

Keywords: Interactive installation, Poetic interaction, Contesting control, Ambiguous control

Introduction

Breathe Kritisk is part of a practice-led PhD research project, inspired by critiques of how patients have lost and continue to lose control of their bodies to the medical gaze. The work reflects on the ambiguity of patients' agency and control within the clinical hierarchy that is constantly negotiated among clinical practitioners, clinical apparatus, and patients in medical settings. This installation focuses on the patient's experience of encountering artificial self-representation through biomedical devices and two experiential dimensions: uncanniness and entangled agency.

My practice during the PhD engaged with *contesting control* as a framework, which serves as a lens for philosophical engagement and also a foundation/departure point for materialising the installation experience. In this presentation, I described elements and rationales for the development of a prototype's physical construction and programming, as well as participant experience and meaning-making based on the framework.

The digital clinical gaze

There is a hierarchy: in which medical professionals, medical spaces, medical practices and medical devices have authority over patients. Patients surrender the agency of their bodies in clinical circumstances (Boyer, 2019; Sontag, 2002). Patient bodies become a site of biological, psychological or societal illness. The bodies are the host of the "wrongness" that needs fixing (Foucault, 2002). Patient bodies are mechanical objects to be studied by the

clinical gaze, like an engine where technicians investigate technical malfunctions (Tybjerg et al., 2016). There is a conflict between the ideology of patients' autonomy and patients' consent to clinical practices.

Patients' autonomy

Despite endeavours to encourage an ideology of patients' autonomy, their agency remains ambiguous. A contemporary medical practice includes *informed consent,* when clinical professionals explain medical rationales and procedures so that patients can accept or reject clinical evaluation and/or treatment. The medical consent aims to empower patients to make decisions (Paterick et al., 2008), and attempts to formalise and legalise patients' agency (Maclean, 2009). Yet, a systematic review illustrated that, although patients comprehend the informed consent process, they still have limited understanding of their disease, potential complications, and clinical risks (Falagas et al., 2009). The consent is critiqued to be merely a relational concept of autonomy, and medical knowledge remains a gap for patients to overcome to achieve active engagement in medical consent (Stoljar, 2011).

Another endeavour is for patients to position themselves as active patients, educating themselves and establishing interprofessional collaboration (Towle et al., 2010). Multiple trials were conducted for patients with AIDs and cancer (Barbot, 2006; Bishop & Yardley, 2004). Nevertheless, the orthodox within healthcare persists. The established practitioners' language and communication practice make it difficult for patients to critically question the expert recommendations and the proposed consents. When cancer patients attempt to discursively re-position themselves as active agents, they are faced with an ideological dilemma to subvert the hierarchy. As they had to claim expertise to justify their reasoning with the clinical practitioners, it resulted in emotional dissonance (Bishop & Yardley, 2004). Thus, it remains a paradox which constantly demands patients to submit, surrender and obey, taking the bodies with illness as hostage – an invincible negotiation between surrender or suffer (Boyer, 2019, p. 85).

Uncanniness

Sigmund Freud articulated uncanniness as the feeling of being 'exposed to a personal, intimate, private side of selves' (Freud, 1919). He pointed to a German word, "unheimlich" and its opposite term, "heimlich" for clarification. Heimlich could be translated as homey; belonging to the house; intimate; friendly; familiar, and it could also be defined as concealed; private; secretive; withheld from sight and from others; deceitful. (Notably, heimlich includes the notion of being concealed from oneself.) Resonating on the opposite side, unheimlich is defined as unhomey; unfamiliar; uncomfortable; eerie; weird and it is also unconcealed, unsecret; what is made known; what is supposed to be kept secret but is inadvertently revealed (Gray, 1989). For such semantic psychoanalytic, Freud's thesis is that the eerie, uncanny feeling comes from a self-exposure or self-revelation of what is private and concealed, of what is hidden; hidden not only from others, but also from the self.

I projected this definition onto medical bodily representation – medical technologies, biosensors and algorithms expose patients' bodies in ways which sometimes evoke uncanny feelings. My PhD supervisor, Anders Sundnes Løvlie, reflected on his personal experience, looking at his beating heart on a screen. He didn't feel at home with his body on display, although his body was supposed to be his home. He struggled to connect emotionally and viscerally to what he was told was him. For such phenomena, physiological sensors and their representation meddled with our sense of "what is me?" and "how do I feel me?"

(Schwartzman, 2011). Although medical technology is built to give us access to connect to our inner selves, it alienates us from feeling at home and in control of our bodies.

Entangled Agency

Biodetection with digital representation transforms us into a *datafied cyborg* and a *quantified self* (Lupton, 2012, 2016). A continuous glucose monitor attached to the user's forearm, allows people with diabetes to measure and keep track of their blood glucose level and regulate it with an automatic insulin pump. In one way, this datafication practice flattens out the hierarchy, empowering users without medical knowledge to access their internal body signals, become more aware of the inner state of their bodies, and care for themselves (Homewood et al., 2021).

Yet, this could give a wrong sense of control and agency. Users with diabetes change the batteries of the insulin pump and continuous glucose monitor, so the devices can in return help them to regulate their bodies. Bodies are made reliant on these biosensors for self-regulation and are inseparable from digital materials. For such negotiation, devices turn their users into *disabled cyborg bodies* (Forlano, 2017).

Biosensors dissolve the boundary of the body between subjects and objects (Schwartzman, 2011). The hierarchy between human and medical devices is dynamic, material, relational and being reconfigured at all times (Boyer, 2019; Homewood et al., 2021). For this broken boundary, patients grapple to find the grounds and agency of their gazed bodies. As Han Kang put it in her novel, *Vegetarian* (Kang, 2016);

> *'It's your body, you can treat it however you please. The only area where you're free to do just as you like. And even that doesn't turn out the way you wanted.' – Han Kang (2016)*

Contest control

Research in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) has explored the design of *uncomfortable interactions*, which intentionally cause a mild degree of suffering to users (Benford et al., 2012). *Discomfort through control* is one of four depicted principles to create uncomfortable experience (Benford et al., 2012). The centre of the discomfort-through-control principle is to reverse the user-friendly fundament of giving users control over the interface. The principle suggests taking away control from direct users and, instead, providing unusual control to other users or machines. This reversal of control can induce discomfort by asking the users to surrender, to lose control, or to battle for control. This discomfort could be the source of reflective experience for participants.

The combination of discomfort through control and the physiological sensors for partially autonomic bodily activities (for instance, breathing, blinking, and heart beating) can lead users to battle/contest to stay in control of both the system and their bodies and thoughts (Benford et al., 2021). When *contesting control*, users travel through various experiential dimensions. Three experiential dimensions were depicted: (1) aware-of-control and not-aware, (2) in-control and not-in-control, and (3) tight-control and loose-control. The state of *ambiguous control* is located among all those dimensions. It is a stage where users travel past, but not necessarily stay in. Furthermore, its definition or description of the stage is not elaborated or clarified. It was vaguely implied to link with unpredictability, unstable, and uncontrollability (Benford et al., 2021).

On a related artistic practice of creating interactive arts, Simon Penny theorises *poetic interaction* as the interactivity with aesthetically behaving systems (Soler-Adillon, 2015 citing Penny, 2011). Aesthetic behaviours are directed toward unpredictability – when interactive systems are neither easy to control nor easy to predict (Soler-Adillon, 2015). "It should not be predictably instrumental, but should generate behaviours which exist in the liminal territory

between perceived predictability and perceived randomness. A zone of surprise, of poetry" (Penny, 2011). It is a dance between expectations and surprise, where the interactive artefact seeks to engage the user in exploring and experimenting with it; a dance of agency (Pickering, 1993). Simon Penny reflected on his 20 years in the new-media-art community. He remarked on the limited research on qualitative discussions of aesthetically rich interaction and the complexities of designing interaction as an artistic practice .

Picking up from the traces of ambiguous control and poetic interactions, this paper investigates in visitors' embodied experience (Dewey, 1958) of the ambiguous control and if the experience could be a discursive resource to instigate discussion and deepen the comprehension of the experiential complexity of patients, subjected to medical practices (Tharp & Tharp, 2019). This paper hopes to contribute to such a discussion through practice-led research methodology.

Method

My practice follows an iterative design convention of building, testing and iterating with participants in a university laboratory. I took notes on my creation process and design decisions as I explored how to create the experience of ambiguous control with physiological sensors. Below, I describe the process of developing a functional prototype (rather than the latter stage of production), because it captures deliberate selections of artefact elements that lead to poetic interaction between users, user bodies and machines.

In order to capture the emotional and bodily experience of the interaction, I conducted phenomenological interviews, a qualitative approach aimed at understanding a user's lived experiences (Bevan, 2014). I chose the qualitative approach to gain in-depth comprehension of each participant's experience in their worlds. I adopted an imaginative variation: giving space for the participants to give free association and description of their experience and asking follow-up questions to add clarification. Then, I asked participants if they have any association with medical or clinical experiences.

I tested and collected impressions from 20 participants in the university laboratory. Their backgrounds include interaction design or HCI (n=10), computer science (n=3), art historian (n=2) and medical humanities (n=5). I recorded and made notes of their responses and photographed their interactions.

My data analysis focused on how participants experience the ambiguous control of the functional prototype and whether the experience could provoke users to critically reflect on the clinical practices. At the end, I reflected on my practice in working with ambiguous control. This includes values on ambiguous control throughout the creation and research process; an experiential core of ambiguous control through participant reports and observation; and its potential and implications to provoke visitor reflection.

Creation process

I sought to produce the uncanniness and entanglement that patients experience at their encounter with clinical self-representation – an experience that ambiguates a sense of self-control and body agency – to challenge the ideology of patients in control of their decisions and bodily agency within the medical practice. Based on the concept of contested control, I aspired to create a physiological-sensor system that partially gives control to the users and, at unpredictable times, reverses that control.

Breathing and physical construction

The first step of the creation process is the selection of involuntary physiologic processes for users to interact with. I considered partially voluntary bodily functions

(heartbeats, breaths, brain signals, and palm sweat) in relation to available and hackable biosensors (heart-rate sensor on a fingertip, EEG and galvanic skin response sensor). Breath is one of the bodily behaviours most extensively explored by HCI design researchers, due to the fact that users can be aware of their breath and control it to some certain extent, as well as its significant impacts on users' mental, physiological and sociological status (Aslan et al., 2016; Fritsch et al., 2025; Karpashevich et al., 2022; Sakurai et al., 2015; Shamekhi & Bickmore, 2018; Ståhl et al., 2016; Tsaknaki, 2021; Wernli & Boyer, 2021; Yu et al., 2015). While profuse works aim to support users to connect to their breaths (i.e., meditating exercises and emotional regulations), I aim to reverse this techno-deterministic goal and to create an uncanny interaction with breaths.

The spatial construction of the installation was based on my initial idea of *externalizing* user lungs (Schnädelbach et al., 2010). This followed the notion of the unheimlich (Freud, 1919) of making one body's into a home, but an un-homey home. A chamber construction was intended as walls of a home: a skin wall of a body, made in a 90-degree-angle, geometric way. The chamber was enclosed from three sides, wishing to give a sense of partial privacy in a medical setting. Within the chamber, two air pillows breathe inside, like mechanic lungs. To intensify the un-homeliness, I aimed at making a twisted version of user's lungs (visual references in Figure 4, sketch in Figure 5)



Figure 4: Clinical rooms, medical apparatus and clinical depictions of diseased lungs

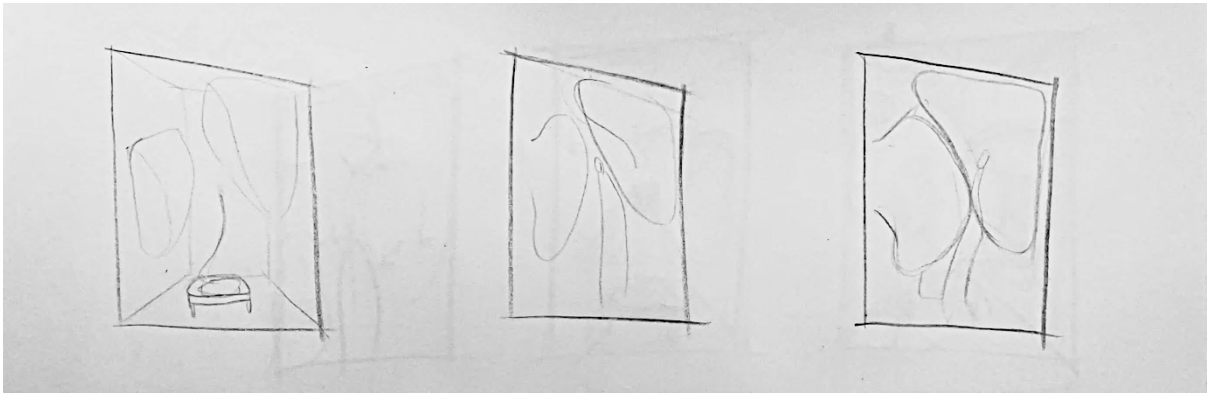


Figure 5: Early sketch of the spatial construction and its interaction

Air pillows were made from parachute fabric, whose mesh captures wind but is not completely airtight. The air leakage by fabric option was selected for safety reasons: to limit the force air pillows put on interactor bodies and to avoid bursts.
Two air systems were tested: fans and an air compressor. Fans intended to give the air volume inside the air pillows and the air compressor intended to act as a disrupting disease, creating air pockets in unexpected areas and moments (Figure 6).
Breath sensors often come in the form of strap sensors (a belt band that goes around the user's chest or stomach – capturing the change of user's body shape for inhales and exhales) or mouthpiece sensors (a sensor to put around the user's mouth or nose to detect air coming in and out). The strap sensor was selected because it would be more convenient to keep hygiene. The strap sensor used a thin film pressure sensor touching the user's stomach – with an assumption that their inhaling body will push into the force sensor, increasing the detected force, and their exhaling body will withdraw from the sensor, decreasing the detected force.
In the early phase of tests, I found that the force sensor is sensitive to small stomach movements, and this sensitivity interrupts the mirroring flow. For example, when users' stomachs make a mini and unconscious move outward at the most extreme exhale, the fans are activated when they should not (Figure 6). I noticed that the sensor worked much smoother with bigger bodies and users skilled at stomach breathing. Despite my several attempts to write buffering codes to make the interaction as smooth and responsive as possible, it still required careful and deep breathing. When tested, participants said that the body contact with the strap intuitively nudged them to pay attention to their breathing, fitting to the intention for users to pay attention to their body and its connection/disconnection with the machine. Thus, I decided to continue with this strap force sensor and embrace the sensor sensitivity as part of the experience.

For the air system, I decided to only use the fan and discard the air compressor. Despite its interesting effect of twitching and changing the shape of air pillows (Figure 6), the valves for controlling the air compressor made abrupt, loud 'pop' sounds distracted participants from focusing on their connection with the machine. Some participants reported the loud pops as strong, dominant and scary. The sounds took away the subtle uncanniness, the unsaid, the quiet creep, the nuanced satire and humour, which I tried to achieve.

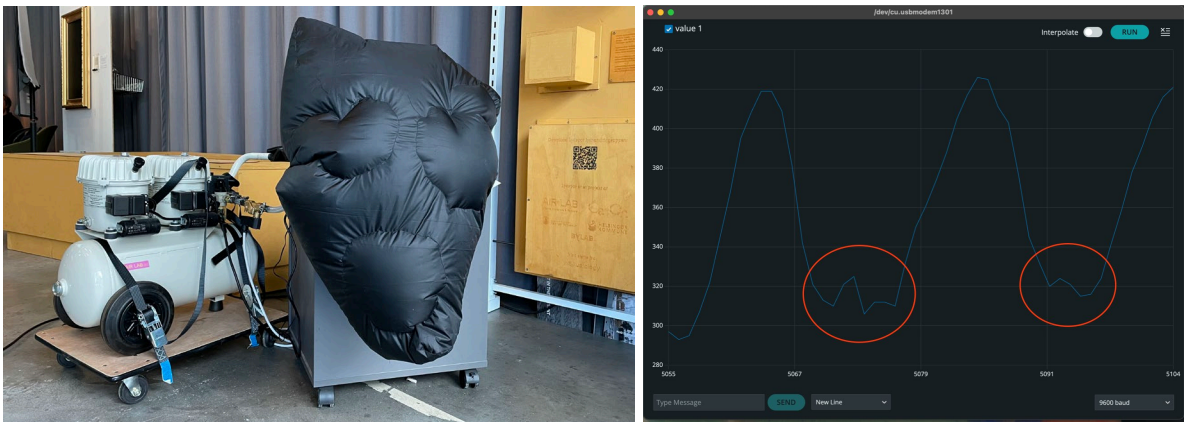


Figure 6: Tested air pillow with fans and an air compressor (the three sub-pockets were pumped by the air compressor, changing the overall shape of the air pillow) and the measured breathing rhythms and unconscious stomach movements (in circles) at the exhales.

Programming the interaction

Visuotactile synchrony, or the projection of one's body to an external representation, can cause people to experience strange visceral "tricks". For instance, the rubber hand

experiment tricks a participant to move away their physical hand when a rubber hand is hammered (Rohde et al., 2011). The mirror therapy helps a patient relieve an imaginary itch on their amputated limb by scratching their other limb in a mirror (Kim & Kim, 2012). These examples work in two stages: first inducing a feeling of body ownership onto a fake/counterfeit body part, then introducing a stimulation on the counterfeit to create an illusion. The experience of this illusion can be highly uncanny. To bring about a similar uncanniness, I programmed two functions: *mirror* and *self-breathe*.

The mirror function controlled the fans following the sensor detection of the user's breaths. If the user's stomach increasingly touched the force sensor (by inhaling in case of stomach breathing), the fans were turned on and the air pillows inflated. If the stomach touch decreased (by exhaling), the fans were turned off and the air pillows deflated.

The self-breathe function controlled the fans based on pre-scripted time, regardless of the input force sensor. For example, the function switched between 3 seconds of turning on the fans and 3 seconds of turning off the fans – the air pillows inflated and deflated as if the machine was breathing by itself. This self-breathe function varied based on a few variables; the time duration of turning the fans on/off, the side of fans that is turned on/off, and the time duration of the self-breathe function.

In order to create entanglement in control, the breathing machine was scripted to alternate seamlessly between mirror and self-breathing functions. In other words, I intentionally made the system waver between responsive actuation (following users' control) and hard-coded actuation (following a program script). The functions switch back and forth without notifying the users in varied periods (for example, 30 seconds of mirror, 20 seconds of self-breathe, then 45 seconds of mirror, ...).

In the middle phrase of creation, I explored several ways how the system reacts to the measured force to match with users' breaths, how to work with the sensor sensitivity, how to code for an ambiguous yet clear interactivity, and how to instruct users practically. From testing with different bodies, I found that the first stage of self-connection with the machine was essential for users to make a distinction between controllable and non-controllable. The responsiveness or the real-time reaction of inflation and deflation based on the user's breaths was a crucial element. If this connection was not made clear to the user, once the self-breathe function is activated the user would assume that the installation malfunctioned and the whole interaction may seem meaningless. For that reason, I iteratively refined the codes and the physical air pillows to inflate and deflate in the right rhythms.

Through this process I have developed a functional prototype of the installation, called *Breathe Kritisk* (Figure 7). The installation switches between following user breaths (to create body ownership/connection) and breathing by itself (possibly to induce the users to follow the machine's breaths).

It should be noted that the transition between the mirror and the self-breathe functions was intentionally made unclear. The system does not give signals to users when it switches between the two functions. An early participant suggested making the visual distinction between the two functions (for example, lights, graphs or numbers), so a user knows right away when they are influenced by the machine. But I decided against the suggestion and remained the ambiguity to give space for visitors to play, search into, and make sense of the ambiguous control.

Final prototype

Breathe Kritisk stands as a two-meter-tall chamber with two air pillows inside. It has an engineer, utilitarian aesthetic. A visitor is invited to put on a breath sensor that straps around one's stomach. The visitor can inflate and deflate the air pillows through the breathing sensor.

The machine sometimes complies with visitors' breaths and other times has its mechanic breaths.

As I welcomed visitors, I gave the following introduction: 'This is Breathe Kritisk. It is a piece about the patients' control in a medical setting. It aims to ask if you control the machine, or if the machine controls you.' Then, I put on the breathing strap under any thick clothing (for example, a sweater), and I informed the visitors about their interactions: 'The sensor is quite sensitive, so you have to breathe in deeply and talking could interrupt its measurement.' In the first 30 seconds, the air pillows would inflate and deflate in response to forces between the user's stomach and the sensor [mirror function]. They may inflate and deflate consistently or inconsistently (with split-second pauses once in a while, due to the sensor sensitivity). Then, the next 15 seconds, the air pillows would be fully and consistently inflated and fully deflated, regardless of the user's breathing [self-breathe function]. Then, the system switches back and forth between the two functions.

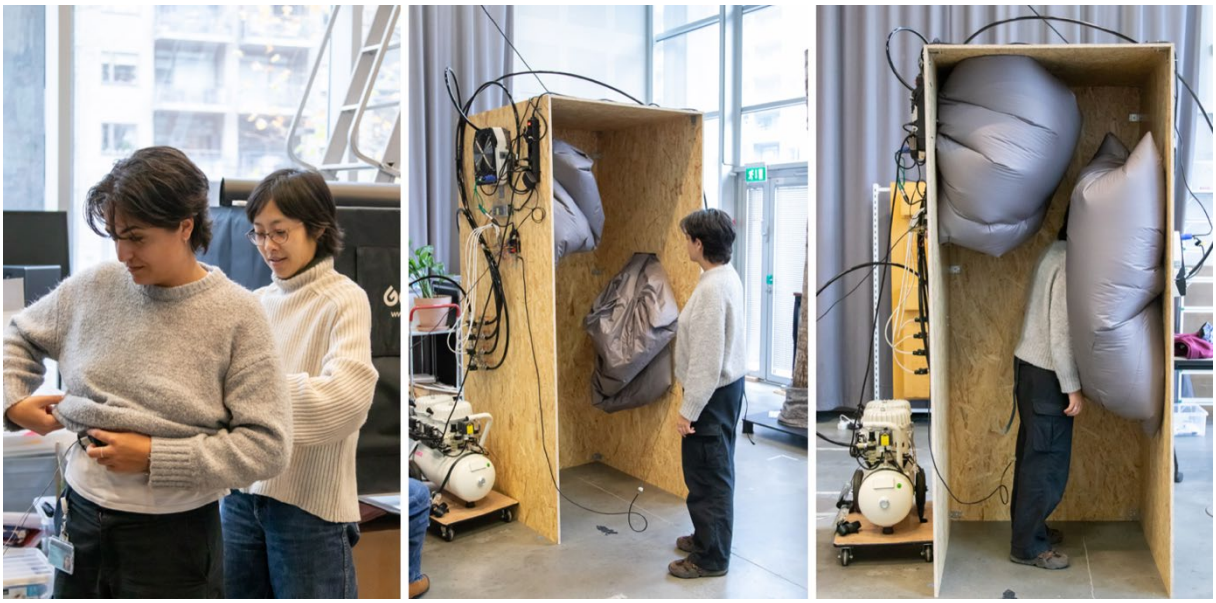


Figure 7: Visitor experience with the functional prototype (putting on the breathing strap and exploring their way of interaction)

Experience of the prototype installation

Ambiguous control

Participant's journey often started from the participant's focus on "How do I and my body control the machine?" or "How do the machine and the sensor work?" Many challenged the system by manipulating their breaths, for example, holding their breaths to see if the machine could catch up.

When participants got a glimpse of how to control, they started to feel calm, to trust the machine, or even to build self-connection to it. They would touch, move closer, and feel confident to move inside the chamber. There were multiple reactions when the self-breathe function was activated. Some who had tight control over their breaths would notice the change. Some followed the machine breaths (i.e., synchrony) without noticing the change.

I observed that the participants kept trying and trying – constantly contesting control – throughout the transitions between the mirror and self-breathe functions. They paid a lot of attention to their bodies, their breaths, and their stomach movement, while keeping their gaze tight on the air pillows. During the interaction, the participant and I often chatted, discussing

‘What is happening now? Are you in control?’ Here, I noted that the poetic interaction emerged, as they could not distinguish when they were in control of the inflatables and when they were not. Some felt ‘disoriented’ or ‘pulled out of an immersion’ (P2, P16) if they had established a body-machine connection. Others described this contest as a positive experience of ‘having a dialogue’ with the machine (P5, P11, P15). P5 described, ‘I felt it [the machine] was telling me like, “Breathe, breathe.” And then maybe I did, right? As a consequence of that.’

I noted that some participants questioned their breaths and bodies within this feeling of half-control and half-loss-of-control. They became skeptical about their control over their bodies or if their bodies were working as they were supposed to. P7 explicitly said, ‘It made me wonder if I'm using my full lung capacity.’

Furthermore, I noticed that the user’s sense of control is not always the same as the user’s actual control. I observed that synchrony happened as intended (participants breathed in and out, following the machine’s self-breathe function), but many of them were not aware of it. Some saw that as a glitch in the system and that they would like to reset the machine to match their breaths again. Many others perceived that the machine on the self-breathe function “is now functioning”. This showed that most participants did not know if they were being manipulated or in control. When I informed them that the system had influenced/manipulated their breaths at times, most participants would reject and report that they did not experience so at all. They insisted that they connected with the machine and didn’t feel ‘controlled.’

Medical perspectives

Participants did not directly associate their experience to biomedical technologies or clinical experience, unless I prompted or asked for their association. Nevertheless, medical experts expressed the resemblance of the aesthetic experience to real-life medical experiences. P13 reckoned the agency of clinical apparatus that asserted discomfort to patients, ‘[Medical technology] is hard and sharp. […] It pushes and cuts.’ P15 associated the unpredictable behaviours of the installation with moments when ‘medical devices or medical practitioners don't behave the way you want them to behave’, which could lead to frustration. On the opposite end, P12 and P16 associated the work with the notion of ‘care.’ They perceived the soft touch from the air pillows as gentle and warm hugs, which echoes in health culture and even healthcare industries.

In critical reflection on medical practices, P13 and P19 reflected upon the negation of power, consent and submission to medical treatment. They reflected upon how consent request is part of the contemporary rhetoric of medicine. Yet, this rhetoric gives the sense of ‘sort of in control’ (P13), but it raises questions about an ‘illusion of agency’ (P19). P13 contemplated upon the topic of politics of control within the medical institutions in the present society. Besides, P19 reflected on the power which medical technologies hold, as a separate entity from medical practitioners. She found it ‘eye-opening’ to regard medical devices and apparatus as subjects with an agency. Finally, she further speculated on the requirements and conditions for patients to consciously surrender and willingly trust in the medical datafying system.

> *‘I think it's really interesting in terms of, you know, medical devices and how much can we fight back and can we say, “no, we're not going to do that.” Or maybe medicine should be a bit bolder and say, “no, you are going to do it” […] with vaccinations in mind. ’– P13*
>
> *‘Transparency and accessibility of data, like your data, especially seems to be the main factor that mediates trust in the [medical] system.’ – P19*



Figure 8: Several modes of interaction (connecting with the balloons through touch; letting oneself be squeezed in between the air pillows; playfully going around the air pillows to observe them)

Reflection and future perspectives

Contesting control with physiological sensors provided me a compelling framework for creators to both reflect and materialise the experience of fighting for agency between human, body and technology. In my process, the principle pointed my focus toward the notion of ambiguity and intricacies of autonomy in the clinical context (section 2). The offered vocabulary supported my investigation and evaluation of the artefact experience (section 4). It was my main guiding rail for creating a tangible system with aesthetic interaction (section 5). And the interviews with participants illustrated that the artefact could evoke a sense of grappling for control and entangled agency (section 7).

In detail, ambiguous control produced an ongoing, long-lasting grappling for control. This notion 'ongoing, long-lasting' made this project different from given example projects in contesting control where users just pass by this ambiguous control space for a short moment (Benford et al., 2021). The participants described the experience with Breathe Kritisk as a conversation or a dialogue that they have with the machine. They reported their experience as a constant play – a process to make sense of the world (Sicart, 2014). Ambiguous control created a mysterious scene for users to figure out how the system control works and if they can ever control the machine. During this play, the mystery heightened users' scepticism in control, and ambiguated their perception of control. Their belief in their control often tipped back and forth, which raised questions about their agency and their perception of agency. This notion adds another layer to the embodied experiences of "dance of agency" (Penny, 2011) with the "dance of perception in agency". I remark that this could be what future creators, artists and designers could aim for and possibly define ambiguous control.

Ambiguous control was a powerful medium for participatory experience that could provoke reflection around entangled agency between humans and technology. In our project, ambiguous control offered an embodied experience of cyborgs where machine body and living body are intertwined, as well as their agencies (Haraway, 2006). Living organisms assert control and influence on technologies, and vice versa. The experience of entanglement in the functional prototype led to some discussion around medical practices, but often limited to people with clinical/medical background. I assume the challenge could be the loose connection between the functional prototype to the medical context. Consequently, my future development steps include creating a sterile clinical aesthetic and adding a performative layer

with a role-play medical assistant and clinical props, to create a clearer relation to the digital clinical gaze for public visitors. I plan to exhibit the installation at an international design week in Malmö, Sweden and observe visitors/audience reactions to the installation in public. It is my interest to investigate if the audience could resonate with the intended experience and how they make sense of the interaction.

Nevertheless, I see that ambiguous control can be relevant for other practice-based research on other impending themes of artificial intelligence, data surveillance, more-than-human, and the politics of individual agency in a complex network. It can make abstract philosophy and concept of entangled agency physical, tangible and experiencable. Its experience can provoke reflection toward socially-given systems and open up rich discussion around the invisible power and hierarchy that is embedded in social norms.

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A Hermeneutic of Collaboration: Curating Community-Engaged Work in UNESCO's Creative City of Design

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Abstract:

In 2019, UNESCO officially designates Cebu City as "Creative City of Design." With such designation comes the restructuring of city spaces which results in the displacement of dwellers from strategic metropolitan areas. One example of such displacement-inducing restructuring of space is the privatization of Carbon Public Market. But whereas local designers and artists opposed certain restructuring in 2013, they now collaborate with the local government in a corporate-led "modernization" project. The wavering disposition of artists and designers in Cebu shows that, per Michel Foucault, urban architecture functions to magnify the regulative dimension of power. It also demonstrates that civil society can work to undermine the promise for an inclusive community of co-makers; that urban design can serve social surveillance and control. This artist-led research offers a hermeneutic of collaboration. It examines the tensions between the "spatial practices" of creative experts and the marginalized by reflecting on community-engaged curatorial work in Cebu. This hermeneutic gesture is a counterpoint to the Foucauldian account of space in that, instead of reinforcing the panoptic reading of built spaces, it looks into the improvisatory tactics of dwellers which lend new possibilities of communitarian engagements that could contest the panoptic, albeit collaborative, instantiation of power.

Keywords: community-engaged art, urban architecture, spatial practice, civil society

On Demythologizing Art

Two different but not unrelated problems face community-engaged cultural workers in the Philippines today: first is the suspicion that the practice and reception of art in the 'space of and for subject-peoples'—otherwise referred to as the 'Third World'—are merely reproducing the conditions of coloniality and, second, is the reality of underdevelopment which renders the very notion of artistic 'modernity' problematic to artists involved in development work.

There is no denying that Michel Foucault's panoptic reading of modern power has shaped postcolonial theory. The Foucauldian reading implies that discourse is complicit with modern power and, as such, it is productive and regulative of the subjects of power. This view poses a problem to the decolonization project in the Philippines, especially when it relates to art practice and art reception. In particular, this view means that the practice of art and the modes of reception that are used to evaluate and gauge the emancipatory efficacy of art in the Philippines merely reproduce the conditions of coloniality. In other words, if the notion or idea of art has a history, and that this history is hinged on colonialist projects of the 18th and 19th centuries, the practice and reception of art is by default complicit in the practice of power and, by extension, the reproduction of coloniality.

This work uses demythologization as a method. Demythologization simply means that one renders the message of an authoritative text relevant to contemporary life. In particular,

this work demythologizes the idea of art because I believe that doing so circumvents the two problems mentioned above. First, demythologizing art can show that, as noted by other commentators elsewhere, modernity today (and contemporary art by extension) is an avenue for the social imaginary. This means that art practice can occasion spaces whereby the hopes and dreams of subject-peoples are formed and articulated through affectual means. Whereas postcolonial scholars are suspicious of modernity, demythologization can show us that modernity is not reductively teleological and it can be appropriated by subject-peoples for emancipatory purposes. Second, the demythologization of art can help us appreciate the banal features of contemporary art which permeates everyday life. Per Henri Lefebvre's notion of "thick space," contemporary art implicates the modalities of (bio) ethics, the environment (or physicality of space), politics (the ecologies of exclusions and inclusions), and aesthetics (the possibilities of emancipatory affects). Art is not some kind of reified, privileged, object that supports and sustains a self-contained ecology or a world—an artworld. Rather, it can be conceived as a spatial practice that directly engages with the problem of underdevelopment in the "Third World." This, for me, is one of the most important revelations of contemporary art practice—a lesson begotten to us by institutional critique, urban art, and new genre public art in recent past. In demythologizing art, however, we do not seek to iterate ready-made categories of contemporary art like "community-based art," "new genre public art," etc., etc. Instead, we look for the unmediated appearances and manifestations of affective resistances in glocalized spaces (e.g. Cebu).

I borrowed demythologization from biblical hermeneutics. Although I am not a religious person, I find the method useful as a critical strategy. As mentioned above, I believe that I can circumvent features in postcolonial discourse that render subject-peoples helpless and bereft of agency. To do this, I will talk about two types of spatial practices: first, I will talk about curatorial work as a production of space and, second, I will talk about architecture as spatial practice and its implication to the co-creation of social spaces. Architecture here is taken in its broad sense which implicates the improvisatory constructions of urban furniture and informal dwellings. I do this in order to address a gap in our understanding of the social production of space in the "Third-World"—an outdated construct of space from the Cold War era.

Demythologization forces us to ask this question: how do we make art relevant or responsive to the ontology of "Third-World" space—the space of and for subject-peoples? Recent collaborative public art practices had already given us the head start in our attempt to answer this question but, unfortunately, recent developments in contemporary art practice suggest that collaboration in art is now integral to the discursive strategy of power, which sometimes circumscribes the liminal and critical efficacy of art. Needless to say, coloniality is constantly reproduced when local artists and designers act as direct collaborators in the neoliberal restructuring of hybridized or glocalized spaces. Therefore, it is important for us to engage in interpretation once again. In this case, we need to do a hermeneutic of collaboration.

Collaboration needs to be critically assessed. My task here is to discuss and elaborate features of spatial practices in Cebu City. I am a practicing artist, but I do not refer to my practice as a privileged domain of culture. Rather, following Lefebvre, I refer to my art practice and curatorial work as spatial practices. There is a good reason for this, which this paper hopes to demonstrate. The idea here, basically, is to offer a demythologized understanding of contemporary art—one that directly resonates with the realities of the lived experience of subjects and agents who occupy and co-produce geographic spaces. My aim being is to articulate a *work* of art that directly aims to change the lives of 'subject-peoples' or local communities for the better. This hermeneutic gesture is a counterpoint to the Foucauldian account of space in relation to the built environment (or architecture) in that, instead of reinforcing the panoptic reading of built spaces, it looks into the improvisatory

tactics of dwellers which lend new possibilities for communitarian engagements that could contest the panoptic instantiation of power.

Aside from archival work, and the customary textual exegesis involved in critical hermeneutics, this work is partly a product of direct community engagement or fieldwork which uses collaborative affective strategy in the form of community-based conversation pieces.

Displacement in the Creative City of Design

In July of 2021, Megawide Corporation (MC) organized a cultural program with a variety of spectacles for Carbon market vendors which included, among others, a fashion show. It was the stall awarding ceremony for a temporary market space in lieu of the impending demolition of the public market. MC secured a joint venture agreement with the local government for the "redevelopment" of the Carbon Public Market, the biggest public market at the very core of Cebu's metro. The term "redevelopment" here, however, is actually a smokescreen for the privatization of the public market because MC's joint venture agreement with the local government stipulates that the corporation will manage the new market space and collect the rents for the said space for a minimum of 50 years (and renewable for another 25 years).

One would think that the fashion spectacle is not appropriate to the said event in that the celebratory vibe of the fashion show was patently discordant with the feelings of apprehension in the area: the livelihood of market vendors is going to be disrupted and no amount of spectacle would soothe the nervous foreboding that, in one way or the other, the privatization of Carbon will definitely alienate vendors, consumers, informal workers, and communities in the area. Even so, the event organizers for the construction corporation thought otherwise that there was nothing problematic about a fashion show in Carbon public market. Perhaps they thought that the show captured the remarkable vision of the project: the transformation of Carbon into a "First World space." The idea is to transform Carbon into a "world class" space complete with commercial hubs, an access to a recently refurbished airport in Mactan (which is also MC's project), and a hotel for travelling tourists and guests. Besides, no other spectacle can best capture the glamor of a 'First World' space than the alluring display of a fashion catwalk—a glimpse of what is in store for the future of Carbon (and Cebu by extension).

In September of the same year, a number of vendors were displaced, much to the chagrin of concerned citizens of Cebu and the affected informal sectors in Carbon. Demolitions continued even when cases against local executives who signed the joint venture agreement are in court. This was at the height of COVID transmissions in Cebu. The pandemic situation in the City has recently turned deadlier as Delta cases in the Philippines surge nationwide. But even this did not stop MC from dismantling market stalls just so the construction operations for the new Carbon space could start. MC distributed stall certificates to registered market vendors who were relocated in a temporary market space while the construction of the new market was in progress. It was however made clear by the administrator of the public market that not all vendors can be accommodated in the interim market, which means that many ambulant vendors will not be accommodated by the new market space. MC also made sure that increases of rental rates in the new but drastically reduced market space are enshrined in the joint venture agreement with the local government. They know that prices of commodities in Carbon will rise (because of the future increases in rental rates) under MC's management as much as they also know that a certain section of the population in Carbon are going to be displaced from the privatized space. In other words,

some members of Carbon community are considered expendables by the "redevelopment" project.

In November, MC proceeded with the demolition of more market structures in Carbon. But prior to this, the local government claimed to have reached an agreement with the construction corporation that they will no longer convert the market spaces to commercial hubs as originally planned. The project also now plans to preserve the historical areas of Carbon, opting to transform the areas into a heritage site instead. This was a partial win for the anti-privatization alliance that was formed to oppose the privatization scheme of Carbon. Interestingly, changes on the renovation plan of the public market were made just a few days after a broader multi-sectoral alliance published a manifesto against the joint venture project. With regard to the privatization of Carbon, however, MC and the local government remain resolute in pursuing the scheme.



Photo still of a conversation piece with Carbon Public Market ambulant vendors organized by Regional Art Forum + Community Art Archive (an art group founded by the author) for VIVA Excon Biennale, Sitio Bato, Cebu City, 2021

For context, UNESCO has named Cebu as a "Creative City of Design" in 2019. The escalation of clearing operations in the city and the co-branding of Cebu as a city of design are not coincidental. The displacements of communities from spaces like Carbon are direct offshoots of the brand. The privatization and renovation of Carbon—its transformation into a "First World" space—is a concrete manifestation of the brand, which is to say that the refurbished image of the city and the restructuring of spaces within its domain are not coincidental. The former presupposes the latter and vice versa.

The Creative City of Design has other ambitions as well. There is a concerted effort in Cebu to produce market reception for local art and design works. In 2021, the first Visayas-wide art fair was also launched in Cebu. Interestingly, some of the major protagonists behind the first Visayas Art fair were the same actors (or "creatives") behind the co-branding of Cebu as a city of design. These protagonists are the same "creatives" who collaborate with MC in the "redevelopment" of Carbon. While artists and designers enjoy the reinvigorated reception for local art, informal sectors in the cities are displaced. This is a curious phenomenon because

it implicates creative production in the operative exclusions of city dwellers. Further, what is more interesting is that the lobbying for the co-branding of Cebu as "Creative City of Design" and the rhetoric behind the "redevelopment" of Carbon use practically the same language that is now too familiar in community-engaged art practice. Lobby statements for these projects deploy the terms "collaboration," "inclusivity," "community-based," non-elitist, etc.—terms that are used to describe community-based art practices.

On Architecture

The actuation of artists and designers to the restructuring of Carbon market in 2021 can be contrasted to the disposition of civil society groups and artists in early years. In 2013, contentions regarding urban design have taken hold of Cebu City. The urban architecture became a pressing concern for civil society in Cebu when the local government presented a plan to build a number of flyovers in the urban core of the city. This issue pitted local architects against the Cebu City Council. The designers are supported by local civic groups, traffic enforcers, local universities, and some artists, while the proponents of the flyovers project are supported by an overwhelming number of barangay captains in Cebu. The encounter between the two camps prompted a debate about urban planning and design. Local architects and civic groups opposed the project for several reasons, which they enumerated in a manifesto published in local publications. What is striking in the group's pronouncements is the designer's foreboding of the things to come if the project were to proceed. For example, the leading architecture school in Cebu charged in a published position paper that the project could lead to "urban decay." The group argued that the project is inefficient in terms of bringing down the traffic congestion in the city and will only "degrade the aesthetic, cultural and historical value" of the urban space. But, aside from these, the movement also adds that the flyovers project will "violate the 'intangibles' of urban space."The "intangibles," according to the position paper of the group, are "things which people cannot readily see but can feel."An 'intangible' of urban space, they explain, refers to the "physical space or the environment which affects behavior in people." The group believes that the flyovers project will create pockets of spaces in the city that are hard to survey. They claim that such spaces are like hidden niches within the city that could host petty crimes. These niches would then demand policing, which means actual deployment of more police officers in the streets, something that requires additional security expenditure from the local government. So, instead of improving the lives of Cebuanos, the group argues that the project will only exacerbate urban problems like traffic congestion, the compromise of Cebu's heritage sites within the city, the depletion of the city's resources, and the rise in criminality—features which the group claims make Cebu "unlivable" and led them to form the Movement for Livable Cebu (MLC).

The last item in MLC's manifesto is a telling revelation because, here, the group summons security issues as a design concern. In doing so, the group reveals a certain distrust of city "outcasts," as if not being able to survey the whereabouts of certain sectors in a rationalized space already endangers the civility of urban life. Here, the original function of city-building in the post war period, which produced the 'informal' communities in the city, is resurrected from hibernation. Albeit, the pronouncement of the movement betrays the direct connection between architectural discourse and the practice of power. Architecture is indeed political, as Foucault would say. The rhetoric of MLC echoes the securitization of space, which speaks of the link between social control and urban design. Local designers may not see the organization of space from the point of view of power but, precisely, this naivety in architectural practice is a function of panopticism which manifests the connection between discourse and authority. This means that the very knowledge embodied by architecture (the spatial art par excellence) is imbued with a certain type of authority and, in "Third-World"

space, such authority is enmeshed with the practice of power. As for Lefebvre, urban spaces are mired in pretension. Urban design passes off space as "being innocent or… as being not political."Similarly, Foucault believes that civil society functions as a surveillance society in that it funnels the actions of the public into a collaborative relationship with power. This, precisely, is the effect surveillance is intended for which is consistent with Antonio Gramsci's take on civil society as a sphere where state power assumes hegemony over the lives of its subjects. As Foucault states, modern power is creative and productive. It produces and reproduces power by creating subjects and it practices power through various forms of authorities or domains of expertise that enliven these subjects. Thus Lefebvre asks, if "architects do indeed have a representation of space, whence does it derive… and whose interests are served when it becomes 'operational'?" For Lefebvre, the space that architecture occasions operates so as to reproduce power.

Curating Social Space

I am reminded by the work of Jay Jore, a Cebu-based curator. Jore displayed makeshift chairs, stools, and tables which he gathered from the downtown area of Cebu. The idea was to show objects "designed" by stevedores and street vendors as embodiments of "improvisational" aesthetic. The curation of the objects in the exhibit does not intend to canonize the makers of the objects in that they are not displayed as works of 'fine art.' Rather, Jore is making an important point: by showing the improvised designs of stools, tables, and chairs in a traditional space of the museum, Jore comments on the practice of design. The curation of the show, Jore states, is informed by the work of the anthropologist, Daniel Miller, who believes that even "seemingly ordinary objects," like the ones shown in the exhibit, can "structure normative behavior. Here, he turns Institutional Critique on its head by raising an important concern regarding design practice: the improvised objects made by stevedores and sidewalk vendors are testaments to exclusions that are operative in the rationalization of space.

Jore's critique shows that design practice can be made accountable as to its effects in everyday life; that design is also capable of self-critique. In this case, Jore's critique projects outwardly toward the city of Cebu. The improvisational aesthetic of tables, stools, and chairs interrogates the exclusionary design of the city. Jore's collaboration with stevedores and street vendors helps us realize that certain forms of collaboration shape physical and social spaces. His curatorial project is made possible through a collaboration with dwellers in the City.

In hindsight, MLC could never have thwarted the construction of flyovers in the city without collaboration. Jore's curatorial gesture helps us reflect on the emancipatory features of MLC's collaborative stance with power, or lack thereof. For one, MLC was a self-conscious deployment of "civil society" as an apparatus of governmentality. Albeit, it is rather unusual to encounter the term "civil society" explicitly summoned by the group in their press statements, social media exchanges, and position papers. Such self-conscious deployment of "civil society" can be read in an essay written by the leading protagonist of the movement, Architect Michael Espina—the then head of a leading architecture school in Cebu. In his published essay, the architect explains the importance of collaboration among civil society, the "private sector" (the corporations, developers, realtors, and investors) and the government.But, although Architect Espina laments that civil society groups should be involved in the organization of urban spaces, the pronouncements of MLC glosses over the contextual circumstances that produce exclusions in the city. MLC is one with power that creates 'outcasts' in urban space. Yes, the movement was able to mobilize civil society but it does so by maintaining the exclusions that are operative in the management of city life. The movement excluded the *other* stakeholders in the city who need inclusion the most. They are the self-employed, DIY, nomads who are *formally* excluded from the promulgation of civic

life in Cebu: the sidewalk vendors, the stevedores, jeepney dispatchers, the squatters, the indigenous buskers, etc.—the artists in Jore's curated exhibition. Not that MLC ought to have involved the "informal sectors" in the city; rather, the movement efficiently operated in lieu of the power that they already possess—hence the need for inclusion of informal sectors in their brand of civil society did not arise.

The MLC experience shows how civil society assumes the disposition of active agency while informal sectors retain the disposition of passivity as subject-peoples. MLC, in other words, was a movement of 'expert' insiders. It was a collaboration in, of, and for authority. The architects, designers, and artists are the very agencies expected to embody and animate the process of urban development as conceived by authorities. In this regard, MLC basically functioned as a conduit of power. One can of course claim that, as with all avenues for social encounters, civil society is a contested zone. But as explained by the geographer, David Harvey, civil society is an animation of state hegemony (unwittingly) pretending to be oppositional.In fact, Harvey believes that the emergence of discourses on civil society groups coincides with the rise of the neoliberal state and therefore co-extensive with such state. This is because neoliberalism prescribes 'Third World' states to take a backseat in order for the market to do its work, which also means that industrial economies are all the more incentivized to directly intervene in the restructuring of local economies and interfere in local politics to suit the neoliberal agenda.As a result, neoliberal interventions in the local economy and politics helped weaken the communitarian values and institutions of the "Third World" (e.g. militant unionism, student activism, collectivism, etc.). Hence, it is not incidental that discourses about civil society became the thing precisely when communitarian values and institutions are being eroded by neoliberalism. Civil society is partly complicit in the erosion of communitarian institutions. Albeit, 'civil society' politics is an attempt to take over the public sphere originally occupied by labor unions, the peasant movement, and the urban poor sector after the collapse of the Soviet bloc. As the scholar, Shalini Randeria explains, interventions in local politics by (Western) industrial economies is way more economical and effective when coursed through civil society. Thus it is important to analyze the deployment of civil society in terms of the agendas animated by such deployment.Neoliberalism reshapes public discourse to exclude actual challenges to the state, which maintains certain exclusions to operate. In doing so, the patron neoliberal states that are pulling the strings of neoliberal globalization are now able to intervene in the affairs of the "Third World" absent the intercession of the client states. Case in point here is the ongoing collaboration of civil society groups in Cebu with neoliberal institutions. In fact, many "civil society" initiatives are supported by neoliberal institutions like the World Bank.

Tentatively, one can say that Jore's curated exhibition can be partly seen as a counterpoint to 'civil society'—the 'expert' agencies that shape urban design practice in Cebu. His curated exhibition engages the symbolic representation that enables expert stakeholders to participate in the construction of urban life. In a way, what Jore does capture the point raised by Jacques Ranciere when the philosopher talks about the marginalizing function of "the distribution of the sensible."The distribution of the sensible implies that, at the very core of politics, is a kind of aesthetics—a distribution of time and space that shapes human encounters. This distribution is governed by regimes of perception that structure who gets to be seen or heard in certain domains of life. The movement against the flyovers in 2013 is a movement within a particular regime of visibility, but its organizers and leaders do not comprise the excluded or outcasts in this particular regime. They are the actual functionaries of that very regime, just like Jore who is a museum curator. University professors, architects, fine artists, traffic enforcers, and the city mayor himself are recognized authorities in a particular regime of visibility, the *habitus* that enlivens urban design. They are not marginalized outsiders protesting to be heard. They are able to speak because they possess the necessary cultural

capital that allows them to speak in such regime. In fact, the MLC movement was able to thwart the plan on flyover constructions precisely because the authorities of its members are duly recognized by the regime that actualizes city planning and design. In other words, their protestation against obtuse city planning is a function of governmentality. It is a function of power.

Yes, Jore the curator manages to hoodwink an institutionally sanctioned regime of visibility but, at the same time, Jore's curatorial gesture betrays the same exclusionary features that are operative in MLC's collaborative stance with power. On one hand, Jore's curatorial work shows that the improvised objects made by stevedores and sidewalk vendors are testaments to exclusions that are operative in design practice.On the other hand, Jore commits to an anemic identitarian reading which compromises the critical dimension of his project. Jore's curatorial gesture summons nativist tropes by reading into the improvisatory tactics of the marginalized some unfounded claims about local Visayan identity, which practically amounts to an aestheticization of poverty. The idea that the vernacular can compensate for the failure of what he calls "Western aesthetic constructs" in accommodating local realities misses an important dialogical point: the improvisational aesthetic of chairs, tables, and stools, I think, has more to do with the creative agency of the 'informal sector' and less or nothing to do with the vernacular or, in his words, the "provisional Bisaya aesthetics." The improvisational aesthetic of chairs and tables made by stevedores and sidewalk vendors reveal the creative potency of their agency. Improvisations are tactics of resistance. It has nothing to do with identity and placeness.

The dominant order shapes local spaces into planarities of space that silences the agency of outcasts. Improvisatory tactics, like squatting and street vending, are contestations of such planarities. These tactics are not mere manifestations of the mechanism of exclusion that is operative in the neoliberal space. Rather, they are expressions of how marginalized communities contest the utility of urban spaces. Improvisatory tactics by the marginalized, much like art, produces its own space. It is one of the ways outcasts fight and vie for power. Squatting signifies agency. Spatial improvisations are direct challenges to the lofty pretensions of Cebu as a "Creative City of Design," or civil society's dismissive tolerance of urban poor's collective potentiality to effect change. Jore's framing of improvisation in his curation of "humble objects" seems to reflect the tendency of many public art engagements that appear collaborative yet deny agency to its collaborators. This is the problem with civil society's function in the "Third World."Civil society's magnanimous and patronizing attitude towards the "poor," as in Jore's project, manifests as a veiled iteration of class power. Albeit, it expresses the anxiety of propertied class, their fear of being dislodged from privileged spaces. Sometimes, of course, this anxiety manifests in overt class violence as in the demolitions and clearing operations of urban poor furniture and encampments.

Conclusion

The limitation to Jore's curatorial gesture implies that our project to speak truth to power should include an accounting of space—how space is produced, conceived, utilized, and contested by different actors or stakeholders of the cityscape. The demythologization of art (and design) practice helps us do this, precisely, which also means that art practice and art reception should not stop at postcolonial meanderings which often leads to reductive essentialism.

Whereas the movement against the flyovers succeeded, the movement against the restructuring and privatization of Carbon Public Market did not. What is happening in Carbon exemplifies the collaborative nature of power which, per Foucault, amplifies its effects. Far from being just a material extension, as pointed out by MLC's manifesto, space is entangled

with modalities that are not necessarily tangible. Space embodies tensions that funnel human interactions and conflicts. Space is geographical, so to say. It is socially produced and socially conceived. Hence, it is almost always ripe in and for contestations. Space is both a subject and an object of creation. This is beyond what Bourdieu would have recognized in the realm of art as "symbolic violence"—a kind of violence that sustains certain entitlements in the production and reception of creative work. Here, spatial practice involves the transformation of real, tangible, habitable, spaces, but by being so, it implicates and deploys certain spatial notions that are patently discursive in that they actualize the operation of power. Here, space is both real and perceived. Think of the terms such as the "First World," "Third World," or "First-Class," for instance, notions of space that MC uses to promote and legitimize its agenda.

There is an important point to be raised here. Instead of looking at people and communities as passive users of space, it is imperative that we look at space as something tangential to agency. In the first place, how can one impute value to gestures and performances in space if people are merely conceived as passive users of space? How can we say that one's actions in certain areas of the cityscape are transgressive of juridical codes if not for the insinuation that people could simply use spaces for what they are designed for? We impute value to human actions because its is believed that they emanate from free personal volition. The imputation of value to human actions is anchored in the presupposition of human agency; that indeed human beings are active participants in the creation of social affects that involve relations with others. Why? Because they can always opt to utilize space for what it is *not* originally designed for. For one, Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics does not find this point difficult to figure out. For him the symbiotic relation of human agency with moral (and juridical) precepts is patently clear. Thus, he says that … "the concept of moral and juridical imputation… implies a subject capable of designating him—or herself. The concept of power… leads to points to a phenomenology of the "I can" and, even more fundamentally, to an ontology of an agent subject." People do in fact use spaces not for what they are originally intended for, like in squatting and informal street vending, which are staple strategies of the marginalized dwellers in Cebu. This realization is absent in Jore's curatorial project.

The self-help strategies of stevedores and sidewalk vendors, exemplified by the improvisational tools, tables, and chairs, and squatting, are testaments to a dormant yet potent aptitude of the urban poor's agency. Albeit, improvisational tactics are testaments to a dormant yet potent aptitude of the agency of subject-peoples. This reminds me of the poetic musings of that Jesuit priest, Michel de Certeau, about people's "creative" consumption or use of space. In this case though, being creative is truly born of necessity (and desperation even). Gilles Deleuze also said something that resonates with this. He said that art has nothing to do with communication or the relay of information. Rather, art he says is an "act of resistance." Squatting and sidewalk vending go against the grain of law. They go against the civility that civic groups find so dear. They go against the very obligation of the state to safeguard properties and capital. They exist as a counterpoint to the rationalized space that modern architecture and design pontificate about. They are creative for the very transgressions that they perform against the mores of civil society. The improvisatory use of space, like squatting, and sidewalk vending, thus, is an "act of resistance." Whether or not we can consider it art is beside the point, hence the need to demythologize the notion of art.

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Writing A Coping With Social Bullying: Creating Performance Art From Narratives Of Personal Experience

Jutaphit Usaha

Abstract

This research constitutes an artistic inquiry that integrates interdisciplinary approaches between live performance art and theatrical arts. Its primary objective is to create a piece of live **performance art** through a multi-modal artistic approach while incorporating theatrical techniques such as **storytelling** and **acting**. These methods serve as tools to present performance art derived from personal narratives and memories. The central themes conveyed include **reflecting on past experiences**, **understanding and reconciling with the past**, **healing**, and recognizing the role of the "**family unit"** as a crucial element in establishing a safe space that enables individuals to navigate through difficult times.

The researcher anticipates that this live **performance art**—rooted in the principles of storytelling and theatrical expression—will effectively communicate and cultivate an experiential awareness in the audience, equipping them with strategies to cope with the distressing experiences of social bullying. The performance aims to inspire audiences while fostering social awareness, ultimately encouraging individuals to transcend their emotional suffering both in the present and future.

Keywords: Artistic Research, Interdisciplinary Integration, Performance Art, Theatrical Arts, Coping with Social Bullying.

Introduction

Bullying remains a critical social issue in contemporary Thai society. Incidents of bullying often leave victims with traumatic memories that result in deep emotional wounds. The pain of being devalued and the suffering endured by victims can linger long after the experience itself.

Overcoming such traumatic memories requires resilience—physical, mental, and emotional strength—as well as support and understanding from both the victims themselves and those close to them. The researcher believes that individuals possess varying capacities for coping with adversity. Therefore, this research emphasizes the significance of the life phase during which individuals strive to move beyond painful experiences. The journey involves confronting emotional wounds, feelings of worthlessness, and bullying—yet not surrendering to these circumstances is what highlights the essence of emotional healing. The acts of self-compassion, feeling the support of loved ones, drawing inspiration from adversity, and engaging in structured processes of recovery all contribute to one's ability to move forward in life, both in the present and into the future.

As an artist with a background in performance art and formal education in theatre at both undergraduate and graduate levels, the researcher has found that theatrical arts place great emphasis on communication and the delivery of meaning through performance. These qualities suggest that methods from theatre may be effectively integrated into performance art to enhance clarity and convey the intended messages.

In the book Performance: An Introduction to Performance Art (2020, p. 91), Thanatchaporn Kittikong describes performance art as an art form rooted in and evolved from visual art, using live performance as a central component for expression. Rinyapat Nithipattaranan (2017, p.50) further notes that performance art often focuses on direct communication with the audience and may even involve audience participation to convey the

artist's ideas and paradigms. As a result, this form of expression frequently embodies a critical perspective and is often used to raise social awareness

Motivated by this interdisciplinary potential, the researcher sought to create performance artworks that draw upon multiple art forms and theatrical techniques. The goal was to narrate stories derived from personal memory, highlight key themes, and share experiences of coping with traumatic events—particularly those involving bullying. It is the researcher's hope that these performances will resonate with audiences and contribute to broader social understanding, offering insight into emotional resilience and the human capacity to move beyond adversity.

Definitions of Terms

Live Performance

"Live performance" refers specifically to a performance artwork within the field of performance art. The work created in this research is a live performance piece that serves as a form of artistic research. It encompasses processes such as script development, the collection and selection of personal experiences, the presentation of these experiences through performance, and the integration of data gathered from post-performance discussions and audience questionnaires. These elements collectively contribute to the research documentation.

Performance Art

The term “performance art” is used by the researcher in this study due to the lack of a widely accepted academic definition of this concept in the field of visual arts. The selection of this term is grounded in the book *Performance: An Introduction to Performance Art* by Thanatchaporn Kittikong, which is among the first academic texts in Thai that addresses both performance art and performing arts in a comprehensive manner. The researcher refers to this book as a key source throughout the study

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the forms and characteristics of **Performance Arts**, as well as relevant theories from the field of **Theatre Arts.**
2. To examine how theatre-based narrative strategies can be integrated into live performance to effectively communicate these social and emotional themes to the audience.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a **practice-based creative research methodology** that integrates disciplines across **visual performance art** and **theatre arts**, operating within the conceptual framework of **artistic research**. The research emphasizes practice as a central method of inquiry, employing theatrical script writing and performance structure as foundational tools in developing a performance art piece.

The creative process began with the researcher constructing a script derived from **personal memory-based narratives**. Multiple fragments of recollections were woven together and translated into **poetic expressions**, presented both through **live performance** and **video-based media**. The methodology drew on the principles of **Story Theatre**, combining narrative-driven performance with the use of **objects, photographs, and archival video clips**. These elements served to evoke memory and mediate dialogues between the performer and the character of the “grandmother,” who symbolized an emotional anchor and source of resilience in confronting the distress of **social bullying**.

The resulting performance piece, titled *My Wonderful Little Wei Po*, was presented in three sessions at the 1559 venue on **September 21 and 22, 2024**, with a total of **39 attendees**.

Each session was followed by a **post-performance discussion** featuring distinguished panelists:

> **Session 1**: Mr. Nikorn Saetang, Silpathorn Artist and adjunct faculty member in the Department of Dramatic Arts, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University.
> **Session 2**: Asst. Prof. Dr. Sukhumal Nitipataranan, Head of the Department of Multimedia, Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts, Silpakorn University.
> **Session 3**: Asst. Prof. Dr. Wonsak Phadungsetthakit, lecturer in Theatre Arts and Creative Entrepreneurship, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University.

Each session had an audience of approximately **20 to 22 participants**. Data for evaluation were collected through several sources: **rehearsal observations**, documentation of **script development and challenges**, **video editing processes**, and **performance-related obstacles** along with their **problem-solving approaches**. Additional data were gathered via **audience questionnaires** and insights from **post-performance discussions**. All data were systematically compiled, analyzed, and synthesized into this research report.

Results

The creative outcomes of this research include the script for the performance *My Wonderful Little Wei Po*, as well as the live performances themselves, each uniquely realized in separate sessions. The insights gained through the development of the work—writing the script and performing—manifested as ephemeral, yet impactful, artistic expressions that engaged directly with the audience in the moment of performance. These performances established a shared experience between performer and audience, extended further through post-performance discussions involving experts, performers, and viewers who shared perspectives, critiques, and interpretations of the work.

From the questionnaire responses covering three thematic categories, it was observed that most audience feedback exhibited a consistent direction in understanding and interpretation. However, a number of participants expressed alternative readings, diverse perspectives, and personal interpretations. This range of responses validated the effectiveness of the work in communicating its intended messages and achieving the research objectives. The performance successfully aligned with the intended structure, themes, and media strategies designed to address the core subject of the research: *Writing a coping with social bullying: creating performance art from narrative of personal experience*.

The creative process of developing and performing the live art piece enabled the researcher to explore the research questions both introspectively and through audience engagement. During the scriptwriting and rehearsal stages, the researcher engaged in a process of self-reflection, revisiting personal memories and reevaluating past experiences. This process generated a heightened awareness of events from different stages of life, which were then reshaped into a performative narrative. The experience fostered a deeper understanding of the researcher's own creative potential—particularly in writing, transforming emotions into poetic form, and crafting narratives that merged movement with layered media elements such as sound, photography, and video.

The integration of live performance, narrative storytelling, and theatrical elements rendered the evaluation of the work multidimensional. Assessment was not solely based on audience responses but also through critical discourse with esteemed scholars and professional artists—such as Silpathorn Award recipients and academic experts in visual and performance arts. Their feedback confirmed the coherence and effectiveness of the work's conceptual framework and performance structure. These evaluations supported the researcher's reflective process in comparing previous works with the current thesis performance, revealing

significant evolution in creative direction, communicative strategies, and narrative construction. Earlier works by the researcher emphasized poetic abstraction, fragmented symbolic imagery, and nonlinear narrative, often producing characters as intangible entities and scenes as associative rather than sequential. However, the present work necessitated a more coherent and accessible narrative structure. Poetic language was adapted into interpretive storytelling; abstract content was translated into concrete actions designed to provoke thought and generate understanding. The character construction incorporated clear theatrical techniques, allowing for narrative continuity while still preserving visual and performative aesthetics—through spatial arrangement, video clips, and visual reduction.

Throughout the three performance sessions, each round exhibited distinct characteristics due to the inherent spontaneity of live art. Although planned to follow a consistent communicative structure, each iteration was shaped by contextual variables and the performer's emotional state.

The intensity of emotion—ranging from nervousness to immersion, and at times, overwhelming sadness—affected each performance uniquely. In some instances, the performer had to manage emotional breakdowns, such as crying on stage, while striving to complete the piece and fully deliver the character's message. Each session contained different moments of communicative peak, making it essential for the performer to remain present and aware of the evolving meaning within each act. The process of inhabiting the narrative and engaging directly with the audience thus became central to the work's impact.

Figure 1 : Photograph of Performance: Part 1 – *Farewell, Wei Po*



Note. The opening segment of the performance serves as the starting point of the entire narrative. Set in the present moment, it introduces a conversation and emotional engagement with the character of "Wei Po" (Grandmother), a figure rooted in memory. Although chronologically this interaction may have occurred later, it has been intentionally repositioned to the beginning in alignment with the thesis theme: *Coping with Social Bullying*. The act of speaking with the grandmother—who passed away during the development of this project—marks a crucial moment in the performance.

Through poetic dialogue, the final exchange of encouragement, and ordinary acts such as sharing a meal at the table, the performance recreates a farewell, and the emotional return to this memory, which becomes a lasting source of strength and motivation.

The scenographic design for Part 1 evokes the atmosphere of a home. Each year, during the Qingming Festival, the performer's only opportunity to reunite with extended family and see the grandmother would occur. As such, the space features a traditional round Chinese-style table, two chairs, and only two drinks—representing the intimacy of a one-on-one conversation. A plate of food is set as it always was upon returning home, symbolizing shared moments around ancestral dishes typical of Qingming: *Hokkien noodles* (a Hokkien dish)*, turmeric-fried fish,* and *kua-gling*.

The first segment was designed as the act of parting. Along the emotional journey—interwoven with grief and joy—the performer navigates bodily expression, acceptance, and understanding, ultimately arriving at the decision to let go.

Figure 2 : Photo of Performance: Part 2 – Painful Memories: My Inner Struggle



Note. This second part of the performance marks a midpoint—both a beginning and a passage through unavoidable obstacles in life. It presents a physical and emotional struggle. Objects are used as a means of conveying the narrative, alongside poetry that has been interpreted and reimagined. The design transforms abstract emotional states into tangible visuals, while some moments are expressed through bodily movement, representing past events.

It begins with pain, confusion, bullying, and the contemplation of suicide—leading eventually to a moment of transcendence. The design of Part 2 reflects a transitional phase into adulthood, like a conversation with oneself inside an enclosed room, surrounded by beloved personal items and drawing tools—symbols of existence and self-expression. This part becomes a time of deep self-learning, of embracing oneself, forgiving, and making the decision to move forward.

Figure 3: **Photograph of Performance: Part 3 –** *Wei Po in Memory, Wei Po in Imagination*



Note. This third and final segment of the performance—though conceptually the beginning—has been placed at the conclusion of the overall structure. It is set within a house constructed from memory, representing the presence of the grandmother, familial warmth, and her profession as a seamstress. The central theme of this part is the transmission of encouragement, acceptance, and resilience through love and care. It embodies the strength drawn from familial bonds that enabled the performer to confront and transcend personal struggles.

This section serves as a direct inspiration for the thesis topic: *Writing a coping with social bullying: creating performance art from narrative of personal experience.* Through a reflective journey into the past, the performance builds a bridge between lived memory and artistic expression. One of the key poetic lines in this segment—*"We are one and the same"*—captures the emotional continuity between the grandmother's life and that of the performer.

The final message is one of reassurance: no matter what one faces, there is always someone—family, a friend, a figure of care—who offers emotional shelter. The idea of "home" becomes not merely a physical place but any space filled with love and understanding. In conclusion, Part 3 ties together the overarching theme of the thesis: *Writing a coping with social bullying: creating performance art from narrative of personal experience*.

Discussion

The creation of the researcher's live performance artwork constitutes a practice-based artistic research process. The researcher engaged in the artistic process by developing scripts in various formats, designing the performance, training in performance and narrative skills in theatrical forms, and utilizing competencies in live performance art to construct atmosphere, develop multimedia elements including short video clips and sound recordings, and use the body as a medium for conveying emotional expression through gesture and movement.

This process, emphasizing the development of diverse artistic forms, enabled the researcher to generate insight both during and through the performance itself. The presentation took place in a performance space where the researcher performed and the audience participated as co-experiencers. The research project titled *"Writing a coping with social*

bullying: creating performance art from narrative of personal experience" became distinctly manifested through this format.

This creative process was grounded in the initial hypothesis of combining live performance and theatrical storytelling. The rehearsal and preparation process emphasized presence and sincerity in each word spoken—both as a narrator and as a character within the framework of theatrical art.

There were distinct differences between this thesis performance and earlier creative works by the researcher. These differences were seen in the modes of communication, the preparation methods, the structure of the script, and the content of the performance. For example, previous live performance works emphasized abstraction, poetic language, and disjointed sequences. Performative moments emerged spontaneously, with characters representing intangible entities or states.

In contrast, the current performance—though structured into segments—presented a more cohesive narrative. Each poem was interpreted to ensure communication and provoke audience reflection. The work explored character development and motivations, using theatrical principles to bridge narrative phases and characters. Visual and performative aesthetics remained integral, though detailed visuals and video elements were reduced to focus on narrative clarity and emotional resonance.

The performance originated from personal journaling in which the researcher documented emotionally impactful events. Through the creative process, the researcher gained deep understanding that emotional wounds do not disappear entirely. Rather, one must learn to cope, accept, and move forward while recognizing that such experiences remain in memory. Over time, these wounds may fade, softened by self-awareness, understanding, personal growth, and support from loved ones. This realization led to a deeper truth: emotional trauma is an inevitable part of life. It becomes part of the self, forming a psychological defense and identity. By accepting and releasing these burdens, individuals can discover paths to move forward in life.

Audience responses varied after the performance. Viewers reflected on their own lives, felt consoled, contemplated significant relationships, and questioned themes such as: Who truly motivates us in life? How much suffering can we endure and overcome?

This research demonstrates that live performance can convey the creator's attitude and coping strategies in addressing social bullying through narrative and performance. It merges live performance art with theatrical storytelling rooted in personal experience, enabling the artist to bridge past memory with present emotional states. The work communicated its story using autobiographical exploration and highlighted the role of family, particularly the grandmother figure, as a central symbol of love—prompting reflection on familial relationships. This enabled the audience to relate their own experiences, creating resonance around the issue of bullying and psychological trauma. The performance allowed viewers to encounter and process emotions, encouraging self-recognition and self-value, and using performance art as a medium for shifting perspectives and inspiring healing.

The researcher incorporated techniques from both live performance art and theatrical performance. According to the comparative framework outlined previously, the following tools were employed:

1. **Integration of Script and Literary Elements**: Spoken text, adapted from poetic works, was used to evoke emotions and create performative states, allowing audiences to relate through shared emotional experiences.

2. **Cross-Disciplinary Production**: Combining live performance and theatrical methods enhanced the completeness of the work—through narrative development, character creation, spatial design, and expressive storytelling. This integration fostered audience engagement and enhanced understanding of the intended message.

3. **Space and Temporality in Performance**: The performance space and time existed in the present moment, forming a shared experiential field between storyteller/character and audience. Meaning, emotion, and presence were conveyed through memory-based narrative, poetry, movement, symbolism, short video, and sound design.

4. **Environmental Immersion and Audience Integration**: The researcher adapted theatrical communication techniques to create an environment where the audience became close observers and participants in the live performance. This fostered critical reflection and co-discovery of meaning, origin, and emotional resonance in the performance.

Through these methods, the researcher presented a personal narrative using a multi-layered, interdisciplinary performance process that integrated visual and live performance art with theatrical storytelling. The result is a unique form of live performance that communicates the researcher's internal reflections, creating resonance and understanding among audiences, particularly around the theme of social bullying and emotional healing.

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From Manifesto to Method: Artistic Research, Community Voice, and the Reimagining of Energy Transitions

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Abstract.

This paper presents the PED Manifesto as a methodological and artistic intervention into energy transition discourse, emphasizing participatory, co-creative, and arts-based research practices to formulate social consent between stakeholders and citizens. Rooted in standpoint epistemology and informed by extensive fieldwork with Renewable Energy Communities (RECs) across Europe, the Manifesto emerges as both a process and a living document designed to aid in *democratizing energy governance*. Through collaborative workshops, artistic outputs (including films, games, and exhibitions), and iterative community engagement, the project repositions energy not merely as a technical issue but as a socially embedded and culturally meaningful practice. The research integrates creative methodologies to amplify citizen voices, challenge hierarchical structures in planning, and build tools for dialogue, inclusion, and local empowerment. Central to the Manifesto are five core demands and ten actionable recommendations aimed at fostering transparency, holistic integration, and place-based solutions in Positive Energy Districts (PEDs). This work demonstrates how artistic research, and co-creation can expand the epistemological scope of sustainability transitions. While the approach aims to present a participatory model for equitable and culturally responsive energy futures, these claims should be viewed as being exploratory in nature, requiring further validation. The proposed framework offers promising pathways toward inclusive energy governance, though its broader applicability and long-term impacts remain areas for future research.

Keywords: Energy Communities, Artistic Research, Community Engagement, Energy Justice, Participatory Governance, Co-creation

Introduction

Climate catastrophe continues to ominously and silently, yet forcefully and sometimes viciously emerge as the definitive material reality to shape the future of the human species. According to Crutzen and Stoermer the “era of humans” (Crutzen, P., & Stoermer, E., 2000) or what they defined as the Anthropocene is a new planetary epoch, in which humans have influenced the environment and shaped the earth in profound, and often harmful and damaging ways. Industrial production has played a key role in this impact, working with ideologies (and systems) such as neo-liberal capitalism to justify the plunder, and create a cognitive dissonance or disconnect between our consumption habits and the environment that allows for our existence. This results in us evading the larger impact of our actions.

The implication that all of humanity bears responsibility for the ostensible destruction of our habitat, not to mention our modes of production, relations and sociality, is one that has been disputed by some academics and writers who highlight the disparity in the creation and impact between classes and even societies. Indeed, Malm and Hornborg (2014) place

responsibility for the destructive power of industrialization and modern extraction on a "clique of white British men." They offer a critique of the wide brush strokes of analysis that place all humanity as being responsible and highlight a discrepancy in agency and impact among social and economic classes. One could thus argue that the monopolization of power and resources in the hands of a smaller yet influential group results in valuing surplus value and profit over all else and thus, destroying our environment.

The neo-liberal system (and Capitalism in general) not only impacts our environment, but our sociality as well. Judith Butler (2015) highlights this by arguing that self-sufficiency is a moral imperative of neo-liberalism. This individualism and lack of community or sociality is one of the key identifiers of capitalism, as economic exploitation and maintenance of class relations is made possible through a domination of ruling class ideology and what Gramsci (1971) labels as the manufacturing of consent. It seems as if we're at a point in history in which power and resources are monopolized and the relations of production allowing such hoarding is normalized through State Apparatuses. Community and sociality are reduced to individualism (with a sense of despondency and loss of hope in citizens) and we're on a crash course towards extinction… all alone.

Energy transition is more than energy sources

This reality, or at least our personal perceptions of what we believe constitutes our current reality, is what motivates us to research movements that are different. We've been active in telling the stories of communities that seek new ways of promoting inclusivity, social well-being, diversity and sustainable practices. Our observations have mostly been that building meaningful connections between citizens and their environment, promoting transparency and local collaboration creates results that far exceed top-down methods that are enforced on society. (Nasya, Vurucu, & Barthel, 2025) There is a lack of transparency and inclusion in our economic and social models. What's more, the topic of energy seems to be a critical issue when it comes to the environment: so we began researching how we could connect these themes, and what the landscape had to offer in terms of cases.

In the turmoil of the climate change we're experiencing and the pressing need to transition our system towards renewable, sustainable principles and practices, energy emerges as a central topic with deep meaning and importance. Within the energy transition projects we studied and researched; we found the newly emerging concept of energy communities as being one that shows promise and aligns with principles of bottom-up processes. These communities are unions made of concerned citizens seeking ways of reducing the environmental impact of our consumption habits, providing alternatives to the monopolization of energy, establishing local communities that sometimes go beyond the mere goal of creating sustainable energy, and engaging in communal activities that create strong bonds among citizens.

In a way, RECs (Renewable Energy Communities) are one response to the anthropogenic reality surrounding us, as well as the need for community and localized sustainable living. Energy has been the driver behind conflicts and environmental damage (for instance through the CO2 emissions), yet the prioritization of the climate issue and the urgency of the climate crisis does not influence the actions and preferences of the global energy industry, given that renewables still only account for %9.7 of the global consumption. (International Energy Agency, 2019)

Through the projects we were engaged in, the energy communities we researched and the members of which, we spent time discussing, exchanging, and dreaming with, we came to the conclusion that the necessary energy transition was too big of an issue to be left to the profit-oriented minds and cultures of industry and Capitalism. Yet, how were we to create a framework that included artistic research and practice concepts such as participation, co-creation and standpoint theory on this topic? We realized that we needed collaborators we

could work with particularly technicians and researchers, and work with them towards a participatory, non-academic approach.

Through the PED-ACT project and with our partners, we began analysing the data in the PED Database. The PED database is a platform that compiles information from different PED practices and contexts, mostly located in Europe. (Nasya & Vurucu, 2025). While compiling an analysis of 50 European cases, we also drew parallels with the cases of the PED-ACT project located in Sweden, Austria, and Türkiye.

This paper builds on distinct empirical contributions made in the PED-ACT partnership, specifically the developed PED Matrix, which builds the foundation of the PED Manifesto. The PED Matrix and Manifesto is introduced shortly in this paper to showcase how the empirical research was adopted into artistic practice. For further details on the empirical work, further documents are cited. It's important to highlight that all available documents of the 50 registered PED projects in the PED database were analysed to define the pillars of the PED Matrix in order to determine common topics, tasks, and challenges. This analysis allowed the identification of the common elements of the energy projects on which the critique of energy transition can pinned, and on which the Manifesto can build upon.

Method

The PED Matrix (Nasya & Vurucu, 2025) and the scoring system is what stemmed out of this data and its analyses. A European research network (Cost Action funded, PED-EU-NET) studied and researched all existing and designed PEDs which integrated into the PED database over a period of 4 years from 2020 to 2024. By 2024 the network consisted of 50 cases across Europe. The PED Matrix stems out of an analysis of these cases. The available documents of all cases were identified from the modelling results of NMF and LDA algorithms to distinct topics, which are representing the core aspects of the matrix. These topics were shared for feedback and revision, with case owners, stakeholders, and researchers of the PED-EU-NET network. The collaborative process involving the PED-ACT partnership and stakeholders refined the PED Matrix, resulting in eight main aspects: social, process, technical, governance, environmental, legal, financial, and managerial. An energy transition scoring system was formulated for each aspect, with five topics detailing criteria for qualitative assessment. An energy transition scoring system, with a numerical point system from 0 to 3, assesses eight PED Matrix aspects. A score of 3 indicates comprehensive inclusion of criteria. Our initial conclusions and findings were as follows:

First, we came to realize that there was/is a gap between the goals of industry, the cycles of the government and the needs of citizens. Political positions emerge based on election cycles and the need to be re-elected (by politicians), industrial decisions are based on profit and commercial concepts, (Nasya & Vurucu, 2025) and the only constant in this equation, which oddly enough plays the least decisive role in the energy transition and energy sourcing are regular citizens. We began advocating for a move beyond profit driven models, one that puts communities and citizen groups as the primary actors in this necessary transformation (Nasya, Stevens, & Vurucu, 2025).

Second, it was obvious that each citizen group and therefore their RECs had strengths, as well as weaknesses. For instance, the Urtinsa energy community in Alcorcon, Spain struck a good balance between prosumers and consumers, bringing various actors in an industrial zone together. Supported by the municipality, Urtinsa has managed to unite companies and create a democratic process where each member has one vote and the decision-making balance is equalled out (Nasya, Stevens, & Vurucu, 2025). On the other hand, the business-driven members of this REC have difficulties in engaging with regular citizens and attracting them as members. In contrast, the BürgerInnenKRAFTwerk community in Austria, consisting of environmentally conscious citizens aiming to produce energy and create an umbrella

organization that could also be active in Schönbühel-Aggsbach as a community with walks, history and environment protection activities and get-togethers, seemed to lack access to the regulatory frameworks and technological infrastructure (ie: ease of access to the electrical grid system). Both cases are energy communities yet differ vastly. The success of these communities can be hindered by several barriers. (Nasya, Vurucu, 2023).

Citizen communities could have extensive resources and know-how in one area, but not realize they lacked resources in another. Quite naturally, we sought to connect the gap and provide an overview, based on our experience and the research conducted by us and our project partners. We wanted to create an overview of what is necessary for a REC to form and maintain its existence in the long term and remain true to its original calling. We began our work towards creating an overarching document by analysing the research and categorizing the findings.

Third, it goes without saying that legislation plays a tremendous role in promoting the creation of smaller communities. While the citizen-centred Austrian example is embedded within the capacities of the electricity grid, which forces the members of the REC to define the boundaries within the hierarchy of the energy grid, for instance along the reach of the transformer network. The business-driven Spanish example on the other hand, has a limitation of a 2km distance in which the REC can operate, independent from the grid system. These simple legislation differences have a huge impact on how the REC can function, how far the outreach is and who in the end can be a member or not.

Fourth was that while renewable energy creation is highly technological in nature, merely focussing on the technology aspect would result in the impact of these impressive communities being reduced.

Finally, we had to acknowledge that the transition into green energy could only be made fully possible (and sustainable) if the process was egalitarian, transparent, and allowed citizen projects to play a crucial role, given that they benefit the most (locally, environmentally, and economically) from transition into renewable energy. Our role here was to advocate for sustainability, collective action, transparency (distinguishing the ideas and interest of monopolies) and localizing the production and consumption of energy (and hopefully, in the long run, other products as well). We came to understand that localization meant breaking the chains of dependencies and empowering citizens. Our first step towards independence was through analysing the data and creating a scoring system that could help RECs identify their strengths and weaknesses.

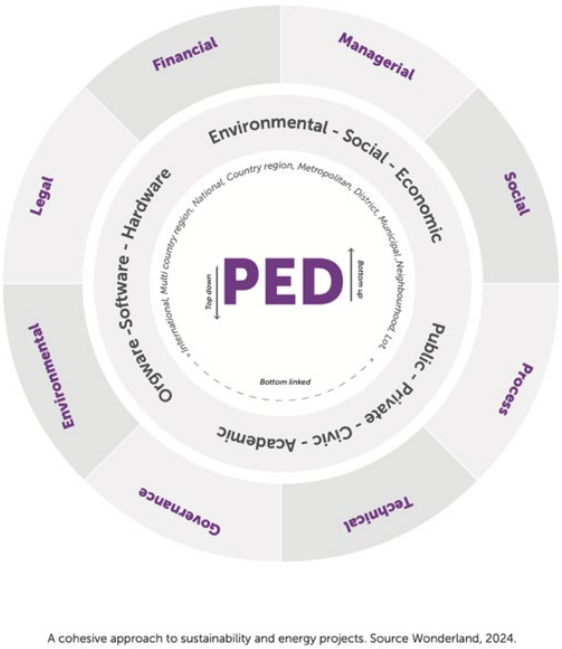
Research result: The PED Matrix

Many studies have focussed on technical, economic, and social factors related to Positive Energy Districts (PED's). Yet, the social aspects are quite limited. The matrix sought to analyse the social aspects on the one hand and provide a quantifiable framework on the other. The complicated process saw the use of machine learning technology and keyword extraction - aspects which are not crucial to the topic of this paper. Suffice to say, the extensive work ended up identifying eight critical subject categories that can help identify and quantify PEDs and ECs. These were the social, process, technical, governance, environmental, legal, financial, and managerial components.



Figure 1: an example of the comprehensive Matrix scoring system for cases

The Matrix is designed to adapt to the dynamic nature of PEDs, incorporating new insights, technologies, and practices as they emerge. The PED Matrix will be further tested and expanded to enhance its precision and usefulness, supporting the development and implementation of energy transition projects in alignment with the latest advancements and stakeholder needs. The Matrix has managed to gather all relevant data and create a scoring system that can help communities identify their strengths and weaknesses.



A cohesive approach to sustainability and energy projects. Source Wonderland, 2024.

Figure 2: a depiction of the PED Matrix categories

PED Aspects scoring & Cases	Schönbühel-A.	Urtinsa
Social	12	3
Process	6	1
Technical	5	6
Governance	9	8
Environmental	9	3
Legal	7	14
Financial	9	8
Managerial	7	7

Figure 3: a comparison of the scores of two different energy communities

A good comparative example of the scoring system are the results for the Bürgerinnenkraftwerk and Urtinsa energy communities, highlighting their strengths and areas needing support. A comparison of citizen and business-driven energy communities highlights the influence of partnership models on legal and managerial aspects. Citizen-driven RECs score highest in social-related topics. Group members have diverse knowledge and capabilities, especially regarding energy, making it an opportunity for learning and strengthening social practice. Community diversity influences energy project values and areas needing assistance. Community energy projects, driven by entrepreneurs' face challenges in demonstrating societal contributions beyond sustainable energy production. Stakeholders often overlook the broader benefits of these projects, but the analysed case is strengthened by the collaboration with the municipality significantly, which is reflected in the score of the legal aspect. In both cases, the scoring results were perceived as important, structured, and detailed feedback on the status of the energy project. Having a quantification for the strength and the needs of the energy project, as well as the comparison with other cases helped to understand the work ahead for the development of the case. In some other cases then the described two cases in this paper, stakeholders perceived the scoring as critical and the scientism allowed a meaningful deeper exploration of the needs of the case and discuss, possibilities to cater to the needs.

Forming social consent: The PED Manifesto and the participatory approach

While the Matrix is an impressive scoring system, we felt there still was a gap in communicating this in a meaningful and holistic manner. Not only did we need to understand and code the needs of these communities, but also present actionable items that could help our cause towards renewable energies. The means of communicating the needs of communities in a language and format that is accessible to practitioners, experts and groups of citizens alike was at the core of our approach. This is in essence what Leavy (2015) highlights as a participatory approach, which views non-academic stakeholders as equal collaborators, and

takes a stance against academic hierarchy (as well as governance and power related hierarchies).

In order to ensure this (as part of our methodology), we utilized workshops and co-creation sessions, in which we used games, brainstorming sessions, reviews and discussions on best practices. Our process included viewing films or reading materials in an effort to ignite exchanges and detail the perceptions and challenges of citizen groups.

The manifesto is a continuation of the PED Matrix in this sense, yet it combines our participatory approach into a pathway that looks at the energy transition in three main pillars: economic, ecological, and social sustainability. We recognize that the first two are well researched and accounted for in the field, yet social sustainability generally lacks in the approach to the transition. Utilizing our exchanges during workshops and co-creation sessions, we wanted the manifesto to recognize the significance of the "other" (in this case, citizens and citizen groups.). We also sought to take a stance against rigid systems offered as solutions, and provide a fluid, more harmonious and flexible approach to the topic of energy.

The aim is to fully respect the unique local characteristics of energy projects and the needs of the communities for which they are designed. The PED manifesto puts consultation and empowerment at the forefront of the transition process. It advocates for collaboration between actors with different backgrounds, skills, interests, aims, in working towards a common goal. It also places any bilateral or collective collaborations into a balanced perspective and can be used as the starting point when develop PED collaborations, projects, or pacts.

arts-based research to co-create

Art-based practices always have some sense of participation attached to them (Leavy, 2015) based on the perceptions and understanding of the perceiver. In this case, the work we created represents the data, and derives out of the data. Likewise, the process of participation comes out of the exchanges, and represents the exchanges. The result of these data and exchanges are multiple: films, the manifesto, articles, research and more. These products are refined through exchanges with communities and their inputs and are then produced to be screened / exhibited / utilized in exhibitions and workshops as part of the process.

At the heart of the manifesto are **five core demands** that call for:

1. **Energy equity and justice:** placing human needs and vulnerabilities above market efficiency.
2. **Inclusive governance**: where the people affected by decisions are also the ones shaping them.
3. **Holistic integration**: connecting social, environmental, and technical dimensions across scales.
4. **Place-based solutions**: rejecting one-size-fits-all strategies in favour of contextual, embedded approaches.
5. **Co-creation and transparency**: ensuring that decisions are not only made for people, but with them.

To accompany these demands, the Manifesto proposes **ten actionable recommendations.** They include tools for participation, recognition of emotional and symbolic attachments to place, support for alternative economies, and the creation of cultural spaces that can nourish collective imagination. Importantly, they offer practical entry points for **both individuals and institutions,** shifting the scale of transition from abstract policy to everyday life.

As expressed, the Manifesto is designed to be alive. It is not definitive. Just like the communities it champions, it evolves through discussion, translation, adaptation. It is a framework intended to inspire, invoke thought and exchange between citizens, municipalities, researchers, and policymakers.

We do not distinguish the forms, nor the process in obtaining these forms; the end result is a form of gentle and inclusive activism that allows others to imagine, participate in perceiving, and perhaps even be inspired to take action in their own ways and within their own possibilities.

Standpoint theory and co-creation as a method

Standpoint epistemology, initially developed via feminist theory, plays an important and significant role in our approach to co-creation. We acknowledge that the hierarchical order of society (in this case, of the legal system, of the governance models and of the economy reality of energy and big-energy companies in contrast to citizens who don't really have a say on the pricing or production methods of their energy supply) creates various standpoints. (Harding, 1993)

The power dynamics shape the perception of those impacted by them differently, and our observations suggest this holds true in energy transitioning. That's why the development and refinement of the PED Manifesto wasn't only informed by technical and policy considerations but also by the methodological integration of artistic research and standpoint theory to explore how lived realities of communities might inform energy futures. This approach was employed to better understand and communicate the lived realities of communities involved in energy transitions and to ensure that their knowledge, needs, and desires informed the outcomes of the project in a substantive way.

In our exploratory engagement with the energy community in Schönbühel-Aggsbach (documented through a film and workshops), a recurring theme emerged: their human-centric structure. We spent time with this energy community, exchanging with them and getting to know them up closer. When compared with other energy communities researched through the PED-ACT project, it became evident that a common denominator across different energy communities was their inherently human-centric structure. Each case we studied and engaged with exhibited distinct characteristics based on its geographic, legal, and infrastructural context, but all shared the condition of being citizen-led or citizen-dependent initiatives. The long-term sustainability of these projects was therefore dependent on active human input and continuous community engagement. **This pattern, observed in a limited sample, suggests** that long-term viability hinges on active participation—**though broader validation is needed to generalize these findings.**

In this project of PEDs, "the other" is represented by local citizens and community members who are frequently excluded from technical planning processes but whose involvement is critical for project success. Listening to these voices enabled the project team to identify broader needs and ambitions beyond energy generation, such as community cohesion, intergenerational collaboration, and social resilience. Through our collaboration with Bürger*innenKRAFTwerk (which included staying in Schönbühel and being generously hosted by the community members) we realized an expanded vision that most likely accompanies all such cases: When citizens come together, they often move beyond the confines of mere energy production. This EC had extended their role into community building and regional cooperation, and was active in environmental preservation, local history and community gatherings. They had carved out roles for the community that included the preservation of a local identity, in a sense – they had social ambitions and were creating a diverse and inclusive environment in which community well-being, environmental protection and cultural heritage were as important as energy efficiency. By integrating diverse energy sources (such as water and solar) and collaborating with regional stakeholders, the community sought to balance energy production with environmental and cultural preservation. However, its impact remains limited, underscoring the need for supportive policies and resources. On the other hand, they are illustrating a potential (though not universal) trajectory for citizen-led

initiatives. While such cases inspire alternative models, their scalability remains constrained by policy gaps and infrastructural path dependencies.

When screening the documentary on this EC, we will incorporate local discussions and exchanges to ensure these issues are touched upon and that the participative process includes other stakeholders such as municipalities, investors and planners. The participative process thus, will not be limited with "the other," yet it will place their needs and perspectives at the centre of the movement towards energy efficiency.

The PED Manifesto functioned as a central reference document throughout this process, guiding both theoretical and practical engagement. It was articulated in multiple forms into accessible narratives: a written publication, an exhibition of visual research, participatory workshops, and two films (a documentary and a short animation) which together served to translate complex socio-technical processes into accessible, tangible, and meaningful narratives. This multimodal dissemination approach reflects principles of arts-based research, which emphasizes the integration of creative methodologies into scholarly inquiry to foster dialogue, increase accessibility, and engage diverse publics (Leavy, 2009). This arts-based approach served as a provocation—repositioning energy as a socially embedded process rather than a pre-engineered system. However, our emphasis on inclusivity and transparency encounters systemic barriers (e.g., grid monopolies, inflexible regulations), underscoring the need for further structural advocacy.

Just as the PED Manifesto advocates for inclusion and transparency, particularly regarding power relations and ownership structures, our approach repositions energy not as a pre-engineered system to be deployed, but as a locally defined and socially embedded product, akin to other forms of local production. However, operationalizing this perspective is challenging due to structural and systemic constraints. Centralized grid monopolies, lack of legal frameworks for localized generation and exchange, and existing infrastructural dependencies necessitate ongoing advocacy. Through the production and dissemination of our materials, films, posters, exhibitions, and games, we aim to support this advocacy, making energy governance more transparent and participatory.

To adapt to local contexts, we have created a database of communication tools ranging from visual materials to interactive games. These tools can be tailored to the cultural, spatial, and environmental contexts of each community. For example, in Cesena, Northern Italy, local identity is shaped by the Savio River, which also presents a recurring flood risk. The exhibition planned in Cesena will connect the energy transition to the environmental crises and increased flooding risks (Nasya, Sarsam, & Vurucu, 2025). In contrast, the city of Antalya, where tourism dominates both the economy and spatial planning logics, requires a different mode of engagement centered around visibility, affordability, seasonal energy use, and awareness building among both residents and visitors. These place-based experiments highlight contextuality but are not prescriptive. We experience that each community's socio-cultural fabric demands tailored engagement. We propose that such responsiveness is vital for sustainable transitions, though its efficacy requires longitudinal study.

Awareness of such intricacies (and the capacity to adapt methods, formats, and content accordingly) is central to our process. By engaging with the specific needs and cultural logics of each location, we aim to foster a more inclusive, grounded, and context-responsive energy transition. This approach reinforces the notion that no transition can be sustainable if it ignores the socio-cultural dimensions of the communities it affects.

Conclusion

The process of creating the PED Manifesto was never meant to be final. It was, and remains, a step in an ongoing inquiry, one rooted in both urgency and care. Through documentary films, animated narratives, exhibitions, and workshops, we opened spaces for

dialogue and collective imagination. These formats allowed us to translate the abstract and technical into the tangible, and to give voice to those too often excluded from the transition discourse. The diversity of the material and content, the levels of simplicity allow us, to share beyond projects and national borders, inspire community groups that were yet not introduced to the topics of energy transition or were unaware that they too, could become one of the actors in the transition. But this is only the beginning. If we are serious about inclusive, community-driven energy futures, then more is needed. More time spent with diverse communities. More attention to the nuances of place, language, culture, and vulnerability. More research into what participation truly means as a process of shared creation. And more experimentation with the forms we use to communicate, co-create, and organize.

The energy transition will not succeed through numbers alone. It will succeed when the stories, needs, and capacities of people are not an afterthought but the starting point. Our work is committed to that belief, and to continuing this journey alongside those who are ready to question, imagine, and co-create what comes next. We have begun to build a database of puzzle-like-tools that are adaptable and open to being shaped by the contexts in which they are used. They come in packages of stories, lots of stories, which can connect and inspire. Our goal is to continue expanding this body of work and to make it accessible as **open commons,** a public resource that municipalities, communities, researchers, and educators can use, reinterpret, and build upon. Especially for the practitioners and researchers using arts-based research techniques this content but also the co-creation moments can be valuable. Especially, for the arts and social science scene, such combination of methods can deliver new insights and potentially new ways of empowerment.

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You can directly access the PED Manifesto in full here: https://wonderland.cx/the-ped-manifesto/

Music, Dance, and Transformation: Funeral Rituals of Marma Buddhist Monks in Bangladesh

Jannatul Ferdous

Abstract

The indigenous Marma community of Bangladesh has a distinctive dance and music tradition that is intricately connected with Buddhist ceremonies. Among these, the Soi dance, Sying (drumming), and Eying (cymbal playing) are essential components of the funeral rites of prominent Buddhist monks. Unlike quiet Theravāda Buddhist funerals, the Marma funerary customs incorporate ceremonial dances and intricate musical performances, which serve as social acts of reverence and spiritual expressions. The funeral of a Marma Buddhist monk is a large-scale gathering where community members, dressed in traditional Marma attire, come together in tribute. The Soi dance, which is exclusively performed at funerals, reflects Buddhist philosophical teachings on impermanence and transition. Monks from across the Chittagong Hill Tracts, lay practitioners, and cultural organizations participate in the event. The rhythmic beats of the Sying drums and Eying cymbals accompany processions, while artistic structures and symbolic gestures—such as rocket fireworks launched toward the mortuary shrine—honour the deceased. In recent times, funeral programs have evolved, incorporating modern sound systems and fusion elements that reshape the sonic and performative aspects of rituals. By analysing the 2025 funeral of Venerable Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera, the Seventh Saṅgharāj of Bandarban, Bangladesh, this study explores the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity. The paper examines the relationship between Marma practices and conventional modifications of Theravāda rituals, placing them in the larger Buddhist traditions of Southeast Asia, which is where the majority of Marma monks receive their religious training. Through participant observations, oral histories, and textual sources, it investigates how Marma funerary dance and music maintain cultural identity while embracing modern influences.

Key words: Cultural adaptation, Funeral music and dance, Marma Buddhist ceremonies, Monastic traditions, Ritual performance.

Introduction

The Marma people are one of the largest indigenous groups in the southeast of Bangladesh. They reside in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), which includes the districts of Bandarban, Rangamati, and Khagrachari... According to the 2011 Bangladesh census, there were about 224,000 Marma people (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2015). They share ethnolinguistic ancestry with the Burmese and have ancestral roots in the Arakan region of modern-day Myanmar. Their migration into the CHT dates back to the 16th and 17th centuries, driven by historical shifts in regional power and colonial interventions (Lewin, 1869/2004).

In contrast to the majority Bengali Muslim population and even other indigenous groups in the hills, the Marmas are followers of Theravāda Buddhism. However, the way they practice Buddhism is ingrained in their community's sociocultural fabric and reflects a syncretic blending of local customs and Pāli canonical teachings. Their spiritual life is centred on communal ceremonies, merit-making practices, calendrical festivals, and monastic rituals.

These include the funeral rites of high-ranking monks, especially those of the Mahāthera or elder monks, which have great cultural and spiritual significance. They serve as elaborate spectacles of artistic expression, community memory, and identity in addition to being rites of passage. The seventh Saṅgharāja (the highest monastic leader) of the Marma Buddhist Sangha of Bangladesh, Venerable Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera, was a person of great religious influence and social leadership. His recent passing and subsequent funeral rites mark a significant moment not only for the Marma people but also for scholars studying the intersections of religion, culture, and identity in South Asia. Studying the leadership and funeral customs of Venerable Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera is important because it provides a deeper understanding of how Buddhist monastic traditions in Bangladesh's hill tracts deal with the intricate relationships between modernity, ethnic identity, and religious practice.However, the Marma Buddhist community, while maintaining its unique cultural identity, faces challenges related to environmental changes, socio-political marginalization, and globalization, which impact the continuity and transformation of its religious customs (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2015; Uddin, 2016).

Historically, the Saṅgharāja functions as a spiritual leader whose responsibilities encompass teaching the Dhamma, overseeing monastic discipline, and acting as a mediator in community affairs (Lewin, 2004). The life and legacy of Venerable Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera, therefore, exemplify the confluence of religious authority and socio-cultural leadership in an indigenous context. His funeral rites – rich in music, dance, and ritual symbolism – reflect not only Buddhist doctrinal adherence but also local Marma customs, highlighting the syncretic nature of cultural expressions in this region.

This study intends to offer a thorough analysis of the musical, performative, and symbolic aspects of the late Venerable Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera's funeral rites. It situates these rites within the broader frameworks of ritual theory and ethnomusicology, drawing on Victor Turner’s concept of liminality and Richard Schechner’s performance studies to analyse how these ceremonies mediate transitions between life and death, sacred and profane, tradition and transformation (Schechner, 2002; Turner, 1969). The integration of artistic research methodologies further enables a nuanced understanding of the embodied and experiential aspects of these rituals, contributing to scholarly discourse on Buddhist funerary practices and indigenous cultural resilience (Barrett & Bolt, 2014).

Furthermore, acknowledging the value of media in preserving intangible cultural heritage in the face of swift social change, this paper aims to record and preserve audiovisual components of the funeral ceremonies. Textual descriptions alone are unable to adequately convey the complex musical patterns, ceremonial choreography, and community involvement that are captured in the audiovisual documentation. These media are tools for cultural education and revitalisation as well as archives for future generations.

Along with ritual analysis, the paper uses community narratives and biographical accounts to contextualise the life of Venerable Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera, emphasising his contributions to Buddhist education, moral guidance, and communal solidarity. The leader’s embodiment of Buddhist virtues and his role in sustaining monastic institutions amidst socio-political challenges illustrate the dynamic interplay between religion and ethnicity in Bangladesh’s hill tracts.

The methodology used in this study combines ethnographic fieldwork, which includes participant observation and observations, with archival research using commemorative publications and oral histories. This multimodal approach respects the viewpoints and cultural customs of the community while guaranteeing a thorough depiction of the funeral ceremonies. It also addresses gaps in existing literature on indigenous Buddhist practices in South Asia, which often remain under-represented in global Buddhist studies.

Research Questions and Aims

Guided by this framework, the study addresses the following key research questions:

I. **How do Marma funeral rituals integrate Theravāda Buddhist doctrine with indigenous performative traditions?**
This question explores the syncretism between canonical Buddhist teachings and the unique cultural expressions of the Marma people, highlighting the rituals' doctrinal and localised significance.

II. **In what ways do modernisation processes, such as the use of sound systems and multimedia staging, reshape the ritual's sonic and aesthetic environment?**
This investigation looks at how social and technological advancements affect funeral rite performance and reception, mirroring larger cultural adaptation and continuity processes.

III. **How does an artistic research perspective contribute to understanding and supporting the preservation and transformation of Marma cultural identity?**
This inquiry explores the methodological implications of using artistic research in ritual studies, with a particular emphasis on the ways that creative inquiry and audiovisual documentation support cultural sustainability.

By asking these questions, the study hopes to increase academic knowledge of Buddhist funeral customs' use of ritual hybridity, modernity, and indigenous cultural resilience. In the face of changing social contexts, it also aims to provide useful information for conserving intangible heritage.

Purpose and Background

In the larger context of indigenous traditions and Theravāda Buddhism, the main purpose of this study is to investigate and record the complex relationship between Marma funeral rituals and their cultural, religious, and social contexts. The goal of this research is to provide a thorough understanding of how these rituals reflect the unique identity and worldview of the Marma community while also functioning as a spiritual practice and performative art form. In order to provide insights into the dynamics of cultural preservation and transformation in a world that is changing quickly, the study also aims to investigate how modernisation, globalisation, and technological interventions have affected ritual practices.

The Marma people, one of the largest indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh, have long been the subject of ethnographic and cultural research due to their rich historical ties and distinct cultural expressions. Their funeral rites are more than just times for grieving; they are significant occasions for cultural reaffirmation, spiritual merit-making, and community solidarity. These ceremonies are rich in symbolism and performative elements that communicate Buddhist doctrinal principles, such as karma, rebirth, and impermanence, while simultaneously honouring ancestral spirits and the natural environment. Dance and music are essential components of these rituals because they serve as mediums for spiritual efficacy, narrative transmission, and emotional expression. The distinct musical instruments, chant styles, and choreographic movements encapsulate the Marma's collective memory and spiritual cosmology (Barrett & Bolt, 2014).

There is not much academic research that particularly examines the complex blending of Buddhist theology with native artistic traditions in the context of Marma funeral rites, despite their cultural richness. Previous studies have tended to focus either on the religious aspects or on ethnomusicological perspectives, often treating them as separate domains (Lewin, 2004; Uddin, 2016). In order to fill this knowledge gap, this study uses an interdisciplinary approach that combines audiovisual ethnography, religious anthropology, and performance studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ritual phenomena.

The growing influence of globalisation and modernisation on indigenous ritual practices serves as another catalyst for this research. Contemporary Marma funerals have seen the incorporation of amplified sound systems, digital multimedia, and staged performances, which have transformed the ritual soundscape and aesthetics (Schechner, 2002). These developments raise concerns about authenticity, continuity, and cultural commodification even as they open up new channels for cultural expression and increased community involvement. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to evaluate critically how these contemporary components interact with traditional frameworks and what they mean for the Marma cultural heritage's future.

By recording endangered ritual practices and raising awareness of their cultural significance, this study aims to benefit the Marma community as a whole in addition to advancing scholarly discourse. The use of artistic research methodologies allows for a participatory and reflexive engagement with community members, ensuring that their voices and perspectives are central to the representation of their cultural life (Barrett & Bolt, 2014). This strategy emphasises respect, reciprocity, and cooperation, all of which are in line with current ethical standards in Indigenous research. In addition, policymakers, cultural institutions, and heritage organisations working to protect intangible cultural heritage in Bangladesh and the larger South Asian region will find useful insights from the study. By highlighting the intersections of religion, performance, and modernisation, the research offers a nuanced framework for culturally sensitive heritage management and education programs that recognize the evolving nature of living traditions (Uddin, 2016).

All things considered, this research project is motivated by the need to close a significant scholarly gap, protect an essential cultural legacy, and actively address issues of resilience and cultural change. The Marma funeral rites are not only revered ceremonies but also active arenas for identity development and cultural negotiation. Through the application of an artistic research lens to these rituals, this study hopes to advance academic understanding and support the Marma community's cultural vitality.

Methodology

This study examines the funeral customs of Marma Buddhist monks in Bangladesh using an interdisciplinary methodological approach that combines performance studies, artistic research, and ethnographic fieldwork. While the artistic research lens offers a distinctive perspective for interacting with embodied performance and cultural identity, qualitative methods are crucial for capturing the complex cultural, acoustic, and aesthetic aspects of these ritual practices.

Research Design

The research adopts a qualitative case study design focused on the funerary rituals of the Marma community, an indigenous group inhabiting the Chittagong Hill Tracts region of Bangladesh. A case study is especially well-suited for this type of research because it allows for a thorough, contextually rich examination of intricate cultural phenomena. The case study design makes it easier to comprehend how religious doctrine, native customs, and modern changes interact during ritual performance in a comprehensive way.

A practice-led investigation known as artistic research is used as a supplementary framework. This approach emphasizes the integration of creative practice, such as audiovisual documentation and performative reenactment, into the research process, thereby generating new insights that are not accessible through conventional academic methods alone (Barrett & Bolt, 2014). Since ritual performance is embodied, it is a good fit for artistic research, which enables a nuanced examination of movement, sound, and material culture in the context of entertainment.

Data Collection Methods

In-depth interviews, participant observation, ethnographic fieldwork, audiovisual documentation, and archival research were all used in the data collection process.

Participant Observation:

Numerous funeral ceremonies in various villages in the Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban districts were observed by participants for extended periods of time. Immersing in the community enabled the researcher to experience the ritual dynamics firsthand and observe the roles of monks, musicians, and lay participants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). The order of the ritual acts, the musical components, and the interactions within the community were all recorded in precise field notes.

In-depth Interviews:

Key informants, such as senior monks, ritual experts, local elders, and musicians, participated in semi-structured interviews. These interviews provided contextual knowledge about ritual meanings, historical changes, and challenges faced by the community (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview questions were designed to extract personal stories, opinions on modernisation, and opinions on cultural preservation.

Audiovisual Documentation:

Considering the importance of dance and music in the funeral ceremonies, audiovisual recordings were an essential source of information. The sonic textures, choreographic movements, and spatial arrangements of rituals were captured in high-quality audio and video. These recordings also serve as archival materials that contribute to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage (Seeger, 2008).

Archival Research:

Previous ethnographic reports, commemorative books, and relevant historical documents were examined in order to place the current rituals in a larger temporal context. Archival materials also helped validate oral histories and contextualise changes brought about by sociopolitical adjustments.

Ethical Considerations

The research process was guided by the ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and their rights, including the ability to withdraw at any time, before data collection. Community leaders were actively involved in securing permission for audiovisual recordings and ensuring adherence to intellectual property rights and local customs. The study gives community members credit as co-creators, acknowledging the collaborative nature of knowledge production.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved thematic coding and interpretative analysis consistent with qualitative methodologies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interview and field note transcripts were methodically coded to find recurrent themes about performance roles, ritual symbolism, and cultural change. The audiovisual materials were analysed using multimodal techniques, accounting for the soundscape, movement vocabulary, and spatial choreography.

The analysis process was facilitated by artistic research methods that allowed for embodied reflection through reenactment and creative reinterpretation of ritual segments. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the sensory and affective dimensions, the researcher used performative practice as a method of inquiry. By bridging insider and outsider perspectives, this reflective process enhanced the ethnographic narrative.

Limitations and Reflexivity

The study admits that it has limitations because of researchers' positionality, time constraints, and language barriers. Even though interpreters make communication easier, translation may miss important cultural quirks. Additionally, the limited fieldwork duration

hindered the ability to observe the evolution of rituals over time. As an outsider, the researcher's background required constant reflection to reduce prejudices and uphold cultural sensitivity. Building trust over time was necessary for deep community engagement, and the research design was adaptable to local priorities and rhythms. To improve transparency and rigour in data interpretation, reflexive journaling and peer debriefing were used.

Results

This section provides an overview of the key findings from the artistic-ethnographic study on the funeral rites of the Seventh Saṅgharāja Venerable Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera that was carried out at Langodu Rehabilitation Buddhist Monastery in Rajasthali, Rangamati, Bangladesh, in March 2025. In contrast to traditional Theravāda funerary practices, the funeral represented a ritual paradigm. Based on fieldwork, audiovisual documentation, and analysis of commemorative publications, particularly the official memorial volume published by the Funeral Celebration Committee (2025), the Marma community's rituals uniquely incorporate performative indigenous elements, such as the soi dance, rocket fireworks, and communal drumming, to create a dynamic spectacle that combines local cosmologies with canonical Buddhist imperatives. This is in contrast to the emphasis often placed on meditative silence and the recitation of Pāli chants in Theravāda rites throughout Southeast Asia (e.g. Thai sūtra paritta ceremonies).

Ritual Architecture and Temporality

Over the course of two days, there were intricate preparation stages, processions, ritual chanting, and cremation. The Langodu Rehabilitation Buddhist Monastery was converted into a hallowed setting where spiritual symbolism, aesthetics, and time all came together. A number of large pandals that evoked both traditional village architecture and festive installations were made out of bamboo, coloured cloth, paper, and Buddhist imagery. This temporary ritual space is described as “the embodiment of dharma and devotion” in the commemorative book (Seventh Saṅgharāja Venerable Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera’s Funeral Celebration Committee, 2025), where monks and laypeople gathered to perform last rites infused with sonic and visual splendour.

The replica of the cetiya (reliquary stupa), which was constructed to house the coffin during the ceremonies, was one noteworthy spatial feature. Prayer flags, marigold garlands, and traditional decorations like the kyaik hti yo (umbrella-shaped spire) were used to decorate the building, which functioned as a symbol of the monk's enlightenment and a place of communal mourning. As recorded in the commemorative volume, daily chanting cycles that were timed at exact intervals according to Theravāda canonical time divisions—māna, yāma, and antara-yāma—also highlighted ritual temporality.

Sonic Atmosphere and Affective Soundscapes

The utilisation of sound, both sacred and modern, was essential to the ritual procedure. During the funeral, senior monks from different monastic lineages in Bangladesh and Myanmar performed lengthy sessions of paritta chanting, including the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, Metta Sutta, and the Abhidhamma Pitaka excerpts. According to the documented evidence, chanting was enhanced by contemporary sound systems that included loudspeakers and microphone arrays, disseminating the Pāli verses throughout the entire village. The ritual's sonification represented a significant shift because, in the past, these funerals were mostly restricted to voice-level acoustic ranges.

The recitations were intended to "bless the community with truth" (sacca-kiriyā) and to convey puñña (merit) to the deceased monk, according to the commemorative book (Seventh Saṅgharāja Venerable Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera’s Funeral Celebration Committee, 2025). This interplay between traditional vocalisation and technological mediation redefined the affective power of the ritual (Schutzman & Turner, 1988; Schechner, 2002).

Choreographies of Devotion and Cultural Memory

Multiple points of entry for community participation were provided by the choreography of the ritual. During the elaborate dāna (offering) segments, laypeople presented the monastic order with food, robes, etc. The commemorative documentation and eyewitness accounts both indicate that these offerings were performative gestures that embodied memory, identity, and respect in addition to being acts of merit-making. The artistic research footage showed young women dancing softly to the rhythm of hand drums and the sacred keyboard melodies while wearing ceremonial thami clothing. As a tribute to the Sangharāja's role in preserving Marma cultural traditions, an elderly woman sang Soi Eyo, a ritual offering song performed exclusively by and for girls, while swinging the coffin of the Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera. Only girls and women are allowed to participate in this ritual. Several groups of soi dancers, including young boys and girls from different villages, gathered in a wide open field to pay tribute to the Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera. As part of their offering, they performed Soi songs and danced with big bamboo structures decorated with colourful paper. Members of the Marma community honour the deceased monk by directing a large number of rocket fireworks straight towards the ornately decorated stage where his body is placed at the end of the memorial ceremonies. This last act is a dynamic offering to honour the deceased Sangharāja's spiritual journey, and despite its spectacular visual impact, it has deep symbolic meaning. Built of bamboo and decorated with colourful paper and Buddhist symbols, the stage itself serves as both the object of this ceremonial performance and the object of veneration.

This moment reflects what Turner (1969) calls the communitas—a liminal experience that dissolves social boundaries and creates a temporary sacred fraternity. Therefore, the funeral served as a performative moment of Marma ethnic solidarity and intergenerational memory-making in addition to being a religious farewell. Young Marma students volunteered to lead processions and translate Pāli texts, as the editors of the commemorative book described, demonstrating the rise of "cultural stewardship" among young people.

Multimedia and Ritual Innovation

The 2025 funeral was unique in that it used audiovisual media as a tool for ritual and storytelling. This film, which was made with the help of local youth, combined reenactments and documentary footage, according to artistic research. According to interviewees, it was a profoundly moving experience, "like meeting the Mahāthera again through light and sound." This innovation challenges the separation of sacred and secular forms. Multimedia was welcomed as a way to enhance collective memory and translate it into new sensory registers, rather than as a way to dilute tradition. As noted by Barrett and Bolt (2014), practice-based artistic research often foregrounds embodied experience as a form of knowledge; here, the film medium became a sacred vessel that embodied the monk’s teachings.

Negotiating Modernity and Belief

The findings also highlight the conflicts and compromises between modernity and tradition. This ambivalence aligns with larger anthropological patterns of ritual adaptation in response to technological shifts (Postill, 2011; Meyer, 2015). This hybridised ritual-modern landscape is reflected in the commemorative book itself, which has a rich visual design and captions in multiple languages. It serves as a performative object as well as an archive, bringing the ritual temporality into the realm of memory and print.

The Body as Sacred Archive

The visual ethnography of Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera's body, which was on display for public veneration from the day of his death, produced one of the most significant findings. His body, covered in monastic garments and embellished with holy symbols, became a subject of devotion and storytelling. The customs of visitors, which have their roots in both indigenous animist traditions and Pāli canonical rites, included whispering blessings, laying flowers, and pouring scented water.

There are many layers of culture reflected in this hybrid form of body-veneration. The body of the Mahāthera was more than just a body; it was a sacred archive that represented decades of social ethics, spiritual leadership, and ethnic fortitude. As Butler (2004) notes, bodies are not just biological entities but sites of discourse, memory, and power. In this ritual, the Mahāthera's body served as a pedagogical tool, transmitting unspoken knowledge to the community.

Conclusion

In this study, the complex cultural and spiritual aspects of Marma Buddhist monastic funerals have been examined, with particular attention to the recent ceremonies commemorating the Seventh Saṅgharāja Venerable Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera in 2025. Through the use of artistic research methodologies, the study shed light on how traditional Marma Buddhist rituals, which are full of performative expressions like dance, music, chants, and theatrical reenactments, function as living archives of religious devotion, cultural memory, and community cohesion in addition to being rites of passage for the deceased. By conducting ethnographic fieldwork, closely examining commemorative texts, and recording audio and video, the study positioned the funeral as a place of ritual continuity and change.

Marma's funeral rites show how indigenous traditions and Theravāda Buddhist teachings interact syncretically. For example, a lived theology that emphasises both doctrinal piety and collective expression is reflected in the incorporation of chanting (paritta), processional music, and traditional dance into the mourning ceremonies. A crucial primary source is the memorial volume Saṅgharāja Ñāṇuttara Smārakagraṅtha (2025), which provides firsthand accounts of the ceremonial stages, including the building of the cremation tower (śmāśāna chattri) and the musical performances by regional cultural troupes. These gatherings demonstrate the concrete, performative ways in which the Marma community understands and embodies Buddhist ideas like anicca (impermanence), dukkha (struggle), and nibbāna (liberation).

A significant discovery of this study is the importance of performance in these rituals, both materially and symbolically. Unlike traditional funerals in Theravāda Buddhist societies, which primarily consist of chanting and meditation, Marma ceremonies incorporate storytelling, dance, and theatrical dramatisations. These elements are structurally integrated into the ritual schema rather than being merely decorative, particularly during the several days of public preparation before the cremation. Scenes from the Buddha's life, biographical dramatisations of the monk's legacy, and staged folk dances that affirmed Buddhist ethics while echoing pre-Buddhist cosmologies were all part of the performances at Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera's funeral. These creative acts simultaneously preserved oral traditions and allowed for contemporary reinterpretations (Barrett & Bolt, 2014).

The acoustic and visual characteristics of monastic funerals in Marma have also been altered by contemporary technology. During Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera's funeral, audio systems and lighting rigs created a multisensory environment that blurred the lines between public spectacle and sacred ritual. These technological inclusions signal a shift towards hybridized religious performances that are both reverent and accessible to younger generations (Turner, 1969).

Community elders and monastic leaders have confirmed that these developments are adaptive strategies for cultural survival in a world that is changing quickly, despite conservative critics who see them as dilutions of sacred norms (Seventh Saṅgharāja Venerable Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera's Funeral Celebration Committee, 2025).

Furthermore, the Marma people's shared identity is strengthened by the funeral rites, which serve as occasions for cultural reaffirmation. Marma villagers from various upazilas, representatives of Buddhist organisations, and foreign observers were among the attendees and participants. The funeral venue becomes a place of pilgrimage, remembrance, and

communal rejuvenation as a result of this convergence. Classical Pali verses and songs and chants in the Marma language are important because they affirm doctrinal authenticity and reassert linguistic heritage. As a result, the ceremonies serve to both commemorate the death of a spiritual leader and to reaffirm the moral and artistic standards that unite the group.

The study's use of an artistic research methodology was particularly well-suited to examining the funeral's affective and sensory aspects. According to Leavy (2015), researchers can interact with lived experience through artistic re-presentation as well as analysis when conducting artistic research. Filming, participant observation, and post-ritual interviews were used in this study to document the ceremony's preparations' emotional impact and teamwork. For example, volunteers prepared meals for the group, students practiced dance with live music, and local craftspeople worked for weeks creating ritual objects. In this performative work, the ethic of dāna (generosity) is deeply ingrained, whereby donations to the monk's funeral earn both karmic merit and social prestige.

The study also highlights conflicts between innovation and preservation, which is significant. Traditional conventions regarding decorum, silence, and sacred space are being challenged by the adaptation of stagecraft and sound systems even as it increases access and engagement. For instance, the monastics' intended meditative atmosphere was occasionally disturbed by the loudspeakers used to amplify chants and musical performances. Similar concerns were brought up regarding consent, sacredness, and the commercialisation of ritual by the widespread use of smartphone recordings. These problems highlight the difficult moral dilemmas that Marma communities face as they embrace modernity while retaining their traditional values.

In addition to documenting memory, the commemorative book also ritualises it. It was published shortly after the funeral and includes community testimonials, eulogies, philosophical essays, and photographic documentation. Editors, translators, graphic designers, and Buddhist scholars worked together to publish it, demonstrating the multidisciplinary and cooperative nature of memory-making. The book serves as both a spiritual artefact and a teaching tool for upcoming generations. It is being read out loud, mentioned in sermons, and put on altars in homes and monasteries throughout the Chittagong Hill Tracts, demonstrating that it lives on beyond the printed page (National Funeral Celebration Committee, 2024).

Moreover, Ñāṇuttara Mahāthera's legacy still influences cultural activism and spiritual discourse. From modest beginnings in Rangamati to his position as Saṅgharāja, his life story exemplifies how Buddhist leadership can transcend generations, geographical boundaries, and ideological differences. He was admired for advocating for indigenous rights, interfaith harmony, and education. As a result, his funeral served as a chance to both mourn and reaffirm the community's commitment to his vision. Songs written in his honour focused on themes of compassion, mindfulness, and peace, and artistic performances drew from his sermons.

In summary, this study has demonstrated that Marma Buddhist monastic funerals are dynamic forums for artistic expression, spiritual rejuvenation, and cultural negotiation rather than static rituals. They are prime examples of what anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) refers to as "liminal spaces," where new meanings are created and the ordinary is suspended. They are simultaneously forward-looking and backward-looking, inventing new ritual communication techniques while recalling ancient cosmologies. The Marma community's approach to monastic funerals provides a powerful example of adaptive resilience as indigenous lifeways are under pressure from globalisation, technology, and cultural assimilation. Their funerals are affirmations of life—ethically, artistically, and communally—rather than just farewells.

This work could be expanded upon in the future by examining the funeral customs of monastic communities in South and Southeast Asia. Further investigation into female involvement, the sustainability of ritual practices in the environment, and cross-border ties

may also improve our comprehension of Marma funerary culture. Scholars and practitioners can support the preservation and creative flourishing of indigenous Buddhist traditions in Bangladesh and beyond by upholding these enquiries with both academic rigour and artistic sensibility.

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Watching the Photograph

Adjani Guerrero Arumpac

Abstract

This essay proposes critical information literacy (CIL) to counter disinformation. The methodology endeavors to complement the dominant paradigm of fact-checking in media literacy efforts while arguing for a broader understanding of information production and circulation within historical and political contexts. The main method in CIL is watching the photograph, defined by Ariella Azoulay as the "repeated observation of a photograph", through which the study traces and analyzes the virality of Raffy Lerma's 2016 photograph Pieta—a powerful image depicting the atrocities of the Philippine drug war. Building on archival and documentary principles, the interdisciplinary study reveals how the sustained visibility of Pieta was driven by activist engagement rather than algorithmic amplification alone, underscoring the necessity of proactive, critical engagement with networked digital media to challenge authoritarian disinformation and uphold historical truth. Ultimately, watching the photograph is framed as a method of care, resistance, and political intervention.

Keywords: critical information literacy, documentary, disinformation

Background

This essay was first written in 2019 as a component of my creative thesis project titled *Anatomy of Compassion* (AOC). Submitted as a Digital Media and Cultural Studies course graduate requirement at the Goldsmiths University of London, the project was an art-based research in the form of a documentary installation that investigated the politicization of an indifferent viral image. It analyzed a well-known photograph of the Philippine drug war—the *Pieta*. On July 23, 2016, photojournalist Raffy Lerma took the photo of a grief-stricken woman, Jennelyn Olayres, cradling the body of her dead lover. The man, Michael Siaron, was a pedicab driver. He was killed due to his alleged involvement in illegal drugs. A placard near his lifeless body read "I am a drug pusher." These placards were ubiquitous markers left by perpetrators in the crime scenes of the extra-judicial killings of the "war on drugs" in the Philippines. Siaron was one of more than the 6,000 killed during the first six months of Rodrigo Duterte's administration whose presidential campaign hinged on eliminating illegal drug trade in the Philippines (Regencia, 2016). The photo was first published online on July 24, 2016 by Inquirer.net. It went viral and has since then been dubbed as Pieta, the photograph that called the attention of the global press to the Philippine "war on drugs" impunity (Hegina, 2016; Phippen, 2106). Consequently, the photographer Raffy Lerma stepped up to the role of representing the Nightcrawlers, an informal group of photojournalists, journalists and filmmakers documenting the slaughter (Democracy Now! 2017)

The topic was informed by the author's involvement as a human rights advocate and artist with RESBAK (Respond and Break the Silence Over the Killings). RESBAK is a group of artists, media practitioners and cultural workers who banded to decry the killings in 2016. In 2025, more than ten years hence, Duterte was finally issued a warrant of arrest and is currently on trial by the International Criminal Court for committing crimes against humanity. Nevertheless, the disinformation that put him in power was likewise instrumentalized by the Marcoses for their political comeback with the 2022 presidential win of Ferdinand "Bongbong" Romualdez Marcos Jr. Indeed, the parallel rise of fake news and autocratic governments is a global malady and the Philippines was "patient zero" (Deinla et al., 2021). Filipina journalist Maria Ressa's pioneering reports about the insidious role of social media

driven disinformation in the outcome of the 2016 and 2019 Philippine elections (Ressa 2016a, Ressa, 2016b, Hofileña, 2016) have earned her the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize. In her Nobel Lecture, she highlighted the need for "information ecosystems that live and die by facts", referring to the rationalist framework of fact-checking or authentication that has become a "journalistic subfield associated with the press' traditional watchdog function" (Labiste, 2022). Fact-checking has since then become the frontline in the campaign against disinformation. Developments in 2023 and 2024 saw the Philippine government under Marcos Jr. launching nationwide media/information literacy programs to counter fake news, deploying the same journalistic method of fact authentication. However, in 2025, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg announced that social media company Meta Platforms will discontinue its US fact-checking program, causing an uproar worldwide amongst journalists. I resume and conclude this essay to contribute to the media/information literacy campaigns that combat disinformation in an increasingly menacing networked digital era.

Methodology

Correspondingly, this essay also serves as a constructive criticism of the current information literacy paradigm. Is fact-checking enough to counter fake news? Traditional information literacy programs focus on fact-checking but often ignore the deeper structural forces shaping media production and dissemination. The awareness of information production and dissemination as a situated sociocultural process is an emergent locus in library studies called the *critical literacy* (McNicol, 2016) or *critical information literacy* (CIL) (Downey, 2016). It is essential to critically examine both the information literacy campaign and its institutional purveyors, as these knowledge institutions not only fund and drive such initiatives but also define the standards for validating information. The abovementioned provide an overview of the profile of the most influential of these knowledge institutions (Nobel, Facebook/Meta, government) as largely Western orthodox and/or regulatory in nature.

An analysis of Jonathan Ong and Jason Cabañes' (2019) research on networked disinformation in the Philippines provides us an example of the nuanced ways in which information production is controlled, either through validation or the deliberate absence of it. The results of their research on the 2016 Philippine elections outcome shifted liability from low-level wage-earning trolls to a spectrum of middle-class complicity—ranging from the executives of ad and PR industries that crafted the Duterte presidential campaign, to the progressive leaders of the Philippine Left who have allegedly failed to counter the Marcoses' myth due to "their failure to listen" to a public disgruntled by the undelivered promises of post-EDSA liberal democracy (Ong, 2022).

Ong and Cabañes' analyses overlook the role of Philippine colonial history in shaping the conditions for fake news production, particularly how U.S. anti-communist propaganda embedded at the grassroots level laid the groundwork for modern disinformation. The anti-communist infrastructure and tactics introduced during the Cold War were later weaponized by the Marcoses and Dutertes to consolidate political power through swaying critical votes from the masses conditioned by the state to fear insurgency (Arumpac, forthcoming). Thus, the new middle-class oligarchs are not merely political clients of advertising and PR firms—they are highly-skilled technocrats who actively shape media narratives and influence public communication. Failing to acknowledge their role in the disinformation ecosystem in the country absolves not only the Dutertes and Marcoses but also reinforces the broader colonial and imperialist narrative that underpins these power structures. CIL surfaces these well-known but unvendible sociopolitical narratives suppressed by powerful neoliberal modern knowledge institutions to interrogate how information production and dissemination has and continues to shape societies.

Combatting disinformation is a stronghold of journalists and technocrats. I am interested to know how other sectors can also substantially contribute to the campaign. Taking

after critical information studies that is "cross-disciplinary and offers concrete structures as points for analysis that are relevant to all disciplines of study" (Downey, 2016), CIL is utilized in the essay as an overarching interdisciplinary methodology that harnesses and merges key ideas from documentary filmmaking, library and archival studies, and digital media studies. To complement fact-checking/authentication, it seeks to analyze the authenticity of a viral photograph. Borrowing from the principles of documentary and archives that problematize the concept of truth and provenance, *authenticity* is defined in this study as the narrativization of an image in relation to an archive that authenticates it.

The next two sections provide key literature about image, photography and digital labor, followed by an analysis of the virality of the *Pieta*—and Lerma's trajectory as the photographer of such a politicized photograph. The discussions entwine foundational concepts from respective disciplines to establish the authenticity of the viral photograph. The last section describes the documentary installation process, aiming to visualize one of the inventive ways CIL can be deployed in analyzing the many forms of information in various platforms.

The Role of Images in the Philippine Drug War

The study focused on a sole image due to deficient accessible data on the Philippine drug war. The lack of reliable data itself was the main premise of the research. In 2019, various groups have already started working on databases on the Philippine drug war. Official sources included data from the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), and the Dangerous Drugs Board (DDB). Independent researches were made by media organizations, the academe, and civil society organizations. Between the two sets of data, most of the independent data sets were kept undercover for various reasons, such as to protect the victim-families. Consequently, state official sources became the main source of information for the public. However, the PNP identified only 6,600 drug-related killings from July 1, 2016 to May 31, 2019 (Tupas, 2019). The total number of casualties was funnelled into numerous categories of the nature of death to keep the death toll low (Quintos, 2019; Kishi et al. 2018). The wide discrepancy between and among sources, ranging from 6,600 to 27,000 as of April 2019, established the unreliability of the state's official count of victims (Coronel, 2019).

The countless but unaccounted-for casualties of the drug war is an aggregate that is as undefined as historian Vicente Rafael's (2020) account of the "phantasms of revenge" (p. 927). In his analysis of the Philippine drug war images, Rafael concluded that the photographs' agency pale in comparison to the dreams of the kin of victims to kill the killers. Accordingly, dreams provoke more than the images of dead bodies that have only elicited indifference. These dreams echo Duterte's violence and in consequence, paradoxically provides fertile ground for authoritarian populism. Both the uncountable victims and Rafael's conjuring of these violent visions function as specters that cast an uneasy presence over Philippine society. They evoke the Kantian sublime, embodying the overwhelming and incomprehensible while simultaneously emerging from the human capacity for rational imagination and its limits. Within the study of aesthetics, the sublime's emotional spectrum—ranging from pleasure to terror—primes individuals to identify what is universal, pure, and moral. Kant's notion of the sublime is rooted in disinterestedness, a perspective that sustains the "object's unified form in a state of indeterminacy—a suspension that is purposive without having a purpose" (Dalton, 2015).

Walter Benjamin took on the task of redefining purpose in aesthetics in his essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,* published in 1935. In the same year as his original publication, Leni Riefenstahl premiered *Triumph of the Will*—a state-commissioned documentary glorifying Nazism and Hitler, widely praised for its technical

mastery. Benjamin's essay astutely anticipated how the liberatory potential of cinema could just as easily be co-opted and weaponized by those in power. During this time, Benjamin was also drafting *Paris, Capital of the 19th Century*, later published in 1938 as *The Arcades Project*. This expansive study meticulously cataloged Parisian historical artifacts, tracing the emergence of urban commodity capitalism. While researching the archive of property relations, Benjamin, as an exiled German-Jewish intellectual, was also witnessing how fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union strategically deployed the arts in their bids for global dominance. Just a few years before the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Benjamin warned that fascist regimes' aestheticization of politics would ultimately culminate in the most extreme capitalist enterprise—war. Set against a backdrop of political upheaval, his conclusion on the instrumentalization of art by fascism was both urgent and clear:

"Communism replies by politicizing art." (Benjamin, 2008, p. 42)

Benjamin recognized the need to reclaim art, restoring its political agency by aligning its purposivity with class struggle. Mark Poster's sobering response to Benjamin's laconic thesis statement was that the great expectations for cinema to foster socialist revolution never materialized (2019). Nonetheless, Benjamin's hope for the politicization of art merits a rereading through *Jetztzeit*, a notion of time he expounded in the essay *Theses on the Philosophy of History* published in 1969. Hannah Arendt annotated Benjamin's *Jetztzeit* as an idea that pertains to *nunc stans*, a Christian philosophy of the atemporal and eternal present time (p.261). But in the context of his materialist analysis of the history, Benjamin's *Jetztzeit* necessitated a redefinition outside of its theological underpinnings (Kathib "Messianic"). Following his "figure of thought" or the method of inscribing philosophical thoughts in tangible imagery, Benjamin outlined the task of the historian as not one of recounting history as commoditized progress and productivity but one of critical curation of events to determine a monad. The monad refers to a wholistic perspective of history that is dialectical and seething with "a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past" (Benjamin, 2008, p.263).

As a rejoinder to Rafael, this essay latches on to Benjamin's ideation of a monad as the mandate of the historian to comprehend that what they conceive as a whole is one that materializes. It foregrounds recognizing and resisting the sublime hegemon that reproduce—in various nuances, forms and imaginations prone to either valorizing or laying prostrate before capitalist and authoritarian phantoms—the prevailing aesthetics of fascism.

Watching the Photograph: A Posthuman Method

At the frontline of the campaign against the Philippine drug war, the Nightcrawlers became the key source of access for local and international media outfits. As the kill list increased, so did the visibility of the mediators who likewise gained recognition for their documentations. The robust circulation of the drug war images in liberal media was the initial premise of Rafael's essay. He asked: "What might account for the limits of photographic intervention in the drug war, on the one hand, and the continued popularity of Duterte, on the other?" (Rafael, 2020, p. 919). The mode of inquiry rested on an ideal inverse proportionality between the visibility of the photographs/photographers and the popularity of Duterte and his drug war. The false equivalence indirectly placed on images—produced by photojournalists and media workers obliged by profession to document and circulate representations of current events—the impossible burden of countering authoritarian populism. Rafael cited Ariella Azoulay's (2008) concept of *civil contract of photography* to conjure an ambivalent imagined community of spectators desensitized by images of impunity, thereby reifying the failure of the photographic critique of power. However, Azoulay's thesis on indifference was itself the

strength of a photograph. The idea of the *civil contract of photography* purged the photograph of a singular interpretation. It was this openness that re-ontologized photography as a site of political agency that can accommodate social negotiations among all the stakeholders of the image. Azoulay explicitly located this covenant outside of ruling powers. Rafael's critique, on the other hand, read the drug war photographs within the framework of consumerism and authoritarianism. The pedantic referencing and overturning of the emancipative underpinnings of Azoulay's discourse already received backlash from the Nightcrawlers during an earlier presentation in the *Photographing Duterte's Drug War* panel as part of the *Watching the Philippines, Reporting Duterte* conference at Columbia University in 2017 (Rafael, 2017).

The tension between interpretation and the autonomy of art is a longstanding issue. In her 1964 essay *Against Interpretation*, Susan Sontag criticized how interpretation mirrors commodity culture, where excess analysis dulls sensory engagement with art. Similarly, Hito Steyerl (2012), in her thesis on the poor image—low-resolution, piracy-driven visuals that proliferate in the digital sphere—argued that speculative valuation displaces art, ushering in the "conceptual turn of capitalism" (p. 42). This shift, she contended, gave rise to information capitalism, where the poor image circulates within structures of exploitation and devaluation. Both Sontag and Steyerl highlight how interpretation has been instrumentalized in reducing art and images to their exchange value—or lack thereof.

To rehabilitate the image, Azoulay denied the photograph of the sole authorial. Freed from ownership or the singular source of meaning, the ambivalent photograph is open to "repeated observation" that fosters deeper, collective insights beyond the fetishization of the visible (2008, p. 391). Likewise, Steyerl finds agency in the **"**velocity**"** of the poor image: its constant circulation degrades resolution, evading ownership's control, while its popularity forges alternative circuits of meaning beyond dominant forces (2012, p. 41). Sontag, in turn, offers a strategy for resisting the reduction of art to a manageable, commodified object—"by making works of art whose surface is so unified and clean, whose momentum is so rapid, whose address is so direct that the work can be…just what it is" (1966, p. 11).

The failure of interpretation is a key factor in determining the framework of this study as critical posthumanist, a theoretical lens defined by Rosi Braidotti as the critique of the humanities characterised by masculine Western reason and human exceptionalism (2019). Employing CIL as methodology and critical posthumanism as theoretical framework, this essay unequivocally supports the call for justice for the victims of the Philippine drug war. It prioritizes praxis over dissociated humanities scholarship, redirecting focus to the urgency of the issue. By re-evaluating *Pieta*, the study seeks to establish the significance of a photograph that has played a pivotal role in the campaign against the drug war. Its approach to assessing the image draws from the polemics on interpretation, which offer analogous frameworks. Sontag's "momentum", Azoulay's "repeated observation", and Steyerl's "velocity" represent different articulations of the photographic image's agency through movement. Through the act of "watching the photograph" (2008, p. 25)—paying attention to its circulation, reproducibility, and persistence through time and (cyber)space—this study moves beyond interpretation, which is often laden with subjectivities of the interpreter. Instead, as a critical posthumanist project, it examines the technological migration of the image, treating its aesthetic form as a database of virality and metadata that constructs its narrative as a "moving image."

Reconstituting Authenticity: The Role of the Documentary and the Archives

Following the movement of *Pieta* illustrates what Christian Fuchs (2013) called a "playful digital work" in that it reified the digital labor that went into sustaining the visibility of a viral digital photograph. It followed the process of building an archive by tracking down the iterations of the digital photograph online and gathering its technical metadata. Watching

the viral digital photograph then became both an archival and documentary practice. These two institutional practices that problematize indexicality inform the conceptual reconstitution of authenticity in this study.

Film critic and theorist Bill Nichols (1991) stated that in cinematic documentary practice, the authentic record is the material documentation of the event that contains the moving image. With the raw material itself comprising the authentic, issues on authenticity in the documentary discipline mainly focus on the veracity of the recorded representation with regard to the realism it claims to portray. At best, what documentary filmmaking guarantees is the evidentiary nature of its discipline, a limitation it shares with the archival discipline.

Archival theorist Luciana Duranti asserted that authenticity "only warrants that the record does not result from any manipulation, substitution, or falsification occurring after the completion of its procedure of creation, and that it is therefore what it purports to be (2002, p. 3)." The authentic record/archive, as evidence of an activity, is valued not for its veracity but for its reliability. The reliability of a record is secured with a form, or a record with date and signature; and a procedure of creation, or "the body of rules according to which acts of portions of them are recorded (2002, p. 6)." Crucially, authenticity is unverifiable and only an assumption.

Deducing from this standard archival definition of authenticity set by the ISO 15489, a document that established the standards of records management, Jens Kastenhofer pointed out the loopholes in the core concepts of archival studies. In her study on forgeries in archives, she questioned the concept of reliability based on objectivity "that is impossible for a human being to attain (2015, p. 168)." Hence, the authenticity of a record that is premised on its reliability "can never be more than an informed opinion" (2015, p. 176). The abundance of forgeries in the history of archives invites a rethinking of such phenomenon not as anomalies but instead "a source of documentary practice in itself." their authenticity marked "to the extent to which the document is assumed to be authentic. (2015, p. 176)." Kastenhofer proposed that the authenticity of the anomalous record can be recuperated by the archive itself that lends authenticity by acknowledging its disruptive presence.

Kastenhofer's reorientation of authenticity as a reiterative process is a helpful way of finetuning the method of watching the photograph through CIL. As a general rule, the library and archival disciplines put prime on the authenticity of the original digital object through its provenance. The concept of the provenance of an object is tied to its intrinsic value that has long been used by archivists to describe historical materials that should be retained in their original form rather than as copies. The purpose of such verification is to ensure the quality of the institutional memory. However, this rule simply does not hold for the networked digital era where copies abound (Moreno et al., 2014). In this light, Kastenhofer's reorientation of authenticity—that does not come from the original object but instead is determined by the archive that authenticates the copy—enables a more expansive analysis that factors in the different contexts and conditions with which the digital photograph was produced, published and reproduced. Meditating on its authenticity became the viral photograph's own agency in telling its story. Crucially, this narrativization provides lead to the institution that bestows its authenticity on the ambivalent viral digital photograph.

Mapping the Virality of Compassion: Pieta as a Case Study

In a digital photograph, the technical metadata establishes its administrative (creation date, location, format), descriptive (visual content information) and copyright information[5]. (*Figure 1*). *Pieta*, with filename RRL_2432.JPG, was from an array of digital photographs taken by Lerma in the Siarion crime scene on July 23, 2016.

ExifTool Version Number : 11.20

File Name : RRL_2432.JPG
Directory : .
File Size : 9.7 MB
File Modification Date/Time : 2019:04:28 10:57:06+01:00
File Access Date/Time : 2019:05:20 22:39:16+01:00
File Inode Change Date/Time : 2019:05:20 22:39:14+01:00
File Permissions : rwxr-xr-x
File Type : JPEG
File Type Extension : jpg
MIME Type : image/jpeg
Exif Byte Order : Little-endian (Intel, II)
Make : Canon
Camera Model Name : Canon EOS-1D X
Orientation : Horizontal (normal)
X Resolution : 72
Y Resolution : 72
Resolution Unit : inches
Modify Date : 2016:07:23 01:29:36
Y Cb Cr Positioning : Co-sited
Exposure Time : 1/320
F Number : 3.2
Exposure Program : Shutter speed priority AE
ISO : 25600
Sensitivity Type : Recommended Exposure Index
Recommended Exposure Index : 25600
Exif Version : 0230
Date/Time Original : 2016:07:23 01:29:36
Create Date : 2016:07:23 01:29:36

Figure 1. Portion of the technical metadata of the original Pieta photo retrieved through Exiftool

At the time of taking the photo, Lerma was a staff photographer of Inquirer hence, technically, *Pieta* is owned by Inquirer. The Siaron crime scene is one of the many similar crime scenes in 2016 with dead bodies and placards denouncing the dead as illegal drug users. The similitude of all these photographs was not a coincidence. The scenes were staged in order to intensify the message that these deaths wanted to convey. Rodrigo Duterte's presidential campaign promised the eradication of the illegal drug trade and he was fulfilling his pledge by sanctioning the police to conduct the drug war campaign. The ownership and creative direction of the *Pieta* was not that of the photographer. Instead, Lerma and his colleagues who reported to duty were instrumentalized in the transmission of the state message warning the unproductive sectors of society.

The virality of *Pieta* refers to two parts—the initial and the organic. In their research on virals, Karine Nahon and Jeff Hemsley (2013) identified virality as the sum of social aspects of sharing the information, its speed, and reach in terms of number of spectators and distance that the information travelled. The virality of *Pieta* was established during its initial widespread circulation within the extensive media network of Inquirer, a newspaper of record with a reach of 54 million people. A highly provocative newsworthy image, it viscerally engaged the public to the horrors of the ongoing impunity of the drug war. However, what this study was interested in was the *organic* virality of the *Pieta*, pertaining to the relational fabric that sustained its visibility after it firmly established its movement online. After the

preliminary momentum, a viral settles to a steady expansion before the onset of its decay or slow disappearance. In the intermediate state before its decay, the viral has shed its shock effect opening it to a multitude of reflective and reactive interpretations.

In a viral digital photograph, technical metadata takes the form of information about the webpages that uploaded and/or shared the image—including the URL, IP address, last date modified, among others. Using the Google Image search engine primarily, augmented by Google, Facebook, and Twitter search engines, the researcher manually identified websites and social media platforms that shared the *Pieta* photo. These website URLs were then run through an algorithm that scraped the photo URL of the uploaded *Pieta* and yielded the metadata of the uploaded *Pieta*, particularly the "Date Modified" information, which indicates when the photo was uploaded online (*Figure 3*). The photo URLs were then rearranged chronologically. The research gathered a sampling of 132 postings—or the extent in archival terms—of *Pieta* in various websites from its first its upload in July 23, 2016 to May 29, 2019. The sampling is not in any way comprehensive but indicative. A chronological arrangement of the trajectory of the viral image in webspace through time revealed the forces that maintained the visibility of *Pieta* for more or less three years.

```
--2019-05-29 09:56:42-- https://pbs.twimg.com/media/Cqk0pvlUMAABMQj.jpg
Resolving pbs.twimg.com (pbs.twimg.com)... 93.184.220.70,
2606:2800:134:1a0d:1429:742:782:b6
Connecting to pbs.twimg.com (pbs.twimg.com)|93.184.220.70|:443... connected.
HTTP request sent, awaiting response...
HTTP/1.1 200 OK
Accept-Ranges: bytes
access-control-allow-origin: *
access-control-expose-headers: Content-Length
cache-control: max-age=604800, must-revalidate
Content-Type: image/jpeg
Date: Wed, 29 May 2019 08:50:52 GMT
Last-Modified: Tue, 23 Aug 2016 21:45:46 GMT
Server: ECS (lcy/1D1E)
strict-transport-security: max-age=631138519
surrogate-key: media media/bucket/3 media/768203103195639808
X-Cache: HIT
x-connection-hash: 959f781cef86abd3156a4d741b34bc3b
x-content-type-options: nosniff
x-response-time: 272
Content-Length: 154340
Length: 154340 (151K) [image/jpeg]
150K 100% 1378G=0.02s
2019-05-29 09:56:42 (7.11 MB/s) -
Modification date of file = (2016, 8, 23, 21, 45, 46, 0, 1, 0)
```

Figure 3. Metadata of a copy of Pieta uploaded in Twitter scraped through Beautiful Soup script

In 2016, the initial postings of the *Pieta* were made in official local and international news outfit websites and their social media platforms. This was followed by reiterations in religious and personal blogs and websites and on Facebook. During the first year of its visibility, the *Pieta* was mostly reposted along with messages of moral outrage over the killings relating to the religious undertones of the *Pieta*. Some pro-administration supporters

and citizens living in and outside the country also posted it to commend Duterte's swift action on perceived criminal activities. The plurality of the meanings attached to the *Pieta* mirrored the multiplicities within the wide coverage of the liberal news media circuit.

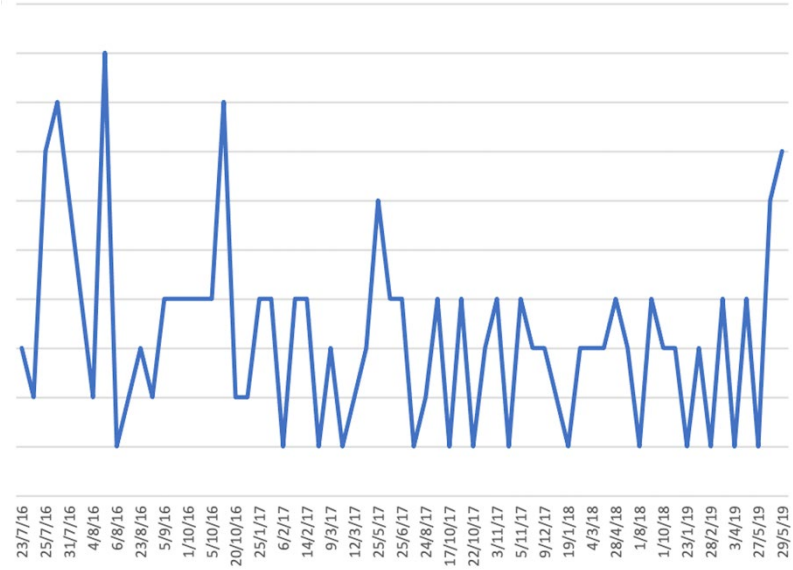


Figure 4. Graph of Pieta virality from 2016 to 2019.

In the virality graph of the *Pieta* (*Figure 4*), its visibility went down from its initial release in 2016 and rose dramatically in 2017. Around this time, the images of carefully curated bloody tableaus of the "war on drugs" slowly came to an end, in part due to the pushback by sectors of civil society. Most of the postings of the *Pieta* in 2017 were made in Twitter by individuals. In the researcher's interview with Lerma in 2019, he recounted:

> We were covering the stories in the hopes of stopping this violent Drug War. But it wasn't. Actually, it became more like a fuel for the president. He did not stop. Then it came to a point that called for (state) accountability.

The second rise of the *Pieta*'s visibility, after its initial circulation, saw an organic collective digital labour authenticating the viral photograph by identifying Lerma as the photographer. In 2017, Lerma resigned from his post as a newspaper photojournalist to become a freelance photojournalist. He then actively participated in the campaign against the Philippine drug war and invitations to his talks and interviews were posted by participants and organizers in Twitter along with the *Pieta*, to identify his authority. As stated, Lerma does not own the *Pieta*. What he imbued to the viral photograph was the reliability of his testimony as witness/photographer and advocate. The effectivity of the campaign efforts against the drug war was such that it was promptly countered by the digital labour of state-sponsored disinformation machinery in the same year. In Facebook, postings of the *Pieta* were made to channel accountability to drug syndicates and not the police. A pro-administration website of the The Manila Times, headed by Duterte supporter Dante Arevalo Ang, posted the *Pieta* to argue on the veracity of its virality.

The visibility of the *Pieta* slightly slumped in 2018 and climbed again in 2019. Its postings in 2018 showed more international news outfits reporting about the Philippine "war on drugs" story, a development brought on by the International Criminal Court launching a preliminary examination into the human rights violations of Duterte's drug crackdown (International Criminal Court). Noticeably, the individual Twitter posts went down as the Nightcrawlers, along with human rights advocacy groups, focused on gathering material

evidences to meet the stringent requirements of the ICC—including authenticated photographs, crime scene artifacts, and video interviews. In 2019, the withdrawal of the Philippines from the ICC relaunched the visibility of the *Pieta* in social media and local and international news websites as Lerma and fellow advocates as well as local advocacy groups engaged in talks to support the ICC investigation of the Duterte administration's impunity (Supreme Court of the Philippines, 2021).

Fundamentally, it was the collective proactivity that sustained the movement of the *Pieta*. Its organic virality rhythm followed the actions of the advocates and the sympathetic public. The *Pieta* initially circulated as content produced for and by the mainstream media but, upon the author's decision to join the ranks calling for state accountability, the persistence of its visibility was in due course powered by aligning with a larger campaign that sees the drug war as a class war—a war against the poor (Wells, 2017; Pangilinan et al. 2020). The specific space inhabited by the targeted group is a historically constructed vulnerability. The Filipino urban poor are mostly rural migrants seeking better pastures or urban dwellers dislocated by resettlement programs and urbanization (Constantino-David and Ofelia Regala-Angcangco, 1975). They converged in the slums where the killings are most dense, whose very heterogeneity was exploited by the Duterte administration that appealed to the mistrust of fellow Filipinos through its campaign against illegal drugs—a trade that flourished in the slums as a function of maximizing the capacity of the body to endure day and night shifts in multiple jobs to make ends meet.

This study concludes that the authenticity of *Pieta* as a viral digital photograph is rooted in the country's long history of class struggle. Drawing on the works of Heather MacNeil, Bonnie Mak, and Luciana Duranti, Kastenhofer elaborated on the complexities of archival authenticity:

> The authenticity of a record is not just presumed because of the records it is archived with, but because of the alleged trustworthiness of the archive as a whole. The archive is considered trustworthy by users, and this trust extends to the authenticity of its entire holdings. Therefore, records in the archive are held to be authentic because the archive as an institution lends them authenticity (2015, p. 167).

The question of trustworthiness, in the case of the *Pieta*, is fielded at the revolutionary perspective of history as an archive. Such politicization--anchored in what Benjamin called "the wholistic perspective of history that is dialectical" (2008, p. 263)--cannot be quantified nor verified in neoliberal standards-based assessment instruments that recognize only short-term outcomes. Ultimately, the contribution of the critical information literacy, through the disciplines of documentary and archives, are cognitive tools to necessarily complicate fact-checking campaigns against disinformation, as the menace mutates further in the coming years to serve the interests of the few who have access to technology, capital, and political power. The true danger of disinformation lies not in the fake news it generates but in the historical contexts it seeks to erase.

Vitality Beyond the Virtual: A Call to Action

Focus is a core competency in the information era. The capacity to see movements as through CIL in the technological landscape is a critical technical skill that requires an understanding of *what needs to be watched,* as well as a creative skill, as it entails strategizing how to relay the story. This skill is the *practice of care*. Technology philosopher Yuk Hui posited an alternative possibility of a technological culture beyond the current extractive informational capitalism by rethinking archival as a practice of care. An awareness that control can be had in the virtual world starts with a deliberate understanding that we can be archivists of our data and not just users whose digital labour is harnessed. In Hui's "Archivist Manifesto"

(2013), he proposed for individuals, as archivists, to regain the knowledge and skills of organising data and digital objects, and in turn, recoup the control appropriated by alienating Internet service providers. Hui's idea of care, that emphasized the "links between objects and archives," relates to a notion of care that Azoulay saw as crucial in understanding the dynamics of the covenant among the image and its spectators (2013, p. 7). Watching the photograph is a transformative act of "caring for its sense" (Azoulay, 2008, p. 25).

Watching the viral digital photograph, on the other hand, creates a database from this practice of care. And this practice of care transcends platforms. It is important to note that the virality information gathered for the research did not end with its reiterations online. Appropriation of the viral usually turns it into a meme (Shifman, 2013). The viral status of the *Pieta* did not translate it into one. As a politicized viral image, the gravity it carried moved directly from the virtual straight to the physical space after its decay. Its appropriation happened offline and in place of meme was the politicized image stabilized as protest art. In 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, a Philippine political art collective, Panday Sining Makati, appropriated the *Pieta* by painting it as a graffiti on a street wall, calling attention to the extrajudicial killings that only intensified under Duterte's militarized response to a health crisis. In 2023, sculptor Julie Lluch Dalena "tattooed" painted images of the *Pieta* on her sculptures of body parts to remind the spectators of the unceasing impunity despite and because of unrelenting crises brought by the pandemic and a newly instated regime under the son of the deposed dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr.

In 2019, along with the first draft of this essay was produced a multimedia installation about the *Pieta* as a graduate requirement in UK. An interactive work, it asked the public to weave the canvasses printed with the incomplete image of *Pieta* by putting physical lines to parts among the canvasses. The documentary installation endeavoured to be illustrative of the study that followed the narrative of an image through CIL. Mostly an exercise in data visualization, the project visualized CIL through the three-dimensional recreation of the *Pieta*. The 12 photos provided by Lerma, along with other Siaron crime scene photos found online, were fed to Regard3D software, an open source structure-from-motion or photogrammetry program that can create 3D models through mapping a series of photographs taken from different viewpoints.For the 3D recreation of the Siaron crime scene, the photo set underwent through six steps in the 3D software. First, (1) it employed homography or the mapping between image pairs within the set. For this particular software, homography was done through the A-KAZE algorithm that identified image keypoints. Second, another algorithm, the LIOP (Local Intensity Order Pattern), located each keypoint with a descriptor.These two algorithms established the similarities between images, literally visualized as lines that connect the keypoints between image pairs (*Figure 5*).

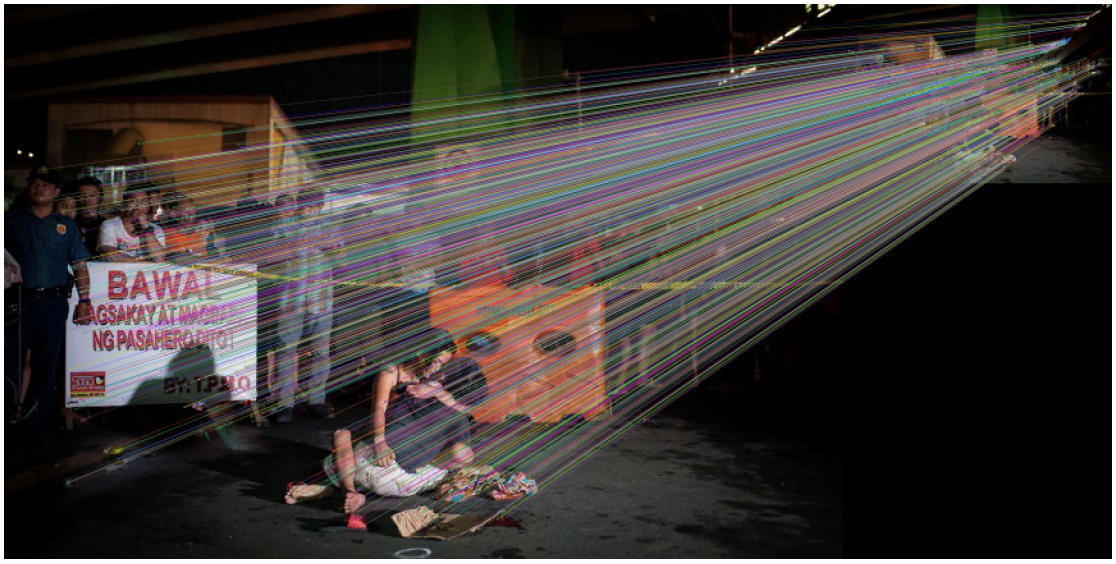


Figure 5. Homography between Pieta and image pair.

The third step was the (3) tracking of connections among image pairs. From the correlations of all image pairs, the application then moved on to the fourth step which was the (4) triangulation of the positions of the matched objects in space. From this positioning of all matches, the (5) point cloud was generated showing a semblance of the three-dimensional recreation of the photograph (*Figure 6*). The last step or the (6) "surface generation" was not done for the project.

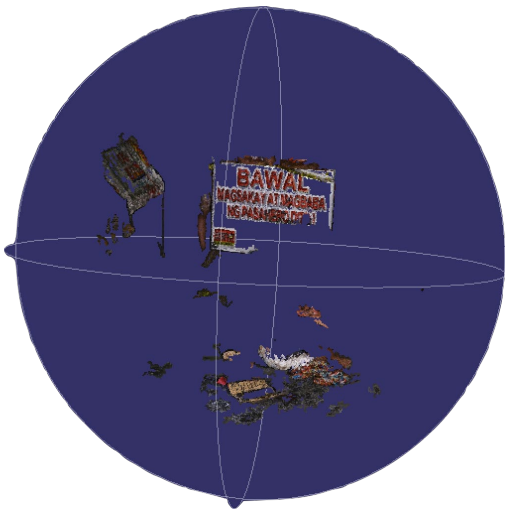


Figure 6. 3D reconstruction of Pieta at point cloud stage.

The limitations of the given *Pieta* photo set include: (1) low-light conditions and (2) sparse photo quantity. Given its inadequacies, the A-KAZE algorithm was only mainly able to identify geometrical lines, points and angles such as the letters in signages, placard, and the stripes of the cloth at the foot of the weeping woman. The 3D-mapped crime scene was then returned to the 2D planar form. The *Pieta* photo and its image pair, identified and matched by the software, were manipulated in Photoshop to remove all the elements that the Regard3D

software was not able to map. This image pair was printed in separate canvases of varying sizes (*Figure 7*).



Figure 7. Partially-mapped 3D reconstruction of Pieta and image pair in planar form

The final documentary installation contained: the partially-mapped image pair of the 3D reconstruction of *Pieta*, each printed on a canvas; and a video of scrolling virality metadata and 3D reconstruction metadata.

By showing the reconstruction of the movement of a viral digital photograph through its technical metadata parallel to its 3D reconstruction technical metadata, the documentary installation invited speculative inquiry into how iterations of the *Pieta* online can also yield tangible volume. How can the social engagement of a politicized viral be reconstructed as a volumized monad of care? Each iteration of the viral photo contains incremental variations of a variable e.g. GPS location, IP address, timestamp, et al. Following the logic of photogrammetry 3D reconstruction paradigm—where similarities can be mapped and connected, volume from the movement of a viral image can also be triangulated and constructed. The documentary installation invited the audience to see a technological form of the CIL that embodies the affective labor of digital laborers. Specifically, it invited the audience to physically and communally perform homography between the *Pieta* image pair canvasses. Through the meticulous act of weaving to connect keypoints between the *Pieta* image pair where the organic human shapes were rendered null by the software, the practice of care in archival was performed and embodied as a social gesture.

Proactive collective digital labor and activist engagement hold great transformative potential. Neither a result of social media algorithms nor media framings, watching the *Pieta* in this study yielded a counter-narrative that was marshalled through a deliberate curation of actions. Indeed, in an era dominated by disinformation, artificial intelligence, invisible digital labor and visual pollution, *watching the photograph* is an archival intervention that becomes an act of care and resistance.

As a methodology, CIL overcomes the limitations of traditional research paradigms in analyzing images in an era of visual saturation, hyper-connectivity, and AI-driven manipulation. Rather than focusing solely on interpretation or exchange value, it examines the movement of images—their circulation, transformation, and the narratives they generate. This emphasis on activity of the image across platforms highlights its narrativity that is crucial for critically interrogating the socio-political structures that shape the production, dissemination, and manipulation of information. Likewise, CIL contributes to the fact-checking paradigm for combatting disinformation by foregrounding the role of power, technology, and historical struggle in shaping digital narratives. As such, CIL is an open invitation for experts from various disciplines to participate in expanding its lexicon to adequately capture, define and understand various multimodal networked digital systems phenomena.

As authoritarian regimes and corporate-controlled digital platforms continue to shape information landscapes, the imperative is clear: neutrality is no longer an option. The archive that authenticates *Pieta* is not a static repository but an evolving battleground of historical and political struggles. To sustain the vitality of the protracted fight for truth and justice, we must not only consume information critically but actively curate, preserve, and mobilize knowledge. Watching the photograph is not just an act of seeing—it is a commitment to interrogating power and resisting the architectures of digital and social control.

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The Presentation and Dissemination of Shanxi Merchant Culture through Dance in "See Pingyao Again"

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Abstract

"See Pingyao Again" is a large-scale immersive situational experience drama that takes Shanxi merchant culture as its background and integrates dance, music, and visual arts to recreate the spirit of Shanxi merchants in the Qing Dynasty of China. This paper focuses on this drama and explores the role of dance in the presentation and dissemination of Shanxi merchant culture, analyzing how it presents the values of integrity and righteousness, as well as the sense of family and country of Shanxi merchants through dance segments, body language, costumes, props, and spatial interaction. In addition, the study also combines the characteristics of immersive performances and, through on-site observation and interviews, analyzes how audiences accept and understand Shanxi merchant culture under the free-wandering viewing mode. This research focuses on the practical significance of dance in the integration of culture and tourism and the revival of local culture, and explores its cultural dissemination value, providing a new perspective for modern cultural communication and inheritance.

Key words: Shanxi Merchant Culture, See Pingyao Again, immersive drama, cultural dissemination

Introduction

As one of the most influential business groups in China during the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Shanxi merchants, with their outstanding business acumen, rigorous business philosophy, and unique cultural values, set a model for ancient Chinese commerce. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Shanxi merchants were renowned throughout the world for their "great wealth and excellent business acumen", and their banking houses once achieved the feat of "connecting the world and benefiting all regions" (Hu & Wang, 2022).Their spirit of "emphasizing both righteousness and profit" is the core of Shanxi's regional culture and a microcosm of traditional Chinese business ethics, and has become an important part of Chinese traditional culture. Pingyao Ancient City, a representative of the commercial culture and residents' life in the Ming and Qing dynasties in Shanxi tourism, integrates the culture of draft banks, architecture, cuisine, residences, Buddhism, and officialdom (Lv & Huang, 2008). It is rich in tourism resources and has profound cultural connotations. As a World Heritage Site, Pingyao Ancient City preserves historical fragments, but its static architectural display fails to evoke emotional resonance from visitors.

Under the background of cultural and tourism development, Director Wang Caoguo's "See Pingyao Again " was born in 2013. This drama is based on the real stories of the Qing Dynasty in Pingyao, combined with indoor scenario experiences, and showcases the cultural characteristics of Shanxi's Jin merchants. "See Pingyao Again" is a story about the tickethouse owner Zhao Yishuo who risked his life to save others. (The story takes place during the October Revolution of Russian culture. Businessman Wang suffered losses and his family was destroyed due to the turmoil. Against this backdrop, the head of the tickethouse in Pingyao, Zhao Yishuo, hired 232 bodyguards to rescue Wang's young son. He spent all his wealth and it took 7 years to rescue the only bloodline of the Wang family. A total of 233 people, including him, unfortunately died on the way.) (Wang, 2015).The entire story is in sync with the concepts of loyalty and integrity, which are the core values of Chinese virtues, and has extremely high

cultural appreciation and artistic value (Li, 2022). "Escorts' Death-Pledge Cleansing Ritual", "Selection of Wives in Zhao Family", "Sending Off", "Return to Hometown", "Crossing Dialogue", "Searching for Roots", "Mian Wu (Chinese Noodle Dance)"are the highlights of this drama, exploring virtues and justice, bloodline and inheritance, and are the "core" and "soul" that resonate with the audience (Kong & Liu, 2024). The entire play contains story performances uch as , etc., which are both story-based and enjoyable. The play adopts the "walking viewing" model, allowing the audience to participate in the historical scenario and freely move through scenes such as the streets of Pingyao in the Qing Dynasty, Zhao Family's courtyard, the Escorts' Office，and ancestral halls，etc. Through narration，it elevates local memories to cultural identity，driving the local tourism economy and the industrialization of handicrafts. It marks the transformation of cultural narration from "viewing" to "experiencing"，and is a representative new form of "immersive tourism". Since its premiere on February 18, 2013, the annual revenue has steadily increased. In 2017, 2018, and 2019, the ticket revenue exceeded one billion yuan consecutively. On August 13, 2023, the play achieved an annual box office of over one billion yuan in just 190 days, setting a new record. From its debut until the end of 2023, the total number of performances reached over 7,100, and the audience reached nearly 5 million. The performance revenue exceeded 820 million yuan. In 2020, "See Pingyao Again" ranked among the top ten "Chinese tourism performance independent theater series" in terms of box office revenue, topping the list. In 2023, "See Pingyao Again" ranked first among the 20 immersive cultural and tourism new forms demonstration cases released by the Development and Industry Department of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Kong & Liu, 2024).In 2025, it was selected as one of the first "Demonstration Cases for Protecting and Promoting Cultural Diversity in the Digital Environment" by the UNESCO International Center for Creativity and Sustainable Development.

The immersive experience created by the tourism performance project "See Pingyao Again" not only conveys emotional messages through the senses of hearing and vision, but also promotes tourists' deep identification with the local culture (Zhang, 2024)."See Pingyao Again" is rooted in the historical and cultural context of Pingyao and the demands of cultural tourism. By replicating the space of Shanxi merchants, integrating intangible cultural heritage and modern technology, it possesses both artistic innovation and cultural inheritance value. The dance in the play is a key cultural communication carrier. It goes beyond mere performance, Transform the abstract spirit of the Jin merchants and historical scenes into a powerful visual ritual.The body language, composition, and rhythm of the dance itself become the core means of conveying cultural information. These meticulously designed segments, with their highly impactful visual expressions, directly touch the heart, effectively compensating for the lack of emotional evocation in static heritage, making profound cultural connotations perceptible, understandable, and resonant. This greatly enhances the depth and breadth of cultural communication and is the key artistic language that activates the vitality of Shanxi merchants' culture in this play.

Research objective

This article aims to analyze the dance design in "See Pingyao Again", and explore how it effectively presents the core spirit of the Shanxi merchants' culture, as well as how the multi-sensory interaction in the immersive space enhances the effectiveness of cultural dissemination. It reveals the unique value of dance in the revitalization of intangible cultural heritage, and provides methodological references for the innovative expression of traditional culture in the context of cultural tourism integration.

Research Methodology

Literature analysis method: By systematically reviewing the classics of Jin merchants' culture, the theories of dance art, and the relevant research literature on "See Pingyao Again", a corresponding framework linking dance symbols with the connotations of Jin merchants' culture was established, and the theoretical basis and innovative paths for cultural translation were clarified.

Observation method: During three on-site performances, the focus was on dance movements, costumes and props, spatial arrangement, and audience behavior, to analyze their cultural expressive functions.

Interview method: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the audience to analyze the cultural logic of the dance creation.

Research Results

1"Return to Hometown": The Spirit of "Trustworthiness、Family" of the Shanxi Merchants

1.1The landmark of the "Pingyao Ancient City" family

Pingyao Ancient City is located in the central part of Shanxi Province. It is the most intact ancient county town in China and its related events can be traced back to 823 BC. Based on this calculation, Pingyao Ancient City has a long history of at least over 2,800 years since its establishment (Yang, 2020).Pingyao Ancient City was listed as one of the second batch of historical and cultural cities in China in 1986. Through the joint efforts of various knowledgeable individuals and the government, it was successfully included in the "World Cultural Heritage List" by UNESCO in 1997. World Cultural Heritage is the highest form of cultural protection and inheritancex (Yang, 2020).The prosperity of Pingyao Ancient City was inseparable from the economic development driven by the rise of the Shanxi merchants (Guo, 2024). And Pingyao itself is an important birthplace and symbol of Shanxi merchant culture.In the "Return to Hometown" dance segment of "See Pingyao Again", the stage presentation form breaks through tradition and creates a vertical performance area resembling the city wall of Pingyao (as shown in the following Figure 1). The dancers move through the vertical surface with anti-gravity movements, accompanied by the wall projection of the silhouette of Pingyao City, creating a visual space where reality and illusion coexist, making the homeland a dual destination of both geography and spirit.



Figure a: Ruins of Pingyao Ancient City



Figure b: Stage design in the play

Figure 1: The Stage of "Return of the Soul to Its Homeland"（a,b）

1.2 Return of the Soul and Spirit: The Manifestation of the Multiple Core Values of the Jin merchants

The shocking stage of the dart master's soul returning to his hometown(as shown in the following Figure 1.2-1) against the current conveys multiple core values of Jin merchants: first, the business ethics of "trust and righteousness is higher than life". Trustworthiness is to

emphasize commitment, trustworthiness and contract; righteousness is to "follow only righteousness" in business activities. Honesty is the foundation of the body, the foundation of the country, but also the foundation of the business (Song, 2017).The collective sacrifice of the dart masters in exchange for the continuation of the bloodline pushes "a promise is worth a thousand words" to the extreme, revealing the business ethics of Jin merchants who guard their promises with their lives. Secondly, the concept of "family business is the same" of local clans. The soul's obsession with returning to the homeland profoundly(as shown in the following Figure 1.2-2) reflects the ultimate pursuit of "returning to the roots(as shown in the following Figure 1.2-3) " and "continuity of the bloodline", and demonstrates the absolute loyalty to the family and the homeland. Thirdly, the "group-oriented" spirit of sacrifice. Individual life in the "righteousness" and "family" in front of the sublimation of the annihilation, highlighting the culture of the Jin merchants personal values subordinate to the interests of the group (the family, the merchant gangs), and its sense of exaltation from the unconditional assumption of collective responsibility.



1.2-1



1.2-2



1.2-3

1.3 Audience Acceptance and Understanding

Audience feedback clearly shows that the plot of "Soul Returning to the Hometown", with its strong emotional impact, shockingly visualizes the core values of Jin merchants: "Faith and Righteousness as the foundation", "Group commitment and spirit of sacrifice". The core values of the Jin merchants are "faith-based" and "group commitment and spirit of sacrifice". The audience is not only impressed by its tragic aesthetics, but also deeply understands the spiritual codes that underpin the legend of the Jin merchants, and triggers thoughts on traditional values and modern significance. The audience was not only impressed by its tragic aesthetics, but also deeply understood the spiritual codes that supported the legend of the Jin merchants and triggered thoughts on traditional values and modern meaning. As the audience exclaimed, "It's so shocking! Those 'souls' want to go back to Pingyao even after they die...It makes me realize that for Jin merchants, it is not simply doing business, but carving 'commitment' and 'hometown' into their bones. ' engraved into their bones. " It reveals that the greatness of Jin merchants lies not only in their wealth, but also in the commitment practiced with their lives and their eternal adherence to their roots.

2. "Wife Selection": The Claims of Jin Merchants for "Bloodline Inheritance"

The "Wife Selection" segment in "Seeing Pingyao Again" is a performance that combines ritualized dance with aesthetic and depressing performances, deeply revealing the complexity and tragedy of women's destiny under the traditional clan system.

2.1 Shanxi Jinshang Compound

Jin merchant compounds are the material carriers of Jin merchant culture, such as the Qiao Family Compound and the Wang Family Compound, which witnessed the splendor of

Jin merchants. Its architecture is magnificent, neatly laid out, rich and elegant, and what comes to the eye is often the tall gates, magnificent (Song, 2017), The courtyard as a unit reflects the business wisdom and family cohesion of Jin merchants. The clip of "choosing a wife" not only reflects the importance of Jin merchant culture to the continuation of the family, but also reflects the fact that the ancestral hall in the Jin merchant compound is the core of the family's spirit, while the "choosing a wife" ceremony is to select a woman who is able to continue the flame for the family. The stage space is set against the backdrop of the Jinshang compound, with high walls, deep courtyards and carved doors and windows (as shown in the following Figure 2.1)creating a closed family space and reinforcing the oppressive feeling of the clan system. The selection process for the young girls is to find "virtuous" women who can take on this important role. Through this ritual, Jin culture links the value of women to the continuation of the family line.



Figure c: Shanxi Jinshang Compound



Figure d:the "Wife Selection" Stage

Figure 2.1:Design of the "Wife Selection" stage(c, d)

2.2Shanxi Jin Merchant"Wife Selection": A Ritual of Objectifying Women

The plot showcases the "bloodline continuation" aspiration in Shanxi Jin Merchant culture through a highly ritualized examination of the female body (systematic reviews of feet, palms, waist, hips, and skin， as shown in the following Figure2.2-1). It presents the female bodies nakedly, highlighting the legitimacy of Zhao Yishuo's "heroic act" through the "city-wide offering of women" scene. The female sacrifice is constructed as a sacrifice to the male heroism ("My child has been born. It doesn't matter if I die now."as shown in the following Figure2.2-2) in the play. The big red lanterns on the stage symbolize the fruits of Shanxi Jin Merchant hard work, perseverance, and diligence, as well as the Proud and honored of Shanxi Jin Merchant ability to connect and unite the world (Lin, 2020).This dazzling "red" carries the heavy expectations of the family's heritage. Behind it lies the selection and utilization of women's value through the "Wife Selection" ceremony - young girls are expected to become the carriers of fertility who meet the standards of "virtue", in order to fulfill the responsibility of continuing the family line. This is similar to the imagery of red (such as "red lanterns" and "red curtains") in Zhang Yimou's "The Red Lantern Hanging High", which metaphorically represents the suppression of desire and the emotional cold violence imposed by the feudal system (Quan, 2021).Under the name of the "great righteousness" of family inheritance, the individual lives and choice rights of women are forced to give way to the continuation of the clan, and their seemingly noble "sacrifice" is actually an invisible oppression imposed by the patriarchal structure. It reveals that the "great righteousness" of the continuation of the clan in the glorious history of the Shanxi merchants is actually based on the suppression of the subjectivity and value of women.



Figure2.2-1S:creening process



Figure2.2-2:The chosen heroine

2.3 Conflict Tension in Artistic Expression

The "Wife Selection" plot is like a prism, reflecting the key tensions in the study of Shanxi Jin merchants' culture: beneath the collectiveistic aura of the clan, there lies an ethical underside that sacrifices the female subject. Viewers, from the perspective of "family members", confront the selection process directly and get trapped in an ethical dilemma. Many middle-aged and elderly viewers regard it as "historical truth ('reproducing the family line, women have a hard life'), acknowledging the patriarchal logic but weakening the criticism; young people, especially women, strongly question its exploitative nature. They criticize the "like selecting a princess" aspect of the "romanticized difficult childbirth", and criticize its replication rather than deconstruction of the feudal gaze, exposing the artist's lack of sensitivity. The division of the audience confirms the crisis of this historical narrative in the contemporary era - when art as artistic expression fails to critically distance itself from feudal decadence, even if it attempts to "restore history", it actually reinforces the reproduction of patriarchal culture. This forces researchers to ask: Should we promote the traditional commercial civilization, implicitly accepting its gender oppression genes? The controversy itself has revealed the ethical questioning that cannot be avoided in the modernization of Jin merchant culture.

3 "Escorts' Death-Pledge Cleansing Ritual": The Core of the "Faith and Loyalty" Spirit of the Shanxi Merchants

The "Escorts' Death-Pledge Cleansing Ritual"See Again Pingyao" profoundly interprets the core of the "Faith and Loyalty" spirit in Shanxi merchant culture. In this dramatic scene, Pingyao escorts were in a specific historical situation and were entrusted with the mission of escorting the descendants of the Wang family back to Pingyao from Tsarist Russia. Knowing that this journey was fraught with many risks and that only the youngest member of the Wang family survived in the end， they still went forward without hesitation. Through this "bathing" action， it shows the love for life and the determination to fulfill the mission that the Pingyao escorts smen had before sacrificing their lives.

3.1 Omnidirectional Stage Space

The omni-directional stage space concretizes the ethical principles of the Jin merchants centered around the character "code of brotherhood"（as shown in the following Figure3.1-1）. The dancers perform within transparent containers（as shown in the following Figure3.1-2）. The effects of fog and light columns enhance the sense of ceremony. The

audience looks down at the Escorts' men, as if witnessing a sacred ritual， directly facing the Escorts' men's awareness of life and death and their spirit of sacrifice， and deeply immersed in the core of Jin merchant culture.



Figure 3.1-1:code of brotherhood



Figure 3.1.-2:transparent containers

3.2 "Spiritual Purification through Water"

In "See Pingyao Again ", water is endowed with the symbolic meaning of purification and fate transformation. The Escorts men achieve spiritual elevation through their interaction with water. They either pour water over their bodies，splash water（as shown in the following Figure3.2），or jump into the water holding a ladle. The movements vary but all carry profound meanings. The form of water - from pouring to submerging - progresses gradually， reflecting the spiritual transformation of the Escorts men from individual purification to collective oath-taking. This showcases the admiration of the Shanxi Jin merchants for purity and loyalty. The prayer gesture further demonstrates their reverence and devotion to the unknown fate，reflecting the ethical core of the Jin merchants， "keeping their promises with their lives".





Figure 3.3

3.3 Audience Reception and Understanding

The audience feedback reveals that this plot is presented in a shocking, ritualistic manner (with water mist, light and shadow, and a bird's-eye view), concretizing the concepts of "living up to one's word with one's life", "responsibility as a mountain", and "the dignity of facing death with a positive attitude" of the Jin merchants. The audience witnessed the Escorts men calmly cleansing themselves and making solemn oaths to die，and was deeply moved by their tragic aesthetics and spiritual strength： "Watching them pour water a ladleful of water at a time... It's clearly using the cleanest bodies to fulfill the inevitable death agreement！ 'Faith and Integrity' is a hard bone engraved in the bones!" This immersive

experience enables the audience to transcend history and understand the foundation of the Jin merchants' great achievements： loyalty above life， collective responsibility for the mission， and reverence for life and commitment. Through strong resonance,elevating regional ethics to universal faith and responsibility spirit,becoming the most profound and unforgettable carrier for spreading the culture of the Jin merchants. It makes people remember that the foundation of the Shanxi Jin merchant legend lies in writing the heavy "Faith and Integrity" with their flesh and blood.

4. "Toothmark Farewell" - Private Affection and Loyalty

In the "Toothmark Farewell" dance segment of "See Pingyao Again", the toothmarks represent trust and contracts, vividly interpreting the trustworthiness and emotional depth of the Shanxi merchant culture. This dance segment, through unique artistic expression, showcases the interweaving of loyalty and emotions in the Shanxi merchant culture, infusing it with human warmth.

4.1 "Retention" and "Rejection" of the Body

In the "Toothmark Farewell" segment of "See Pingyao Again", the woman uses a strong action of biting onto the man's body to "imprint" her emotions and feelings, attempting to engrave them onto his body as a memory carrier. The man's resisting movement symbolizes his commitment to his mission. The two forms a sharp physical confrontation, revealing the inner conflict of "having to leave" and "not wanting to part". The man presents a resisting posture (as shown in Figure 4.1), not merely a physical resistance, but symbolizing his departure for the mission. The woman's act of biting deep tooth marks on the man's shoulder and neck transcends simple emotional expression. The bite marks symbolize the blood and flesh-bound vow, leaving the marks as a commitment to "return to the hometown". This painful memory confronts the pain of parting with physical pain, converting emotions into touchable scars. The "imprint of home" is deeply rooted in the hearts of every Jin merchant.



Figure 4.1

4.2 The Interweaving of Loyalty and Emotion

Tooth marks, as a special kind of "body inscription", carry significant cultural symbolic meaning. In the culture of Shanxi merchants, loyalty and life contracts are among the core values, and tooth marks can be regarded as a symbol of a contract. This dance segment reveals the internal conflict between the Shanxi merchant culture's obsession with "returning to one's roots" and its essence of commercial expansion. The Escorts men fulfilled their promises with their lives， and the woman left her tooth mark， which is like leaving a contract of emotion and responsibility, embodying the two-way sacrifice of loyalty in the Shanxi merchant culture. Granting women the historical writing rights of "using blood instead of ink" showcases the emotions and sacrifices of women in the history of the Jin merchants.

4.3 Audience Reception and Understanding

The "Toothmark Farewell" dance segment, with its highly charged "body engraving", shocks the audience. Witnessing the physical confrontation between the woman biting her shoulder and neck and the man struggling to break free in pain, it vividly showcases the tension between "not wanting to part" and "having to go". The audience resonated strongly: "The toothmark is so painful! It's like carving 'I must come back alive' with flesh and blood!" This bite mark transcends personal feelings and rises to become the supreme symbol of the integrity and life contract of the Jin merchants. It is the ultimate conflict between the "root-seeking" obsession and the mission of the long journey. It is both the woman's "blood instead of ink" loyal vigilance and the man's "life as a promise" responsibility certificate. As the "return home vow" engraved in flesh and blood, it penetrates history in the most primitive and profound way, allowing the audience to deeply understand the two-way blood and flesh loyalty and sacrifice in the spirit of the Jin merchants, as well as the eternal imprint of the contract spirit.

5 "Mian Wu (Chinese Noodle Dance)": Food Culture

The noodles in Shanxi have a history of over 2,000 years and are hailed as the "root of world noodles". In Shanxi, noodles come in a wide variety, including hand-rolled noodles, cut noodles, torn noodles, pulled noodles, and knife-struck noodles, among many others (Gao, 2024). The diverse forms of Shanxi cuisine correspond to the adaptability of the Shanxi merchants who "travel far and wide". The dancers pay tribute to this "constant change yet unified spirit" through their dynamic movements. The "kneading, pulling, tugging, and cutting" processes in the production of noodles symbolize a spirit that goes far beyond the realm of food and becomes a physical manifestation of the spirit of the Shanxi merchants. The "noodle dance" segment in "Again, We See Pingyao" is inspired by the Shanxi cuisine culture. It transforms food into emotional symbols and weaves together themes of "homesickness", "bloodline inheritance", and "resilience of life" through poetic dance language.

5.1 Core Props

The core props in "Face Show", namely flour, long face cloths, and red silk, serve as typical carriers of the dietary culture of Jin region. They not only function as physical creative mediums but also become cultural codes that connect historical memories with collective identity. The laserized dough-making table breaks the physical boundaries and integrates modern technology. (As shown in Figure 5.1 below) The dancers hold the white long silk symbolizing noodles, artistically recreating the noodles. Every wanderer who has left their hometown has the most direct memory of their family and hometown cuisine. "Eating" is the most indispensable step in sustaining life and is inseparable from life itself (Guo, 2019). Its entwined and fluttering metaphor represents the "unbreakable" bond between the wanderer and his homeland. The red silk combines both hardness and softness (as shown in Figure 5.1-2), symbolizing the passionate veins of life and also aligning with the contractual spirit of the Shanxi merchants, who regarded red as a sign of trust. The superimposition of material props and symbols makes the "face performance" a condensed slice of the Shanxi merchant civilization and its emphasis on food and inheritance.



Figure 5.1-1

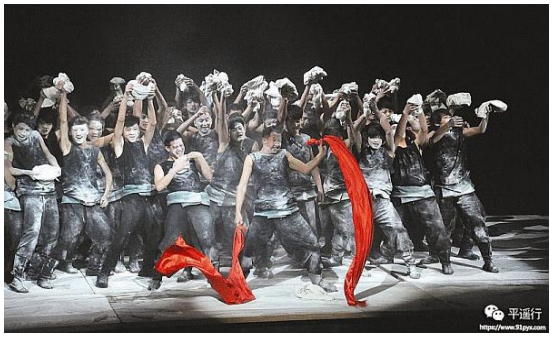


Figure 5.1-2

5.2 Narrative Nature of Dance Movements

The dance movement system presents a progressive logic from "technique imitation" to "spiritual metaphor". In the "Mixing Dough" section, the dancers wrap their arms around each other and overlap their palms, reconstructing the process of making dough; in the "Pulling Noodles" section, the body tension reaches its peak, with the waist twisting and the arms stretching forming the "entanglement - release" action pattern. The "bloodline network" woven by the group elevates the narrative of the movements, progressing from individual skills to collective memory. It reflects the spiritual struggle of the Shanxi Jin merchants between the commercial wave and the attachment to their homeland, making the dance a flowing cultural gene map, embodying the flexibility, adaptability and expansion spirit of the Jin merchants.

5.3 Audience Reception and Understanding

When the group of dancers intertwined and stretched in front of the laser and the table, forming a huge "web of life", the audience was all moved by their powerful vitality. As one audience member exclaimed: "The fluttering white silk made my eyes water! It was pulling the noodles, evoking the nostalgia of our hometown. It was weaving the network of roots that the Jin merchants couldn't escape even when they traveled far and wide!" This dance, through the most poetic body language, vividly presented on the stage the flexibility and unbreakable adaptability of the people of Shanxi, their ever-changing yet consistent survival wisdom, as well as the deep-rooted attachment to the homeland and the sense of responsibility. It enabled the audience to deeply understand: The legendary journey of the Jin merchants traveling far and wide, its source of power lies precisely in this life resilience integrated into daily meals and engraved into their bones - a bowl of noodles is half of the Jin merchant epic.

Conclusion

"See Pingyao Again" centers on dance as the core medium. Through highly symbolic body language, it transforms abstract ethical concepts such as "loyalty and integrity above all else", "family business being identical", and "fallen leaves returning to their roots" of the Shanxi merchants into a powerful visual ritual, effectively breaking through the emotional transmission barriers of static heritage. The immersive "walking viewing" mode reconstructs the role of the audience, enabling them to move from passive viewers to historical participants, deeply empathizing with the core spirit of the Shanxi merchants. The research also reveals the contemporary tension in cultural dissemination: for instance, the "selecting a wife" dance segment replicates the feudal gender power system, causing value division among the audience, highlighting the need to balance historical authenticity and critical recontextualization in the modernization of traditional culture. The "face show" uses innovative arrangements such as laser, table for making faces, and silk fabrics to transform dietary symbols into a spiritual totem of "flexible adaptation and constant change", verifying the methodological value of dance in cultural tourism integration - only by injecting cultural

genes into emotional and ritualized body narratives, making the body a flowing cultural container, can we achieve deep dissemination from knowledge transmission to value resonance, providing a creative paradigm for the revitalization of intangible cultural heritage.

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Sustainability in Ceramics: Exploring Waste Utilization and Community Engagement through Baravia Pottery and Workshop

Dyah Retno Fitriani

Abstract

The awareness of sustainable practices in the field of ceramics has grown significantly over the last decade, evidenced by a rising number of ceramic practitioners and institutions exploring material reuse and environmental responsibility. This study continues the author's previous research on ceramic waste reuse, including clay waste, glaze overspray, and glasswool insulation from kilns. The research integrates material experimentation and participatory design through the establishment of *Baravia Pottery and Workshop* in Yogyakarta. The studio functions not only as a production space but also as a pedagogical platform for sustainability-based ceramic practices, offering workshops and training modules to students and the broader community. Methodologically, the research follows a seven-stage approach combining experimental techniques and community engagement. The goal is to produce a replicable and inclusive model of sustainability in ceramics that supports environmental, educational, and economic dimensions. While results emphasize circular material use and collaborative learning, the study acknowledges the need for further quantification and long-term impact evaluation.

Keywords: sustainability, ceramic industry, waste utilization, material experimentation, community education

Purpose

Sustainability in ceramic art practices has emerged as a major area of focus over the past decade (Ceramic Arts Network, 2022a). Numerous studies have addressed waste reduction strategies in the ceramics industry, especially regarding clay waste, glaze overspray, and insulating materials such as glasswool. For instance, Ipekoglu (2021) explored cullet-based glazes as eco-friendly alternatives, while Martín-Márquez et al. (2016) investigated the recycling of glaze slurry waste in industrial settings. Despite these advancements, reuse efforts remain limited to isolated practices and have yet to become widespread within community-based or educational ecosystems (Ceramic Arts Network, 2022b).

This study extends the author's long-term research since 2016 and aims to bridge that gap by integrating sustainable material reuse with participatory practices. It addresses two primary research questions:

1. How can participatory and educational approaches enhance community engagement in sustainable ceramic practices?
2. How can regenerative material cycles be applied to open studio models like Baravia?

The objective is to develop an adaptable training module grounded in experimental material methods and participatory pedagogy, fostering greater sustainability awareness and capacity building across the ceramic arts community.

Approach

Several previous studies support the idea that ceramic waste holds significant potential for reuse. Mishra et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of recycling waste to reduce environmental impact in tile production. Dondi et al. (2016) demonstrate that industrial residues such as fly ash can serve as alternative raw materials in ceramics. Adediran et al. (2020) and Rywotycki et al. (2024) explore glasswool waste as a fluxing agent, showing that

it enhances mechanical properties and lowers sintering temperatures. Strecker & Costa (2014) indicate that up to 30% of glass waste can be reformulated into ceramic glaze. In Indonesia, Fitriani & Suharson (2023) developed a reuse approach rooted in religious values and creative education for glass and ceramic waste. This concept serves as the foundation for the establishment of *Baravia Pottery*, an open studio that integrates experimentation, training, and production.

Meanwhile, the author's previous research, which forms the basis for the continuation explored in this study, is illustrated in the diagram below:

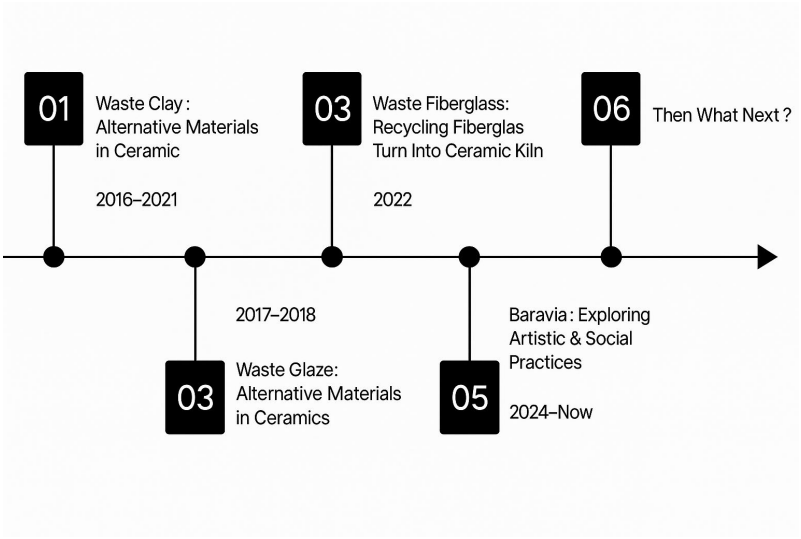


Figure 1. Previous Research Conducted
Source: Author

Method

This research employs a hybrid methodology combining **material experimentation** with **participatory action research**to explore the sustainable reuse of ceramic waste. The experimental aspect focuses on clay waste, glaze overspray, and glasswool residue, investigating their properties and applications in studio practices. The participatory component includes structured workshops involving students, local artisans, and community participants.

The process is organized into **seven sequential stages**, beginning with material collection and preparation, followed by experimentation, training, evaluation, and product realization. The participatory sessions are designed to evaluate public engagement, knowledge transfer, and the viability of integrating reused materials into broader ceramic practices. While this method provides a robust framework, further specification of sampling techniques, workshop duration, and qualitative/quantitative analysis tools would enhance reproducibility and research rigor.

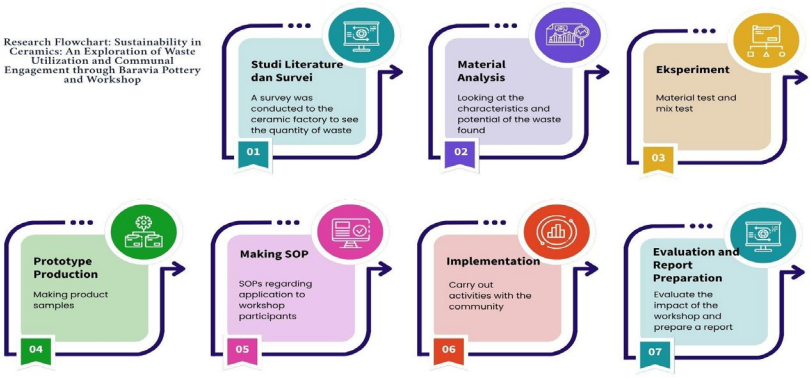


Figure 2. Research Flow Diagram
Source: Author

Results

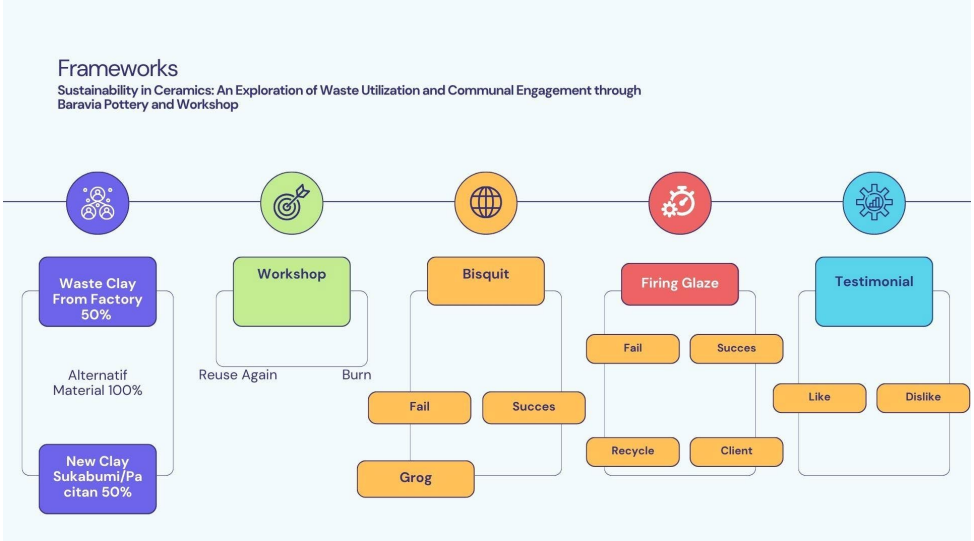


Figure 3. Frameworks Baravia
Source : Author

The framework titled "Sustainability in Ceramics: An Exploration of Waste Utilization and Communal Engagement through Baravia Pottery and Workshop" illustrates a sustainable workflow in ceramic practice that prioritizes waste utilization and community involvement. The process begins with the use of clay sourced from two origins: 50% clay waste from factories and 50% new clay from the Sukabumi or Pacitan regions. This combination produces a 100% alternative material that serves as the main medium in the workshop activities.

The workshop functions as a participatory space where the public or participants are directly involved in the ceramic-making process. If the resulting pieces from the workshop do not meet the quality standards, the material can be reused. Meanwhile, successful pieces proceed to the initial firing stage, known as bisque firing. At this stage, failed works are crushed and turned into *grog*, ceramic fragments that can be mixed back into fresh clay as part of the material cycle. Successful bisque-fired pieces then undergo the glazing process, where they are coated and fired again.

The glaze firing stage also presents two possible outcomes: failure or success. Failed pieces in this stage can be recycled back into the production system, while successful works are delivered to clients or users. At the end of the process, clients provide testimonials on the final products they receive. Their feedback, whether appreciation (like) or dissatisfaction (dislike), serves as input for future improvements.

Overall, this framework emphasizes not only sustainability by minimizing waste and recycling materials, but also strengthens community engagement in the creative process. The system integrates educational, ecological, and social values into a cohesive and sustainable workflow.

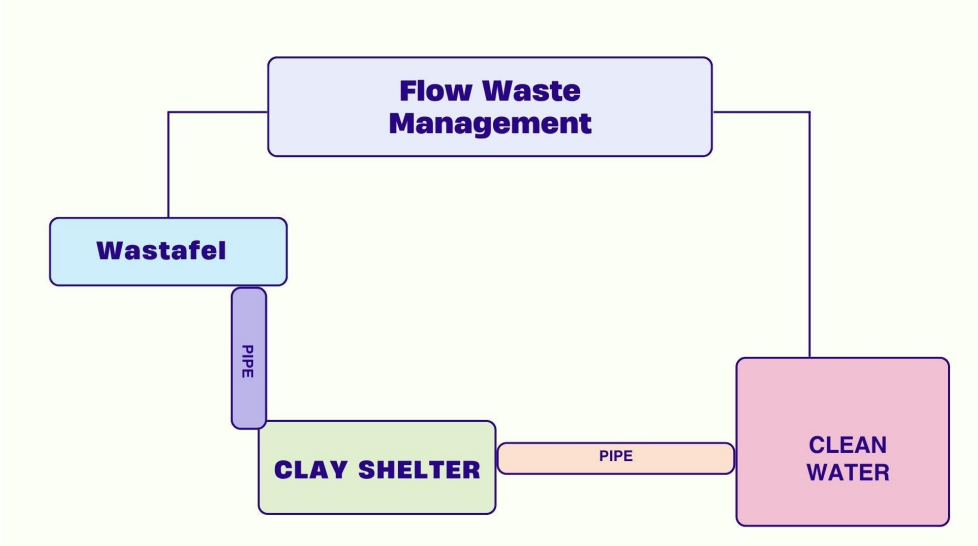


Figure 4. Flow Waste Management
Source : Author

This diagram illustrates a wastewater management system derived from handwashing or tool-cleaning activities involving clay (ceramics), designed with an environmentally friendly and sustainable approach. The system begins at the **sink**, which serves as the primary site for washing activities. The wastewater from the sink is channeled through a pipe to the **Clay Shelter**, which functions as a natural filtration area or **clay trap**, where clay particles and other solid materials are allowed to settle and separate from the water.

After passing through the Clay Shelter, the filtered water continues through a second pipe into the **Clean Water system**, a holding area for the processed water. This clean water has the potential to be reused for non-consumptive purposes such as watering plants, cleaning the studio, or even for other recycling processes.

The entire system operates within a larger framework called **Flow Waste Management**, which governs the flow and circulation of wastewater to ensure it is not directly discharged into the environment, but rather reused after proper treatment. This system exemplifies a best practice in implementing sustainability principles in a ceramic studio, by minimizing waste and preserving the quality of discharged water.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that sustainable ceramic practices can be developed holistically through a combination of material experimentation and participatory approaches involving the community. Through the Baravia Pottery and Workshop initiative, the concept of sustainability is applied not only to the reuse of clay waste, glasswool, and glaze but also expanded into education, social empowerment, and local economic development. Studio workflows such as the Flow Waste Management system provide concrete examples of how wastewater can be managed efficiently and environmentally friendly. Training modules, open workshops, and community-based recycling systems make this initiative a model of an integrated, educational, and replicable sustainable ceramic ecosystem.Thus, this research contributes to establishing a new paradigm for ceramic practices that are both environmentally responsible and inclusive of community participation.

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Dynamic writing of "boat living" culture: a study on dance in Tanka wedding culture in Beihai, Guangxi

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Abstract

This study focuses on the dance in the Tanka wedding of Beihai, Guangxi, exploring its symbolic significance and social functions as a dynamic medium for "boat-dwelling" culture. Through field investigations, video documentation, and analysis of dance movements, the research finds that the Tanka wedding dance, through body language, ritual structure, and spatial fluidity, reenacts the identity and cultural memory of the water-dwelling community. The dance movements center around "wave-like" trajectories and simulated rowing motions, metaphorically representing the symbiotic relationship between the Tanka people and the sea; the dynamic performance of the wedding ceremony, through the transition from "boat to shore," reinforces the dual nature of ethnic boundaries and social integration. This study provides theoretical references for the protection of intangible cultural heritage and the study of maritime ethnic cultures.

Keyword : Tanka wedding; dance research; boat living culture; dynamic writing

Introduce

The Tanka people of Beihai, Guangxi, as a typical maritime ethnic group in southern China, have shaped a unique "boat-dwelling" cultural expression through their lifestyle of "living by the sea and using boats as homes." Weddings, as a core scene for the transmission of ethnic culture, are rich in cultural information, with dance playing a crucial role in narrating rituals and conveying emotions. This study uses dance as a starting point to reveal the dynamic logic of its cultural symbols, delving into the social structure, belief system, and aesthetic concepts of the Tanka people, exploring the diversity of maritime culture, and providing new perspectives for the protection of ethnic culture.

Purpose of research

This study aims to analyze the action characteristics and cultural metaphors of Tanka wedding dance, explore the dynamic writing function of dance in ritual space, and explore its unique cultural value.

Research technique

I. Research Methods

This study adopts the methods of literature research, field investigation, in-depth interview and semiotic analysis to deeply explore the cultural connotation, dynamic writing function and inheritance and development of Tanka wedding dance in Beihai area of Guangxi. The details are as follows:

(1) Literature research method

The system reviews and collects academic literature, monographs, journal articles, theses, historical documents, and folk customs records related to the Tanka culture, wedding customs, dance art, and maritime culture of Beihai, Guangxi. It aims to comprehensively understand existing research findings, trace the historical development, cultural background, and

theoretical foundation of Tanka wedding dance culture, analyze previous studies on Tanka weddings and dances, and provide a solid theoretical basis, research starting point, and historical context for future studies.

(2) Field investigation method

Delve into the Tanka settlements in Beihai, Guangxi, participate in Tanka weddings, and observe the local Tanka wedding dance performances on-site. Record details such as dance movements, rhythms, costumes, and props to understand the cultural significance, inheritance, and role of the dances in weddings. Collect firsthand data to vividly experience the authentic scenes and cultural atmosphere of Tanka wedding dances under the "boat-dwelling" culture. At the same time, observe the wedding ceremony process and document dance movements and spatial movement paths. Record the entire performance process, including actions, formations, costumes, props, and other details, as well as the wedding ceremony procedures and related cultural customs. Obtain first-hand "living" data to avoid fragmented captures of cultural phenomena. Ensure a comprehensive, in-depth, and genuine understanding of the dance culture.

(3) In-depth interview method

Conduct semi-structured interviews with key informants, such as organizers of the Tanka wedding ceremony, dance performers, and elderly Tanka residents (including open-ended questions and situational recall methods). This helps understand the origin, evolution, transmission methods, cultural symbolism, historical memory, and their views and feelings about Tanka wedding dance culture. It also aims to uncover the implicit knowledge system behind the movements, reveal the subjective interpretations of cultural bearers, compensate for observational limitations, and obtain deeper cultural information.

(4) Semiotics analysis

Using the theoretical framework of cultural semiotics, interpret and analyze the collected dance movements, costumes, formations, and other materials. Deconstruct the cultural symbolic meanings of dance movements, costumes, and props. Unearth the cultural metaphors, values, and life wisdom embedded in these symbols, revealing the significant role of dance as a cultural symbol in inheriting and expressing Tanka culture.

Data acquisition

(1) Interview method

Interviewees: including performers (professional dancers, folk artists), organizers (wedding planners, community cultural leaders), audiences (local residents, tourists) and key informants (folk culture experts, scholars, community elders).

The interview covers the origin and meaning of dance movements, the design and symbolism of costumes and props, the process and cultural connotation of wedding ceremonies, and the community's cognition and evaluation of dance.

Interview method: semi-structured interview is adopted, which has a certain interview outline and allows flexible adjustment of questions and in-depth questioning according to the actual situation of the interview to ensure the acquisition of rich and in-depth information.

(2) Observation method

Observation object: Tanka wedding dance performance in Beihai, Guangxi.

Observation content: record in detail the movement characteristics, formation changes, costume details, prop use, etc., as well as the whole process of the wedding ceremony, including the performance form and function of the dance in the wedding ceremony, such as the bride welcoming, the hall worship, the wine offering, etc.

Observation Method: A combination of participatory and non-participatory observation is used. With permission, researchers can appropriately participate in dance performances or wedding ceremonies to personally experience and feel the cultural atmosphere of the dance; at the same time, maintaining an objective observational perspective, recording the entire

process and relevant details of the dance performance.

(3) Collection of image data

Collection objects: including professional shooting of dance performance videos, folk spontaneous recording of wedding dance images, and related documentaries, news reports, etc.

Collect content: Obtain high-quality video materials of dance performances, ensuring that they cover different scenes and angles of dance performances, so as to comprehensively analyze the movements, formations, costumes and other elements of dance, as well as the dynamic development and cultural expression of dance in wedding ceremonies.

Collection method: Collect existing video materials through cooperation with local cultural departments, community organizations, folk artists, etc.; at the same time, professional photography equipment is used to shoot the whole process of dance performance during field investigation to ensure the clarity and integrity of video materials.

Finding

1、The change of "boat living" culture and the dynamic nature of dance

1.1 Transformation of cultural space

With the advancement of modernization, the traditional "boat living" lifestyle has been gradually replaced by land settlement, and the wedding dance has been transferred from the actual ship space to the land stage, and the dynamic movement of the action has also changed.

Early Tanka people lived on boats, spending long periods of time on the water. Boats were not only their means of transportation but also tools for production and living quarters. Families often lived on a single boat, moving as their living environment changed and to meet the needs of survival. Later, some Tanka people gradually settled ashore, building simple huts or houses along the shore, forming a settlement pattern that combined both aquatic and terrestrial aspects. Today, more Tanka people have fully migrated to land-based settlements, constructing modern residential buildings such as brick-wood houses and reinforced concrete structures, with their living spaces increasingly aligning with those of land-dwelling residents. During the period when they lived on the water, Tanka cultural activities mainly took place on boats or within the water community, such as singing saltwater songs and holding water-based weddings, funerals, and other ceremonies. These cultural activities were highly inward-looking and unique. After settling ashore, their cultural activity spaces gradually shifted to land communities, blending with local terrestrial cultures. On one hand, they continued to preserve and pass down traditional customs, like organizing Tanka-style artistic performances during festivals; on the other hand, they actively integrated into local terrestrial cultural activities, participating in various community cultural events and folk festival celebrations, sharing and creating culture together with land-dwelling residents.

During the water-based living phase, Tanka dance was mostly associated with aquatic labor and life scenes, such as dances that mimic rowing, casting nets, and fishing. These dances were relatively simple and straightforward, directly reflecting fishing activities and the emotions of water-based life. As cultural spaces transformed, dance forms became increasingly diverse, incorporating more elements and techniques from land-based dances, like adding some distinctive local folk dance steps and movements to the dances. In terms of content, while still showcasing traditional fishing life, the dances began to depict the new lives and appearances of the Tanka people after they settled on land, as well as the integration of Tanka culture with land-based cultures, making the dances more contemporary and culturally rich. For example, in the "Dianchuan" dance, the action of simulating the swaying of a boat relies more on the dancers 'physical control rather than real boat movement when performed on land. This transformation not only changed the visual presentation of the dance but also influenced the interaction between dancers and the audience. On the boat, the dance movements are closely linked to the real marine environment, with the dancers' body language

directly responding to the boat's sway and the waves. On the land stage, this direct environmental interaction is severed, and the dance relies more on the performers' skills and stage design to convey the imagery of the sea.

1.2 Reconstruction of time rhythm

The tidal cycle used to be an important benchmark for wedding ceremonies, but modern weddings are more based on calendar time, leading to a disconnect between dance rhythms and natural rhythms.

In the past, boat living was primarily centered around fishing and rowing, with a relatively slow and regular pace, heavily influenced by natural factors. For instance, fishermen would set out to sea in the early morning and return in the evening, maintaining a steady rhythm throughout their workday. The dance rhythms often matched this, characterized by their gentle and smooth nature. Traditional boat culture festivals, such as water weddings and Fishermen's Day, were usually held on specific lunar dates, with fixed schedules. Dance performances, as a crucial part of these celebrations, also had stable times and content. Traditionally, wedding ceremonies were closely tied to the tides, for example, "sending off the day" required choosing an appropriate tidal time to ensure the smooth departure of boats. However, with modern scheduling and standardized time management, this close connection with natural rhythms has gradually been disrupted. On one hand, some traditional festivals have adjusted their timing to align with the peak tourist seasons, attracting more visitors. Consequently, the timing and format of dance performances have changed, not only during holidays but also irregularly during off-peak tourist periods based on visitor needs. Modern weddings now prioritize the convenience of participants and social schedules over the rhythm of the natural environment. This reconfiguration of time rhythms not only affects the flow of wedding ceremonies but also alters the function and significance of dance in these rituals.

2、The cultural connotation and symbolic significance of dance form

2.1 Ritual expression of Marine faith

In the boat-dwelling culture dance, movements often mimic those of fish, seabirds, and other marine creatures. For example, dancers swing their hands up and down, resembling the tail fin movements of fish swimming in water; they extend, bend, and swiftly wave their arms, as if sea birds are flapping their wings to fly. These actions not only vividly depict the forms of marine life but also symbolize the boat-dwellers' reverence and worship for these creatures. In their beliefs, marine life serves as messengers of the sea deities. By imitating their movements, the dancers attempt to establish a connection with the sea deities, seeking their protection and blessings to ensure that fishermen return from fishing trips laden with catches.

In the dance, there are also movements that mimic natural ocean phenomena. For example, the action of depicting wave undulations involves dancers swaying from side to side and their arms moving in a wavelike motion, as if waves are crashing against the shore one after another. Such movements not only express reverence for the power of the sea but also symbolize the adaptation and reliance of boat-dwelling people on the ocean. Waves are one of the typical features of the sea, representing its dynamism and vitality. Through these movements, the dance conveys the relationship between boat-dwelling people and the sea, emphasizing their respect for the laws of the sea. Just as they adapt to the rhythm of the waves, they strive to live within the embrace of the sea.

The "casting the net" and "offering wine" movements in the "Sea Worship" dance have clear blessing functions. Dancers engage in symbolic dialogue with sea deities through their body movements. These actions not only serve as a ritualized presentation of maritime faith but also express reverence and dependence on natural forces. For example, the "casting the

net" movement symbolizes fishermen's reliance on marine resources and their wish for a bountiful harvest. The casting motion is large in amplitude and has a strong rhythm. Dancers mimic the scene of fishermen working, conveying gratitude for the generous gifts of the sea. The "offering wine" movement involves sprinkling wine into the sea, where dancers symbolically offer sacrifices to the sea god, praying for favorable weather, safe voyages, and forgiveness and blessings from the sea deity to ward off disasters and ensure smooth sailing. This movement is usually accompanied by solemn music and a serious expression, reflecting respect for the sea deities.

The costumes of boat-dwelling cultural dances often feature various patterns related to the ocean, such as fish, shrimp, crabs, shells, and other marine life, as well as natural elements like waves and seashells. These patterns are not only decorative but also carry deep maritime religious significance. For example, fish patterns symbolize abundance and harvest, as they are abundant in the sea and are the primary source of income for fishermen; wave patterns represent the power of the sea and the cycle of life. Boat-dwellers believe that these patterns can bring good luck and protect them from dangers at sea. Wearing costumes embroidered with these patterns during dances is like wearing the blessings of the sea deities, making the dancers more sacred in their performances and expressing their reverence for the ocean and their longing for a better life.

2.2 Metaphorical expression of marriage concept

Wedding dance not only conveys the cultural connotation of marriage concept, but also strengthens the emotional bond between husband and wife and the common commitment to family responsibility. These movements and symbolic meanings are constantly inherited and reconstructed in dynamic writing, providing a new way of expression for the continuation of marriage culture.

In some boat-dwelling cultural dances, male and female dancers will engage in mutual eye contact, gentle steps, and slight arm movements. These actions simulate scenes of mutual attraction between men and women. For example, the male and female dancers hold hands lightly and sway their bodies slightly, as if testing each other's feelings. This movement metaphorically represents the shyness and probing nature of early romantic relationships among boat-dwellers, showcasing their cautious approach to marriage and delicate expression of emotions. In the dance, the man may mimic rowing motions to approach the woman, who responds by gently twisting her waist and swaying her skirt, symbolizing the man's pursuit of the woman. This conveys the natural emotional attraction and mutual pursuit between men and women in boat-dwelling culture.

Some dance movements depict scenes of couples working together. For example, male and female dancers hold hands and perform synchronized rowing motions. This not only symbolizes the cooperation and harmony between spouses in their daily lives but also metaphorically conveys the idea that marital life requires joint efforts from both parties to face life's challenges. The "Tumbling Ship" dance, for instance, uses the swaying of the boat to symbolize the dynamic balance in marital life, emphasizing the metaphorical representation of couples facing life's storms together. Dancers mimic the boat's movement through the waves, expressing the ups and downs and challenges of marital life. This dynamic balance symbolizes that both partners need to work together to maintain stability in the face of life's storms, reflecting mutual support and trust in marriage. In the dance, the coordinated movements of the couple demonstrate a supportive and interdependent relationship, reflecting the importance placed on teamwork in marriage by boat dwellers, who believe that only through concerted effort can one achieve stability and happiness in maritime life.

Common props in dance, such as flower baskets and red silk ribbons, also carry rich marital connotations. The basket is filled with various beautiful flowers, symbolizing the

beauty and happiness of married life. Dancers convey bouquets to symbolize fertility and reproduction. By gently and solemnly passing the bouquet to each other, they express care for new life and hope for the future of the family. The bouquet is usually held by the bride or groom, symbolizing the continuation of life and the prosperity of the family. This gesture not only metaphorically represents reproductive ability but also conveys a beautiful wish for the continuation of the family line, symbolizing the inheritance of life and the continuation of the family. Dancers circle around the bouquet, symbolizing protection and nurturing of new life. This movement is often accompanied by cheerful music and light steps, creating an atmosphere of celebration and auspiciousness.

3、Cultural identity and community cohesion

Wedding dances are not only a vehicle for cultural heritage but also an essential means of emotional exchange among community members. By participating in the dance together, community members strengthen their sense of identity and belonging to their own culture. As dancers move and spin to the rhythm passed down from ancestors, their footsteps carve out collective memories on the sandy ground, turning each wedding into a living archive of cultural genes.

3.1 Collective participation

Wedding dances typically require extensive participation from community members, with the interaction between dancers and audience being an indispensable part of the dance. Whether young or old, male or female, everyone can join in the dance. For example, in some traditional boat-dwelling festival dances, elders often dance together with their grandchildren. Female dancers are light and graceful, while male dancers are strong and powerful. Everyone showcases their unique talents during the dance, creating a joyful and harmonious atmosphere. Dance events usually take place on important occasions in the community, such as traditional festivals like Spring Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival, as well as special days like the harvest of fish and the launching of new boats. At these moments, dancing becomes the core content of community activities, attracting many residents' participation and attention. For instance, at the launch ceremony of a new boat, the boat-dwellers will perform dances filled with blessings and celebration, praying for safety and a bountiful harvest for the new boat. The entire community is immersed in a sea of joy, with the dance bringing people closer together and strengthening the bonds among community members.

During the dance rehearsal process, everyone needs to cooperate with each other to complete the choreography of dance movements and formations. For example, in the "Ship Tossing" dance, the audience's cheers and the dancers' actions echo each other, creating a strong sense of community cohesion. When the boat song plays, the old fisherwoman hands over the faded rudder to her grandchildren, while young dancers step to steps that mimic tides, and the stomping of the audience forms surging waves. This physical resonance transcends language; when everyone finally huddles in a circle and shakes their bodies, the footprints on the sand have long blurred the lines of age and gender. Through this collaboration, communication and interaction among members become more frequent, and mutual understanding and trust deepen gradually. During the performance, everyone works towards a common goal, and this shared experience and emotional engagement strengthens the bonds between members.

3.2 Cultural education

In the process of participating in wedding dances, the younger generation not only learns dance moves but also deeply understands their cultural significance. This intergenerational transmission ensures the continuous inheritance of "boat dwelling" culture. Cultural education activities effectively pass on the genetic code of boat dwelling culture to the younger generation, making them the "cultural carriers" of this tradition. When young people gain a deep understanding of the historical value and spiritual essence of boat

dwelling culture, they will naturally integrate these cultural elements into their lives and work, such as incorporating boat dwelling dance elements into modern art creation and drawing inspiration from traditional boat dwelling architectural styles in building design. This achieves innovative development of boat dwelling culture in contemporary society, ensuring the sustainability of cultural inheritance.

Through cultural and educational activities organized by schools and communities, community members can systematically learn about boat-dwelling culture, gain a deep understanding of its historical origins and intrinsic values, thereby breaking the limitations of their perception of local culture and enhancing their sense of identity with boat-dwelling culture. For example, in the "Pilot Dance," the newlywed bride holds a red silk lantern, recreating the dance posture of her ancestors from a century ago; in the "Tidal Step," young people mimic the rhythm of the ebb tide, with the sandy ground under their feet bearing traces of nets once dried by their forebears. These dance movements serve as keys to interpreting history, each gesture embodying the wisdom of coexisting with the ocean.

Cultural education promotes the construction and maintenance of community cultural ecology, enabling boat-dwelling culture to flourish over the long term within communities. Schools, communities, and families collaborate in a comprehensive and multi-level cultural education network, creating a favorable ecological environment for the inheritance of boat-dwelling culture. In this ecosystem, boat-dwelling culture is continuously nourished and enriched, attracting more residents to participate in its preservation and protection, forming a virtuous cycle that ensures the sustainable development of cultural heritage. This sustains the unique charm and vitality of boat-dwelling culture.

Conclusion

This article delves into the wedding dance of the Tanka people in Beihai, Guangxi, revealing its rich symbolic significance and social functions as a dynamic medium for "boat-dwelling" culture. The study finds that with the advancement of modernization, the Tanka's "boat-dwelling" lifestyle has shifted towards land-based settlement. The space for wedding dances has moved from the boat to the land stage, and the dynamism of movements has changed. For instance, in the "Tianchuan" dance, actions simulating the swaying of the boat body increasingly rely on the dancers' physical control, and the timing rhythm has shifted from being influenced by tidal cycles to being based on calendar time. The connection between dance and natural rhythms has been redefined. The dance forms embody deep-seated maritime beliefs, such as imitating the movements of marine life, recreating natural ocean phenomena, and the "casting nets" and "wine offering" actions in the "sea worship" dance. The maritime patterns in dance costumes also carry profound religious meanings. Additionally, marriage concepts are expressed through dance metaphors, including simulations of courtship scenes, joint labor activities between spouses, and the symbolic meanings of props. Furthermore, wedding dances serve as an important means of emotional exchange among community members. Through extensive collective participation and collaboration during rehearsals and performances, these dances strengthen the bonds between community members and their sense of identity and belonging to their own culture. Cultural education activities promote the intergenerational transmission of boat-dwelling culture, making the younger generation a "living archive" of the culture, thus driving the innovative development of boat-dwelling culture in modern society. These findings provide new theoretical perspectives and practical cases for the protection of intangible cultural heritage and the study of maritime ethnic cultures from a dance studies angle. They enrich our understanding of the diversity of maritime cultures, deepen and broaden cultural research, and emphasize the significant role of wedding dances in cultural transmission. This offers valuable insights for the protection and inheritance of other intangible cultural heritages, helps maintain community stability and harmony, enhances national pride, and promotes

multicultural development in society.

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Siamo-Portuguese Dance: From Thai Communities to Innovative Economic Development

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Abstract

This creative research, "Siamo-Portuguese Dance: From Thai Communities to Innovative Economic Development," explored the cultural capital of Thai communities through Portuguese dance. Its objectives were to study this cultural capital, foster community participation in establishing creative communities using the dance, and develop it as a teaching medium for Thai school dance curricula. Applying the theory of artistic creation based on creative diversity, the study analyzed creative works across five aspects: their connection to people's way of life, nature, environment, and cultural processes; the influence of internal variables like belief and faith; the impact of external factors such as globalization, science, technology, and innovation; the capacity for learning, knowledge accumulation, transmission, and development; and the value derived from recipients' knowledge and artistic experience. The findings demonstrate how Siamo-Portuguese Dance can transform Thai community cultural capital into an educational medium and inspire community engagement to become a creative community.

Keywords: Siamo-Portuguese Dance, Creative Community, Creative Dance, Kudichin Community

Introduction

Thonburi used to be sparsely populated. The majority of the inhabitants worked as agriculturalists. The river transportation was an important route. The river transportation was an important route together with the historically trading routes in sailing along various canals such as Khlong Mon, Khlong Kudi Chin, Khlong Bang Sai Kai, Khlong Wat Buppharam, Khlong Wat Arun, Khlong Wat Tai Talat, Khlong Sanam Chai, Khlong Phasi Charoen, Khlong Bang Khamin, and Khlong Bang Khun Thian. Both sides of the canal are lined with communities and temples that are artistically beautiful and historically significant, reflecting the unique way of life and living conditions of the community.

Thonburi District is currently influenced by Bangkok's urban growth. The population has shifted away from agriculture and toward industries that prioritize low-skilled labor. As the number of industrial factories has increased, so has the migration of workers and people to Thonburi. Thonburi District is one of Bangkok's most heavily populated areas. Thonburi District is one of Bangkok's 50 administrative districts, belonging to the Northern Thonburi group. It is designated as an old city conservation region, a historical tourism destination, and a cultural variety area.

The Kudichin community is located in Wat Kanlaya Subdistrict, Thonburi District. It is an old neighborhood with numerous ethnic groups residing nearby, including Chinese, Europeans, and Muslims, all of whom coexist peacefully. The architecture of Santa Cruz Church, which combines Neo-Classic and Renaissance art, is one example of the community's distinctive arts and culture. The dome is modeled by the one at Florence Cathedral in Tuscany, Italy. This is because the Portuguese have been present in the Kudichin community for a long time. Until 2011, the wife of the Portuguese Ambassador to Thailand visited the Santa Cruz Church and discovered that the Kuti Chin youth performed blessing

dances and modern dances. As a result, she came up with the idea of having the president of the Kuti Chin community perform a Portuguese dance and bringing interested youth from the community to practice, ages 8 to 12. Initially, she obtained financing for training and costume making from the wife of the Portuguese Ambassador in Thailand. The inaugural performance commemorated the 500th anniversary of Thai-Portuguese relations (Pattama Wattanabunya, 2018:137). In addition to the Kudi Chin community, traces of Portuguese culture can also be found in the southern provinces of Thailand on the Andaman coast, such as Phuket and Phang Nga, where there is a blended culture called Sino-Portuguese, which is a blend of Chinese, Malay, and Portuguese cultures. This can be seen in architecture and food culture.

Since the beginning of time, numerous groups of people have passed down performing arts such as dance and music through their lifestyles. Dance and music have evolved over time to become one of the most essential and linked parts of communal cohesiveness. In certain locations, dance and music have lost their status as miracles for occult or religious beliefs. Instead, they have evolved into a social activity in the society (Recreational Activity) and have evolved with the times into performing arts for entertainment, such as dancing at various celebrations and activities at the royal court.

Dance is also useful to social activities such as couples dancing at Jewish weddings, as well as couples or guests dancing at parties. We can observe that this style of dancing is termed dancing for personal enjoyment. Dance is also used to entertain others, such as arranged performances for others to observe, which is also considered entertainment (Naraphong Charassri, 2005: 2-3). According to Suchat Thaothong (1996: 59-65), creativity is a desirable human behavior that causes changes in new things to satisfy the desire to be curious, seek knowledge, and gain more experience, and knowledge of human creativity originated in prehistoric times by inventing various tools for use from natural materials close to us with simple forms and methods. Later, humanity improved those innovations to make them better than before, and progressed in the process. Human creativity is an activity that distinguishes humans from other creatures and allows them to preserve their species.

Performing arts, such as dance and music, help to polish people's brains and actions throughout history. The transmission of original knowledge helps foster an understanding for the significance of national arts and culture, including Thai dance and other dance styles. Creativity and research to generate new thought processes and methods from existing information can have an impact on society and original culture, as well as alterations to culture in new forms of performance, such as the integration of ethnic cultures or elevating the significance of that culture to national identity. Using dance and music as tools to connect and interact with both the old and young generations in order to respect and comprehend the past in order to understand the present.

Performing arts is a form of performing arts that combines the national arts and cultures of each country in the form of dance, ram, and fon, combining the unique characteristics of each area, reflecting the way of life, philosophy, ideas, and perspectives of society at all levels. Over time, performing arts have changed according to the social context. The original may deteriorate according to the cycle of change in each era. There is development and adjustment to be consistent with the roles and needs of the new society, resulting in progress that is accepted in academic circles at the national level. Phrit Suphasetthasiri (2002: 63) The postmodern world society or the current society, according to the ideas of social science scholars, is considered a society related to the development of the capitalist system. It is seen, particularly from the middle of the twentieth century, as a period of multinational capitalism, consumer capitalism (Multinational or Consume Capitalism), and an era of product and technological popularity. As a result, if the performance is created without regard for the consumer, it will progressively lose its relevance in the eyes of the

new society. As a result, the creator must adjust his or her strategy for delivering the performance. It may be required to remove the barriers between different sorts or categories of performance. It must tolerate the blending of forms in performance for new works, or if the artist has to integrate global ideas with Thai performance qualities to make the work more accessible to the consumer, this might be a viable option.

From the above, the project on the creation of dance works from Portuguese dances is a study and development to expand the knowledge of creating dance works in various forms, especially performances that are specific to each area.

From the above, the creation of the Portuguese dance, Siamo-Portuguese, is a study and development to further develop the knowledge of the creation of dance works that reflect the specific characteristics of Portuguese and Thai cultures. It is a reflection of the identity of the community and the history of the community with diverse cultures that can be harmoniously blended. In this study, the researcher recognizes the importance of the original area and the Portuguese immigrants who settled in the Kudi Chin community, Phuket and Phang Nga provinces, to further develop the original knowledge of the community's Portuguese dance by developing and creating new ones to promote community tourism in the creative dance performance dimension by presenting the identity of the Thai community through the creative process based on the creative principles of Naraphong Charassri. Students of the program exchanged and learned the skills of Western dance and Portuguese folk dance of the Kudichin community from the inheritors and community scholars. The results were then used to disseminate and promote community tourism based on the existing cultural capital, responding to the research for area development to create changes and drive the country's economy and society in the local cultural dimension to be sustainable.

Objectives

1. To study the cultural capital of the Thai community through Portuguese dance.
2. To use Portuguese dance to encourage community members to participate in establishing a creative community.
3. To develop it as a teaching medium for Portuguese dance in Thai schools' dance curriculum.

Approach

The researcher studied in-depth knowledge of history and community culture that influenced the dance performances of the Portuguese dance in Thai community by using in-depth interviews and non-participant observations, which were watching the actual performances and watching videos using cameras and sound recorders to record the performances. The researcher analyzed the data according to the research objectives, divided into 8 dance elements, as follows:

1. Creations of dance script
2. Performance space
3. Casting
4. Music selection
5. Dance equipment
6. Choreography
7. Costume design
8. Lighting design

The researcher has described the design in detail for each element as follows.

1. Creations of dance script

The researcher designed the presentation script into 3 parts:

1.1 Convergence

Represents the journey into the same area, the merging of people from different cultures. It is the opening scene that is the entrance to the show, greeting and inviting each other to dance.

1.2 Mingled

Represents the merging of people and cultures. The researcher uses Thai desserts that are influenced by Portuguese desserts in this performance.

1.3 Celebration

Group dancing with various line formations, showing unity. Portuguese dancing at celebrations on various occasions.

2. Choreography

The researcher designed the Portuguese dance style from the study of additional information related to the traditional style, Macanese style, Malay style and Kudichin community style, which were considered in designing the dance style. The design guidelines for the dance style can be analyzed as follows:

Portugal is a country with a rich cultural and performing arts tradition. In particular, Portuguese dance has regional variations, originating in different parts of the country's rural and coastal towns. Portuguese folk dances, also known as Ranchos Folclóricos, are an important part of Portuguese culture, as well as Portuguese traditions and celebrations. They are influenced by traditional Portuguese music, such as Fado and Pimba, which play an important role in these traditional Portuguese dances. Portuguese dances can be divided into six categories (Danceask, 2023):

Vira Dance

The Vira Dance is one of the most popular Portuguese folk dances. It is similar to the waltz in terms of its three-step rhythm, but is much faster. The Vira Dance translates to Turn Dance in English. The researcher believes that the use of the term Turn Dance comes from the style of the Vira Dance, which involves a lot of turns in the dance. This dance form originated in a region called Minho, located in northern Portugal. It is also performed mainly by couples who dance to the rhythm of the music without holding hands. Sometimes, women may dance solo. In addition, before the dance begins, couples arrange their standing in a circle so that they can see each other.

Chula Dance

The Chula Dance is another very popular traditional Portuguese dance that has a similar style to the Chula Dance. It is very popular in the region called Douro, which is located in Northern Portugal. The dance is mostly performed by couples. It is characterized by standing in a circle and dancing to the rhythm of the music, emphasizing foot stomping and finger snapping, as well as singing.

Corridinho Dance

The Corridinho Dance is very popular in the Algarve, the southernmost region of Portugal. The Corridinho Dance is a dance performed by couples, performed in two circles, with the man on the outside and the woman on the inside, to the fast rhythm of the music, using mainly foot stamping and changing directions within the circle.

Malhao Dance

Malhao is a traditional dance form popular in the province of Estremadura, located in the westernmost part of Portugal along the Atlantic Ocean. Most performances are performed in a circular format. The music for this dance is often accompanied by a song with lyrics beginning with the words Malhão, malhão, o malhão do norte, meaning Malhao of the North. The costumes used by the performers are less colorful than those used in other forms.

Fandango Dance

Fandango Dance is a traditional Portuguese dance form that originated in Spain. The dance is usually performed by men facing each other to the beat of the music using tap dance techniques. Fandango Dance is not the most popular dance form in Portuguese culture, but it is performed during certain religious events and on auspicious occasions such as Christmas.

Chotiça (A Variation of Schottische)

Chotiça, sometimes called Xoutiça or Choke, is a form of Schottische, a social dance originating in Bohemia, Germany, which is based on a combination of the Polka Dance and Circular Hop, in which couples circle around each other and embrace each other throughout without changing partners.

In addition, the researcher used everyday movements for the second performance scene to present the Thai dessert culture influenced by Portuguese desserts in the form of holding a tray of desserts to invite people to come and see, taste and share.

3. Casting

The researcher experimented with the performance three times before generating this performance, which had solely female actors. The researcher argues that in order to produce naturalness and demonstrate the range of civilizations represented in the dance, this performance should feature actors of various genders, sizes, and races. Furthermore, Portuguese dance is seen as an activity for commemorating significant milestones. As a result, the researcher promotes diversity and freedom, stating that everyone can participate in the dance. As a result, ten actors were chosen, including four males and six females.

4. Music selection

The researcher studied the melodies from listening to music online through six categories of traditional Portuguese dances music as follow: Vira Dance, Chula Dance, Corridinho Dance, Malhao Dance Fandango Dance and Chotiça (A Variation of Schottische). The researcher also looked at the tunes of Portuguese dances in other foreign cultures, such as Macau and Malaysia, as well as the songs that the Kudi Chin community enjoys using in their performance. The music for the performance "Siamo-Portuguese Dance" was then created, with the data being examined in collaboration with the composer, Pilot Officer Menisa Manosorn. The music was divided into two parts based on the performance script: Convergence Mingled and Celebration.

The researcher and composer found that in addition to the melody of the Portuguese traditional dance, this work was also inspired by the Sino-Portuguese culture found in the southern provinces of the Andaman coast of Thailand, or the so-called Peranakan ethnicity, which is a unique blend of the three ethnic groups: Portuguese, Chinese, and Malay. Inspired by the song in the Rong Ngen dance, the violin is used in combination with Malay folk music. Another instrument that adds color to the song “Siamo-Portuguese Dance” is the Flamengo “Castanets” cymbals, which are used in fun couple or group dances or in flirting between young men and women. Therefore, the song in this work will give the audience a sense of Thai-Portuguese together with Peranakan identity.

5. Performance space

The researcher decided to use an outdoor performance venue at the Portuguese Embassy in Thailand. The researchers used the first building of the embassy as the backdrop for this performance. The Portuguese Embassy was the first embassy in Thailand, established during the reign of King Phutthaloetla Naphalai (Rama II). This place is still well maintained even after more than 150 years. The Portuguese colonial style building is perfectly combined with Thai style. Originally, the materials intended to be used for construction were imported directly from Portugal, but the transport ship sank. Therefore, the Portuguese Palace was built with local materials, blending in well with the surrounding community.



The Portuguese Embassy in Thailand
Vorawan Pinrattanakorn

6. Costume design

The researcher designed the costumes from studying performances in various areas both in and outside the country and designed to use three color tones: red, green, and blue, which are popular colors that are often seen in performances. Moreover, red and green are the main colors in the Portuguese flag. As for the blue color, the researcher was inspired by the Christian church in the city. In the city of Porto, Portugal, there's a church that stands out from everything around it. It's called the Chapel of Souls, and its walls are completely covered in 15,947 blue tiles, called azulejos. (Vidar, 2025)



The Chapel of Souls
https://streetartutopia.com/2025/02/08/the-chapel-of-souls/

6.1 Female performers' costumes

Consists of a white long-sleeved shirt, covered with a red, green or blue corset tied with a black rope, a long white skirt, covered with a short skirt in the same color as the corset, an apron with patterns of Portuguese women, trees, flowers, birds and the Lusitano horse, which has a history of more than 5,000 years as the world's first saddle horse. (Parques de Sintra, 2025) A headscarf is used in the color of the shirt, red lipstick, white stilettos and black pumps.



Female performers' costumes
Vorawan Pinrattanakorn

6.2 Male performers' costumes

Consists of a white long-sleeved shirt, a dark vest or one embroidered with flowers, black slacks, a waistband with the left side loose, divided into red, green and blue, black pumps, black waist corset, and elegant makeup and hair.



Male performers' costumes
Vorawan Pinrattanakorn

7. Dance equipment

The researcher designed the props for use in the second scene (Mingled) as follows:

7.1 Snack tray

Snack tray decorated with tile patterns that combine Sino-Portuguese culture, designed to be related to the costume design, i.e. emphasizing red, green, and blue tones. The tray is made of shiny silver stainless steel, often used in households because it looks clean and is easy to clean.



Snack tray
Vorawan Pinrattanakorn

7.2 Desserts

The researcher studied and selected Thai desserts and modern desserts influenced by Portuguese food culture, namely, desserts that contain chicken eggs. The origins of the historical story of Maria Guyomar de Pinha, a half-Japanese, half-Portuguese woman and wife of 'Chao Phraya Wichyen' or Constantine Phaulkon, a Greek nobleman who served during the reign of King Narai the Great during the Ayutthaya period. She was assigned the role of the head of the royal kitchen, titled Thao Thong Khip Ma, whose duty was to invent new recipes and cook food at the royal court, which was the place where Thao Thong Khip Ma invented Thai desserts that adapted the original Portuguese recipes with local ingredients, resulting in various Thai desserts. The main ingredients used to make desserts were coconut, flour, and sugar. She also taught the women in the kitchen until these dessert recipes were spread and passed down to the next generation, earning her the title of Queen of Thai Desserts. (Sriwikar Santisuk, 2024)

From the above information, the researcher chose to use desserts on a tray for the actors to use as props in the second scene, reflecting the food culture of Thailand and Portugal and inviting them to eat desserts on important occasions. There were 9 types of desserts in total, namely, Khanom Farang Kudi Chin, Thong Yip, Thong Yod, Foi Thong, Med Khanun, Khanom Mor Kaeng, Khanom Pia, Tao Sor, and Egg Tart. All of these desserts were collected from various areas that are related to Portuguese culture, namely, Khanom Farang Kudi Chin from the Kudi Chin community, Khanom Pia and Ten Sor from Phang Nga and Phuket, Egg Tart from Macao culture, and other Thai desserts that are commonly found.



Dance equipment, Dessert
Vorawan Pinrattanakorn



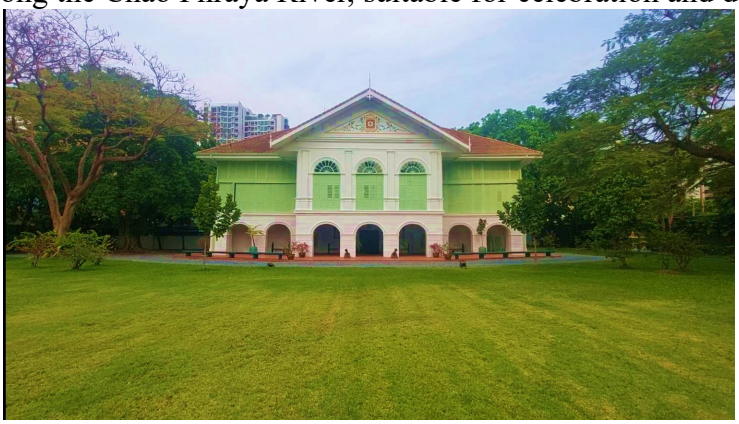
Dance equipment, Dessert
Vorawan Pinrattanakorn



Dance equipment, Dessert
Vorawan Pinrattanakorn

8. Lighting design

The researcher Designed to use natural light in the area of the Portuguese Embassy from 3-5 pm to record the performance, which was bright and had soft sunlight in the atmosphere along the Chao Phraya River, suitable for celebration and dancing.



Light and location during recording,
Vorawan Pinrattanakorn

This creative research employs the theory of artistic creation based on the principle of creative diversity to describe the characteristics of creative works in 5 aspects (Narongchai Pidokrajt, 2019): 1. People's way of life, nature, environment, and cultural processes that are related to creative works. 2. Internal variables such as belief, religion, faith, and love influence creative works. 3. External factors in terms of globalization, the spread of science, technology, and innovation affect the creative works. 4. Creative works can be learned, knowledge can be accumulated, transmitted, initiated, and further developed. 5. The value of creative works depends on the knowledge and artistic experience of the recipients of the

works, which are used as a guideline for criticizing and evaluating the artistic value resulting from the creative works. The researcher clarifies the qualities of creative works in five aspects, as follows:

Aspect 1: The People's Way of Life: This dance evolved from the way of life of the Kudi Chin community in Thonburi, an old community where various ethnic groups live together peacefully, including Chinese, Europeans, and Muslims. The Portuguese dance was passed down from the wife of the Portuguese ambassador to Thailand when she attended the former Santa Cruz Church. It also presents the culture of Thai desserts influenced by Portuguese desserts, reflecting the food and sharing in the community.

The researcher studied the Portuguese dance style from the leaders of the Kudichin community, trained the dance style, studied with students from Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University, and the method of transferring knowledge to Kudichin community. Moreover, this creation uses the concept of creative diversity, which means that the work can be learned, collected, transmitted, initiated and developed further. Studies and developments are undertaken to expand the body of knowledge in creating dance works in different forms, and the costume design is adapted to the mixed culture, using colors commonly found in performances and inspired by the Portuguese flag and the Chapel of Souls in Porto.



Portuguese dance performance by the leaders of the Kudichin community
Vorawan Pinrattanakorn



Experiment Portuguese dance with the community

Aspect 2: The creation of "Siamo-Portuguese Dance" is deeply influenced by internal variables related to belief, religion, faith and love, reflected through the cultural context of the Kudichin community in Bangkok. The role of Santa Cruz Church, an architecture that combines Neoclassical and Renaissance art, became an important starting point when the wife of the Portuguese Ambassador to Thailand visited the church and sparked the idea for the youth in the community to perform Portuguese dance, which shows the connection between religious places and cultural inheritance. In addition, dancing is seen as an activity used to celebrate important events and promote diversity and freedom of participation, which emphasizes the value of coexistence and participation of people in the community. The research aim of promoting cooperation among people in the community to be in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and using dance and music as a tool to connect the interaction between the old and the new generations, all reflect the love and bond that wants to preserve and promote cultural heritage to continue and flourish. Even the story of Thao Thong Khip Ma, who adapted Portuguese desserts into Thai desserts, is an inspiration that shows the love of creating and blending cultures.

Aspect 3: External factors of globalization, the spread of science, technology and innovation have affected the creation of "Siamo-Portuguese Dance", especially in terms of adapting to a post-modern and consumerist society. The creators of the work realize that the performance must adapt its strategies to reach the current audience, which may include breaking the boundaries between genres and embracing new forms of fusion. In addition, the use of technology in music education, such as listening to music online to study traditional Portuguese dance melodies and recording the performance with cameras and audio recorders, demonstrates the application of science and technology in the research and creation process, in order to make the work more accessible and relevant to the times.

Aspect 4: The creation of "Siamo-Portuguese Dance" clearly demonstrates that creative works can be continuously learned, accumulated, transmitted, initiated and developed. It is based on research and development to expand knowledge in creating dance works in various forms. This creation is the result of studying and developing knowledge in creating dance works that reflect the characteristics of Portuguese and Thai cultures. The researchers studied and learned the skills of Western dances and Portuguese folk dances of the Kudi Chin community from successors and scholars in the community, which shows the process of accumulating and transmitting knowledge from generation to generation. In addition, the results of the study and creation are disseminated and promoted community tourism based on existing cultural capital, which is an initiative and development to create sustainable economic and social benefits.

Aspect 5: The value of the creative work "Siamo-Portuguese Dance" lies in the artistic knowledge and experience of the recipient, where the creators have taken into account the audience's participation to create a more natural and interesting experience. Some of the performance designs also allow the performers to express their own style through improvisation, which is a form that the audience can easily understand. The interaction between the performers and the attraction of the audience to dance with the performers reflects that the value of the performance is not limited to one-sided viewing, but also includes participation and shared experiences, which can be applied to other festivals and celebrations, including communities that have never experienced dance before. Therefore, the artistic knowledge and experience of the recipients are important factors in evaluating and interpreting the value of this creative work.

Results

From the study of data related to Portuguese dance, using a total of 7 research tools as follows: 1) documentary data survey 2) interviews 3) information media 4) field survey 5) observation 6) artist standards and 7) creator's experience, and created the work through 8 dance elements. This enabled the researcher to create a Portuguese dance "Siamo-Portuguese Dance," which is a contemporary work that combines Thai-Portuguese culture from the past to the present. The researcher has a process of working with communities, academics, cultural experts, including creating a partnership with the Portuguese Embassy in Thailand, which has led to cooperation in many sectors, creating knowledge in creating performances to be used as works to support tourism in Thai communities in various areas and can also create awareness of sustainable development in line with the SDGs of the United Nations.

The researcher appears that the study can be carried out to meet all three research objectives: 1. To study the cultural capital of the Thai community through Portuguese dance. 2. To use Portuguese dance to encourage community members to participate in establishing a creative community. 3. To develop it as a teaching medium for Portuguese dance in Thai schools' dance curriculum.

In Objective 1, the researcher has already written an explanation about the study of cultural capital of communities in Thailand related to Portuguese dance. In Objective 2, the researcher believes that the researchers have created a collaborative process with communities, academics, and cultural experts, including the collaboration with the Portuguese Embassy in Thailand, which led to collaboration in many sectors, resulting in knowledge in creating performances that can be used to support tourism in Thai communities in various areas. The researchers believe that the performance format that allows the audience to watch from multiple directions will help create community participation and a more natural performance, including allowing the performers to improvise, which creates interaction between the performers and attracts the audience to join the dance. These can be applied in communities that have never had experience with dancing, and in festivals or celebrations to create value for the area and attract more tourists.

Objective 3, the creation of data on the cultural capital of the Thai community through Portuguese dancing can be used as an educational media for students. The researchers studied in-depth information on the history and culture of the community that influenced the performance of Portuguese dancing in the Thai community and analyzed the data according to the research objectives. It was divided into 8 dance elements, which were tested in the festivals of the Kudichin community, the 3 Arts 3 Religions Festival in the Kudichin area, and in elementary school classrooms. These results are knowledge that can be applied and developed into a curriculum for teaching Portuguese dancing in various schools in Thailand in a tangible way to continue and disseminate this culture.

Lastly, the researcher believes that this study can be used as a model for creative economic community activities that encourage community participation, attract tourists to watch performances, participate in Portuguese dance training activities, design Portuguese clothing patterns, and serve as a learning center for Thai-Portuguese history.



Portuguese dance experiments in elementary school classrooms.
Vorawan Pinrattanakorn



Portuguese dance experiments in 3 arts 3 religions festival.
Vorawan Pinrattanakorn



Portuguese dance in Christmas Festival at Santa Cruz Church.
Vorawan Pinrattanakorn

Discussion

This study developed "Siamo-Portuguese Dance," a contemporary work blending Thai and Portuguese cultures, informed by an extensive data collection process including documentary surveys, interviews, media analysis, field surveys, observation, artist standards, and the creator's experience. The creation of the dance incorporated eight distinct dance elements. A key aspect of this research was the collaborative process with communities, academics, cultural experts, and the Portuguese Embassy in Thailand. This partnership has fostered knowledge creation for performances that support tourism in various Thai communities and align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting sustainable development awareness.

The research successfully met all three objectives:

Objective 1 (Cultural Capital Study): The study thoroughly documented the cultural capital of Thai communities related to Portuguese dance.

Objective 2 (Community Engagement): The collaborative approach with various stakeholders, including the Portuguese Embassy, resulted in performances that can significantly boost tourism. The innovative performance format, allowing multi-directional viewing and improvisation, enhances naturalness and audience participation, making it adaptable for communities new to dance and for festivals to create local value and attract tourists.

Objective 3 (Educational Medium Development): The findings on Thai-Portuguese cultural history and dance elements, tested in the Kudichin community's "3 Arts 3 Religions Festival" and elementary school classrooms, provide concrete knowledge. This information can be directly applied to develop a tangible curriculum for teaching Portuguese dance in Thai schools, ensuring cultural continuity and dissemination.

This study serves as a practical model for creative economic community activities. It encourages community participation, attracts tourists through performances and dance training, inspires Portuguese clothing pattern design, and establishes learning centers for Thai-Portuguese history.

Suggestions

The creation of "Siamo-Portuguese Dance" was guided by six characteristics of traditional Portuguese dances, including single and overlapping circle arrangements, foot stamping, spinning, finger snapping, and performer interaction. The chosen performance format, allowing multi-directional viewing and performer improvisation, aims to enhance community engagement and audience interest, making the dance accessible even to those with no prior dance experience. This adaptability makes it suitable for various festivals and celebrations. Furthermore, this creative work provides a valuable framework for exploring and adapting Portuguese culture in other relevant areas within Thailand, such as the Portuguese village in Ayutthaya and the Peranakan ethnic community in Southern Thailand.

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Piano as Material *Body*: Reconsidering Instrumental Representation in Contemporaneity

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Abstract

This article explores the transformation of the piano from a functional musical instrument into a hybrid, conceptually charged body within contemporary artistic practices. Traditionally associated with technical mastery, concert tradition, and cultural prestige, the piano in these contexts loses its conventional functionality and becomes a site for expanded meaning-making. Through the analysis of three artistic cases – Ross Bolleter's *Ruined Piano Sanctuary*, the author's own performances *Compost* and *Concerto and Installation for Piano and a Piece of Furniture* – the article investigates how altered, deconstructed, or contextually displaced instruments may affect the role of the performer and the structure of performative interaction. The analysis draws on Bruno Latour's actor-network theory and Jane Bennett's vital materialism, seeking to highlight how the material state of the instrument generates performative potentials beyond sound production. These perspectives suggest that the instrument can be understood as an active agent whose altered materiality encourages alternative strategies of sensitivity, adaptability, and embodied intersubjectivity. The piano ceases to be a neutral medium and instead emerges as a participant in a distributed network of meaning. The article proposes that the transformation of the instrument's status can contribute to a shift in the performer's identity and in the aesthetic and ethical value systems that shape musical experience.

Keywords: piano representation, new materialism, performance practice, interdisciplinary, ethics

Introduction

Music researcher Samuel J. Wilson begins his book *New Music And the Crises of Materiality: Sounding Bodies and Objects in Late Modernity* with the following thought:
Matter seems to be the solid ground on which we stand. In the European art music tradition, it provides the sturdy enclosures of the concert hall and the opera house, and the objects and beings – instruments, musical technologies, and persons – that reside within them.(Wilson, 2021, p. 1).

Thus, matter is what enables the emergence of information perceived beyond its material boundaries. An overview of scholarly literature reveals that the process of musical performance is examined from various perspectives: the relationship between the instrument and the musician is often explored through the lens of the subject (i.e., the performer), focusing on artistic identity (Cumming 2000; Auslander 2006; Moore 2012; Lüneburg 2013; Navickaitė-Martinelli 2014; Doğantan-Dack 2017; Valuntonytė 2023), virtuosity and mastery (Hennion 2012; Shlomowitz 2016; Jankowska 2021; Devenish and Hope 2023), physical expression and gesture (Godøy 2006; Windsor 2011; Navickaitė-Martinelli 2012, 2014, 2023; Laws 2019; Moroz 2020; Auslander 2021; Devenish 2021; Valuntonytė 2023).

However, ongoing geopolitical conflicts, the Anthropocene's intensification of existential crisis, the increasing relevance of posthumanist theory and the application of New Materialism ideas across artistic disciplines prompt the search for new modes of being and new objects of attention. In these contexts, human agency is revealed not through the subject itself, but through the surrounding matter. In this article, *the force of things* is examined through the inclusion of the piano in various artistic practices.

Over centuries of its history, this instrument has maintained its status not only as one of the central symbols of classical music, revealing the finest qualities of the performer, but also as a frequent object of sonic experimentation. In the context of artistic movements beginning in the second half of the 20th century, its physicality becomes the object of experimentation – through the use of screws and saws, exposure to natural forces, inclusion in moments of collective catharsis (and even becoming its cause), or destruction aimed at opening new possibilities for sonic perception. This multiplicity of perspectives on the instrument's materiality encourages a departure from hierarchical systems, allowing the physicality of the instrument and the performer to be regarded as two equal agents.

For this reason, the concept of the body is chosen to describe the external form of the instrument. For example, in ethnomusicologist Eliot Bates's article *The Social Life of Musical Instruments*, the accordion is described as having a "[…] hoarse and whining voice, which reminded listeners of the cruelty of love and the breadth of desire" (Bates, 2012, p. 363). It is important to note that this *voice* should not be understood solely as a sonic metaphor – rather, it refers to the instrument's capacity for agency, enabling it to act as protagonist, actor, or mediator within social networks (Bates, 2012, p. 364).

An opposing view reflects another, more everyday expression of the piano – its inherent stillness, which evokes its "furnitural" nature. In many homes, the upright piano functions as a piece of furniture (Laws, 2019, p. 112); Wilson highlights this quality by referring to the instrument's ability to stimulate compositional thinking that materializes in practice – what sounded in the mind is easily articulated with the help of the piano: thought becomes material through a specific object (Wilson, 2021, p. 51).

Though the authors' positions may seem contradictory, they reinforce the *article's central premise:* instruments become active agents beyond the boundaries of concert institutions. It is therefore essential to explore the kinds of questions and contexts these representations of instruments are capable of articulating.

For the development of this article, the questions posed by E. Bates become especially relevant [excerpted]:

- Why do some musical instruments (but not others) possess the performing musician and/or the audience, and how do such possessions happen?
- Does the performer perform the instrument or the other way around?
- Why are some musical instruments caught in anallegorical web overflowing with symbolism and symbolic associations, while others comparatively seem to lack symbolic references? (Bates, 2012, p. 387).

This paper draws on the theoretical frameworks of Bruno Latour's actor-network theory and Jane Bennett's vital materialism. While both perspectives recognize the agency of nonhuman entities, they conceptualize it differently: Latour emphasizes the relational nature of agency, which emerges from the associations between human and nonhuman actors in networks, whereas Bennett attributes a kind of inherent vibrancy or animacy to matter itself. In this article, these perspectives are brought into dialogue to explore both the networked positioning of the instrument within performative systems and its potential to act as a materially affective body, even outside of traditional musical roles. **This theoretical framework is applied to the analysis of three artistic works: Ross Bolleter's** *Ruined Piano*

Sanctuary, **the performance** *Compost*, **and** *Concerto and Installation for Piano and a Piece of Furniture*.

Reinterpreting Bates's questions in the context of the artistic practices discussed, this paper aims to question:

- How does the relationship with the instrument transform when it loses its conventional functionality?
- In what ways do artistic practices such as Ross Bolleter's *Ruined Piano Sanctuary* or the performance *Compost* challenge the performer's position as the sole creator of meaning?
- Can the instrument, as an active, living body, be recognized not only as a tool but also as a partner?

Methodological approach

This article applies a qualitative methodology grounded in artistic research and reflective analysis of creative processes. The three case studies – *Ruined Piano Sanctuary*, *Compost*, and *Concerto and Installation for Piano and a Piece of Furniture* – were selected for their capacity to represent materially transformed instruments in diverse artistic and performative contexts.

The analysis is based on detailed narrative accounts of each creative work, considered alongside relevant theoretical perspectives, and relies on reflective interpretation of artistic processes and outcomes, using theory as a lens to situate and articulate the insights that emerge from each case.

Two of the three works discussed were created and performed by the author. This position provides an opportunity to include not only analysis of the final outcomes but also personal reflections on the creative process, decision-making, and performance experience. Grounded in practice-based research, this study does not aim for generalisability; instead, it offers a situated understanding of how materially altered instruments can shape performer–instrument relationships.

Relations of Matter: The Concepts of B. Latour and J. Bennett

At the end of the 20th century, the boundaries of classical humanist dichotomies – subject and object, human and machine, science and culture – begin to dissolve, resulting in theories that no longer centre on the human, but rather on the interconnectedness of different forms of life, objects, and processes. The non-singular approach resonates with Bruno Latour's *Actor-Network Theory* (*ANT*), which central aim is to reveal how relationships between different actors generate power – objects, people, and their interactions are understood as hybrid formations whose meanings are not fixed:

Hybrids ourselves, installed lopsidedly within scientific institutions, half engineers and half philosophers, […] we have chosen to follow the imbroglios wherever they take us. To shuttle back and forth, we rely on the notion of translation, or network. More supple than the notion of system, more historical than the notion of structure, more empirical than the notion of complexity, the idea of network is the Ariadne's thread of these interwoven stories. Latour, 1993, p. 3).

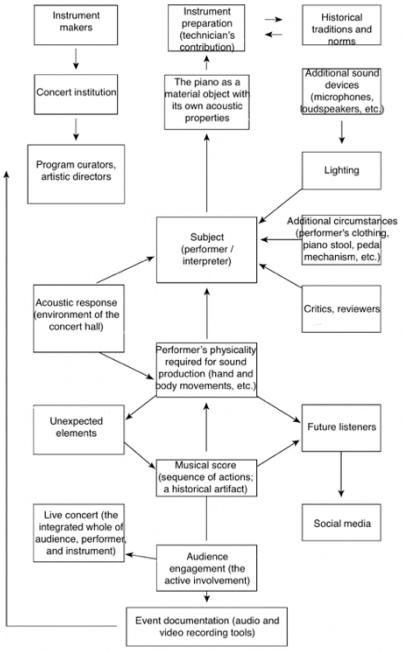
In Latour's work, the concept of "translation" – comparable to a linguistic metaphor – is synonymous with the idea of a network (or mediation). It is through this process that hybrids are created, understood as mixtures of culture, nature, new forms of being, or as chains that connect different domains. Latour's colleague John Law offers a more precise definition of this concept, describing it as "the process or the work of making two things that are not the

same, equivalent." (Law, 1999, p. 8). Drawing on the reflections of Trevor Pinch and Frank Trocco, who explore the context of the creation of a new musical instrument, the Moog synthesizer, Bates presents the analogy of the network in musical performance practice:

Certain factors were essential for the synthesizer to become an instrument rather than just another experimental object. Here we need to understand the roles of many kinds of actors, including marketers, distributors, and expert users, in translating between the worlds of electronics and lab equipment, and the worlds of musicians in the genres of psychedelic rock, sound design, and underground/ mainstream dance music. (Bates, 2018, p. 44).

Using Bates's interpretation, ANT can be applied to the concert situation as well (see Fig. 1): the concert event emerges not merely as a result of the interaction between the performer and the instrument, but as a derivative of numerous mediating actors that bring together historical and institutional factors (traditions, concert practice norms, established expectations or conventions); artistic creation (compositional practice) and repertoire selection shaped by curatorial decisions. The role of technological mediators, such as speakers,

amplifiers, microphones, and lighting, is also crucial, as these elements alter not only the nature of the sound but also the experience of the performance. Objects such as the piano stool, the instrument's pedal mechanism, or other small details take on an active role, contributing to the articulation of the instrument's body. Alongside these elements, unpredictable yet active network participants emerge: the performer's physical and emotional state (tension, focus), unexpected events (possible technical errors, audience reactions) – all of which can reshape the trajectory of the event. Finally, the event does not end on stage – it extends into documentation, social media, and listeners' experiences, forming an expanded and ongoing network. Such a perspective allows musical performance to be understood as a dynamic, multi-actor medium in which no element is isolated, but rather exists within a



dynamic of mutual interdependence:

Fig. 1. Application of B. Latour's ANT to the concert situation (author's interpretation).

Continuing to explore the questions raised in Latour's work and the dominant terminology he employs, the practice that retains dual roots is described as "purification". In this process, human subjects and nonhuman entities are positioned in opposition, with the model of action aiming to establish boundaries between the always-existing natural world and

a society with predictable and stable interests and objectives (Latour, 1993, p. 11). According to Latour, all of these processes occur simultaneously, closely intertwined with the processes of hybridization:

So long as we consider these two practices of translation and purification separately, we are truly modern - that is, we willingly subscribe to the critical project, even though that project is developed only through the proliferation of hybrids down below. As soon as we direct our attention simultaneously to the work of purification and the work of hybridiza- tion, we immediately stop being wholly modern, and our future begins to change. (Latour, 1993, p. 11).

If hybridity is understood as existing between conventional categories, then in musical performance, the human, the object, tradition, and technology become equally significant factors. The instrument can be prepared, dismantled, or modified, and its material characteristics shape both the performance and the very "being" of the instrument. As Bates notes, an instrument is always multifaceted: "Makers and instrument repair specialists have a different conceptualization of a working instrument than instrumentalists or listeners […]. There is always an instrument multiple." (Bates, 2018, p. 46) Thus, the piano becomes more than a musical tool; it becomes a multi-layered, interdisciplinary, and technological hybrid whose agency emerges through ongoing interaction and transformation.

Although the actor-network theory's sympoietic openness allows for moving beyond the dualistic opposition between the performer and the composer, this theory is not primarily concerned with the question of how matter itself attains agency. Rather, it focuses on how actors connect within the network. Thus, it becomes important to adopt a theory that critically examines the power of material forces. One such perspective is offered by theorist and philosopher Jane Bennett in her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things.*

The author proposes to transcend the boundaries of an anthropocentric worldview by grounding her theory of vital materialism in the claim that organic and inorganic forms participate in a shared life system, in which no ontological weight is privileged. Matter, according to Bennett, is no longer treated as passive, mechanically reactive substance – it vibrates, resonates, participates, and creates (Bennett, 2010, p. 6). Such an ontological stance changes the status of the human subject, shifting it from a privileged position to a dynamic, networked field of relations, in which the body is not an individualized unit but a composite of various processes – proteins, minerals, bacteria, chemicals (Bennett, 2010, p. 96). Bennett emphasizes that the main obstacle to the development of a vital materialist perspective is the deep cultural attachment to the idea that matter is *lifeless* and that real action and power belong to the human (Bennett, 2010, p. 119). As a solution to this situation, Bennett suggests abandoning themes of subjectivity or the interior nature of the human, since ultimately "[…] these topics will lead down the anthropocentric garden path, will insinuate a hierarchy of subjects over objects, and obstruct freethinking about what agency really entails." (Bennett, 2010, p. 120). Consequently, what has been considered "nonhuman" bodies or objects acquires agency that cannot be ignored on ethical or political grounds: "[…] But the case for matter as active needs also to readjust the status of human actants: not by denying humanity's awesome, awful powers, but by presenting these powers as evidence of our own constitution as vital materiality. In other words, human power is itself a kind of thing-power." (Bennett, 2010, p. 10)

In the context of this article, it is also significant how Bennett perceives objects that have lost their primary function or become unnecessary: such matter is usually considered meaningless and discarded. However, Bennett argues that even this "discarded" matter can become a philosophical and aesthetic factor. She grounds her theory in an everyday example – the accumulation of trash in storm drains:

As I encountered these items, they shimmied back and forth between debris and thing-between, on the one hand, stuff to ignore, except insofar as it betokened human activity (the

workman's efforts, the litterer's toss, the rat-poisoner's success), and, on the other hand, stuff that commanded attention in its own right, as existents in excess of their association with human meanings, habits, or projects. (Bennett, 2010, p. 4).

This moment – when an object becomes visible and active – reveals the power of things. Objects deemed useless or destroyed are not "nothing" – they act, create vibrations, and change our relationship to matter. This perspective allows us to rethink the existence of matter as a cyclical, constantly shifting participation in a networked whole.

Based on the ideas discussed in this section, the following text aims to reveal the power of unconventional expression embedded within instruments to reorganize conventional artistic practice.

Creative Case Studies: Ross Bolleter's Work, the Physical Theatre and Music Performance *Compost*, and *CONCERTO AND INSTALLATION FOR PIANO AND A PIECE OF FURNITURE*

As the theories of Latour and Bennett discussed above suggest, the piano is an inseparable, living, and influential part of the network of musical processes, capable of reflecting social and cultural issues. But what messages are conveyed by musical instruments that fall into cultural margins, when they are no longer suitable for conventional playing practices? What does such instrumental expression signify for the network and its organization, for the organological relationship between human and technology? These questions open up a space for somewhat utopian reflections: how might our usual artistic practices look today if the standardization of instruments (pianos) in the nineteenth century had never occurred?

A sanctuary for ruined pianos established by composer and co-founder of the *World Association for Ruined Piano Studies*, Ross Bolleter, currently houses over fifty pianos in the Wambyn Olive Farm in Australia. The creator, who integrates these instruments – unsuitable for conventional playing – into his CD recordings and installations, perceives them as an autonomous, individualized species. Unlike in traditional classical music performance, where extraneous sounds might be considered disturbances, the music of the ruined piano embraces all of the instrument's sounds, and unexpected outcomes enrich the musical experience: "What was a sweet-swelling long ringer on Tuesday can be the merest plink by Thursday." (Bolleter in Haruta, 2021, p. 75). A traditional piano is constructed to be predictable in its operation: the hammers should properly strike the strings, the keys should be sensitive to touch and not stick. While the performance characteristics of pianos may differ slightly, the overall design of the instrument is consciously aimed at consistency and reliability.

It is natural that the disappearance of an object's usual characteristics prompts a reconsideration of the subject's behavior, as the instrument increasingly emerges as an active participant in the network. The absence of predictability naturally transforms the performer's actions, rendering conventional standards of virtuosity irrelevant. What is emphasized here is not the performer's dominance but adaptability – an aspect also highlighted by art researcher Håkon Stene, who, in writing about his experience as a percussionist, stresses that performers working with all standard percussion instruments learn fundamental striking techniques and sound formation principles, which apply universally to achieve a certain virtuosity based on these norms (Stene 2014, p. 41). In contrast, the practice that Stene refers to as *post-percussive* moves in the opposite direction – canonical knowledge and ways of thinking dissolve, as it becomes difficult to precisely define the skills required to perform such sonic material. This aspect also becomes relevant in the case of abandoned instruments.

The expansive and unpredictable sonic landscape of instruments can be associated with the work of John Cage, who, through the full preparation of the piano, transformed the instrument into something else entirely, fundamentally altering its original timbre. As Kevin

William Davis observes, "In this transition into the 1960s, the presence of the piano begins to be felt in a different way […]. Composers, performers, and audiences seem to be reevaluating their relationship to this object" (Davis, 2017, p. 53). Thus, preparation creates a disjunction between the keyboard – which represents the tempered tonal system – and the multitude of different types of sounds that can be produced through it (Haffter, 2023, p. 88–89). However, in Bolleter's case, the instrument is expanded not by external means, but by the piano's inherent ability to change and interact: the new sonic environment is created from the decay of the piano's own physical materials – wood, keys, rusting metal, and strings.

The essence of the piano sanctuary is perfectly captured in Wilson's iconic reflection: Their status as pianos – and as cohesive objects – eventually exists only in memory, in the disjunction between the objects as musico-cultural icons and the materiality that composes them at present. In one's imagination, this is something one might project into their future becoming-debris.(Wilson, 2021, p. 65).

A similar approach can be taken when discussing *Compost,* a physical theatre and music performance initiated by the author of this paper and partly inspired by the previously discussed *piano sanctuary*. While the work itself spans multiple disciplines and themes, this article focuses on the motivations behind choosing its subject matter and on the integration of Håkon Stene's concept of adaptive virtuosity (or post-percussive practice) when working with musical instruments of varying characteristics.

The creative process began with the creative team's residency at the *Getlini EKO* waste sorting plant in Riga. Throughout the visit, documented material took various forms within the work: for instance, the stork, traditionally seen as a symbol of family, harmony, rebirth, and happiness, appears in the organic waste plant as a dirty, aggressive, chaotic bird. As a result, in the piece, the stork is embodied by the circus artist, who establishes a connection with the human figure. Based on the conveyor belt diagrams seen in the factory (see Fig. 2), the composer combined musical scores (see Fig. 3). The score, usually understood as the performer's secret or map, here becomes a publicly projected material, lending playfulness to the work and rendering the spectator as important as the performer:

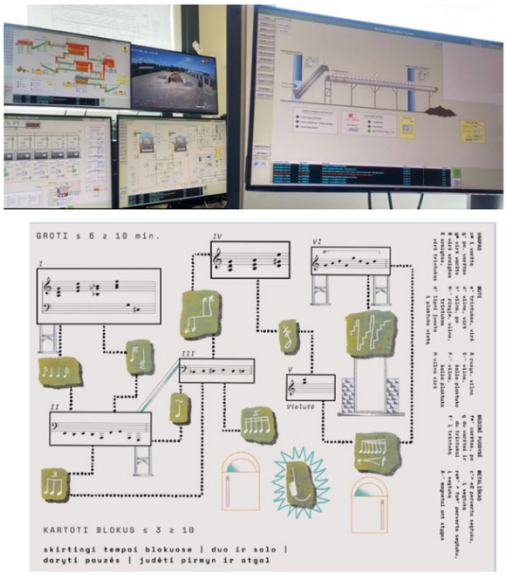


Fig. 2. Visualizations of conveyor schemes, which in the creative process turned into musical scores; **Fig. 3.** Sketch of the piece's score.

In the piece, musical instruments are used to reflect different states of decay and transformation: Instrument *a)* is the inner part of a piano, dismantled and removed from an

instrument that had stood in water for a long time; *b)* is an instrument without any significant defects or deviations from the norm, but one that was acquired for free from people; *c)* is a piano that had stood outside for several years and had begun to physically deteriorate. To preserve its original, primary form, the instrument is held together with additional protective straps. A characteristic of this instrument is that its keys no longer press down, so it can only be played directly on the strings.

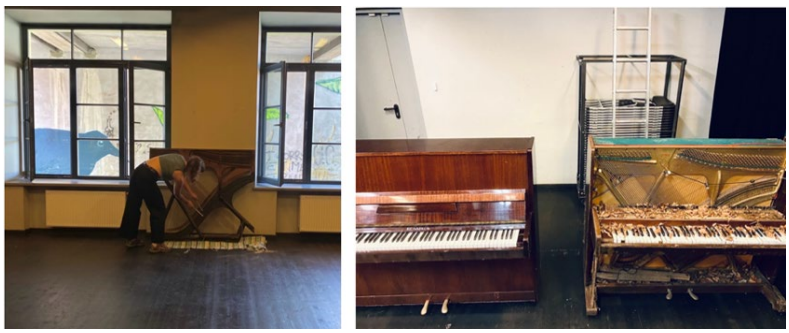


Fig. 4. (*from the left*) Instrument *a)*, *b)*, *c)*.

Thus, in all cases, we have the same musical instrument – the piano – but during the performance, different states of this object are revealed, conditioned by varying life circumstances. To further emphasize this change and inequality, the main condition set during musical rehearsals was that each instrument generates its own new logic, and therefore, each piano is approached individually. For example, instrument *a)* was suspended two meters above the ground and could be played only with long bamboo sticks to which various objects (screws, piano hammers) were attached. The instrument was amplified with contact microphones, resulting in the creation of a rich and at times dangerously intense sonic landscape. Instrument *b)* was prepared by categorizing the sounds into four groups based on their acoustic properties: *bell-like*; *muted*; *slightly wooden (muted but resonant);* and *muted but metallic*. For preparation, wool, erasers, screws and bolts of different thicknesses, wires, magnets, and metal chains were used. As already mentioned, instrument *c)* can only be played directly on the strings, and due to the extremely fragile and deteriorating wooden parts of the instrument, it was not advised to move or use its body for sonic solutions. These limitations inherently bring instrument *c)* closer to *a)*. For this reason, the situation was resolved by amplifying *a)* in a specific way, while *c)* was prepared solely with wooden sticks. The playing process took place through these sticks: by preparing (rubbing) them with rosin and then drawing them across the strings at different speeds, various pitches and intensities of sound were produced.

Unlike Bolleter's *piano sanctuary* or the improvisations recorded by the composer, *Compost* features a fixed score that requires consistency from the performer. However, such consistency is extremely difficult to achieve under conditions where the instrument's state changes unpredictably. For example, although instruments *a)* and *c)* were kept in safe and suitable conditions throughout the creative process, due to their long exposure to the elements and the damage already sustained, they exhibited new characteristics with each rehearsal. Thus, the score becomes a starting point that recalls the original intention; attempts are made to imitate and recreate previous versions of the instrument's sound. Yet the instrument itself prevents any potential for reproduction, since each performance will inevitably be noticeably different simply due to the changes imposed by the instrument.

Another important example of the author's creative practice is the project *CONCERTO AND INSTALLATION FOR PIANO AND A PIECE OF FURNITURE.* An interdisciplinary team of artists decided that the fate of an abandoned piano, whose potential had never been

fulfilled, would be best represented through a dialogue between a piano and a grand piano, realized through live streaming and the use of technologies.

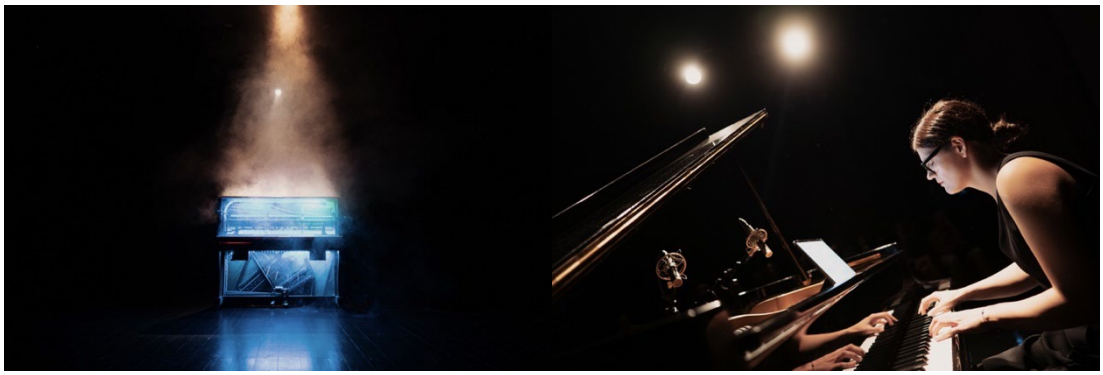


Fig. 5. *CONCERTO AND INSTALLATION FOR PIANO AND A PIECE OF FURNITURE* (the image on the left captures an excerpt from the installation, while the one on the right depicts a moment from the live concert).

Two events took place simultaneously in two different rooms: a concert and an installation. The concert featured live piano music, with a program of more than twenty piano pieces written across different periods. Meanwhile, the installation audience heard the live-streamed concert performed by the pianist (and author of this article) Julija Bagdonavičiūtė, which in the installation environment was unrecognizably modified and, in a semantic sense, deconstructed. It is important to mention that the technical solutions developed by the engineer allowed the piano in the installation to be played even without a pianist: the composer controlled it remotely using a specially created console, and the musical motifs chosen by the creative team seemed to reflect the melancholy mood of the piano's unfulfilled dreams.

Although it might seem that the two simultaneously occurring events operate independently of one another, this is precisely the aspect that the creative process sought to avoid: the installation includes episodes in which the piece of furniture clearly dominates (i.e., in such moments, the pieces performed in the concert must be interpreted in a way that allows the composer and director working within the installation to implement their planned ideas). This means that the performer's interpretation in the concert part must be highly precise, resulting in two simultaneous yet interdependent artistic events, each with its own dramaturgy defined by exact climaxes, rhythmic and melodic unisons. Typically, the concert format reveals the pianist's virtuosity and creative freedom, but here it is complemented by the condition that the performance of music becomes just one of the many components of the overall event.

Paradoxically, in an installation that lacks the central controlling figure of the instrument – the performer – the piano itself becomes the main agent and the factor that generates corporeality. Viewers see only this robotic instrument, which has transformed from a dull and lifeless voice into a cyborg-like creator, operating beyond the limits of its abilities. Although the absence of the performer encourages us to see this part of the performance as reductive, it is also greatly expanded – the corporeality is embodied in the presence of the piano itself.

Conclusions

The instrumental expressions represented in the discussed works allow the piano to be seen within an unusual networked framework, where subjective agency must be reconsidered.

Conventional behavioural models, shaped by standardisation processes, are transformed into practices of adaptation, attentiveness, and a nuanced form of empathy that acknowledges the material and contextual particularities of the instrument.

Since the performer's actions are influenced by the instrument's condition and specific characteristics, this further confirms the relevance of Latour's and Bennett's concepts within the field of musical performance, where matter is treated as an equal agent in the network, possessing its own vibrant power to change. The instrument becomes situationally active, as the piano's material vulnerability encourages a shift in performative strategies, alongside a transformation in the perception of aesthetic value.

Bolleter's creative initiatives, along with the examples of instruments discussed in *Compost* and *CONCERTO AND INSTALLATION FOR PIANO AND A PIECE OF FURNITURE*, allow pianos to be seen as hybrids in which musical functionality intersects with the context of *living conditions*. Similar to how Latour questions the formation of ozone holes as either purely natural or purely cultural phenomena, the existence of these instruments invites a reconsideration of their status and role in contemporary culture. Of course, these examples are not as radical or all-encompassing as global ecological problems, yet they are closely related to human habits, consumerism, and broader attitudes toward matter.

The problematic of this paper suggests that the formation of different piano identities allows for a conceptual rethinking of the performer's function as someone who does not merely control but also creates meaning through interaction with the diverse expressions of the instrument. Such an approach opens up possibilities for performative and equal interaction, in which the instrument is treated as a partner and matter itself is *empowered to speak*.

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Act Your Own Story: Enhancing Creative Skills for the Local Community to Develop Soft Power for the Nation

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Abstract

In order to enhance creative skills in theater for a total of 103 participants from all four regions of the country in the project "Developing Innovators through Theatre Practice and Local-Contemporary Knowledge for Diversifying and Enriching Creative Thailand", who varied greatly in terms of age, profession, theatrical experience, life experience, and goals for attending the training, enabling them to create works that reflect issues they believe are important to their society and community, the first author, as a researcher, found that in addition to training the hard skills related to the creation of theatrical works, such as acting, scriptwriting, directing, and presenting performances, the group of instructors also needs to guide the use of soft skills in collaborating creative work with others for the trainees. The researcher learned that the most appropriate method is to use a "soft power" approach.
Keywords: The Development of Creative Skills, Teaching Scriptwriting, Acting, and Directing, Theater "Hard" Skills, Soft Skills, Soft Power.

Introduction & Project Background

The project titled "Developing Innovators through Theatre Practice and Contemporary Local Knowledge to Enhance the Value and Diversity of Creative Thailand" was funded by the Program Management Unit for Human Resources and Institutional Development, Research and Innovation (PMU-B). The project was led by Professor Pornrat Damhrung, with the first author, together with Assistant Professor Dr. Parida Manomaiphiboon and Dr. Lowell Skar, serving as the principal researchers. Additionally, seven doctoral and master's students, along with alumni from the Department of Dramatic Arts, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, served as research assistants, later co-authors.

The project aimed to: 1) Develop theatrical innovators capable of telling diverse and creative stories with an understanding of the theory and art of theatre, particularly in playwriting, acting, and directing. This included an understanding of how to apply educational media, define key local narratives, and appropriately integrate local artistic elements. 2) Enhance Thailand's human capital by focusing on the development of theatrical innovators, facilitators, and educators working in the fields of theatre and performing arts. 3) Build a network of new-generation theatrical innovators and facilitators as human capital capable of driving transformative change in their communities and society. And 4) Develop a foundational theatrical arts ecosystem that is linked to business and industry sectors.

The team of research assistants, serving as model innovators and trainers, employed an acting and directing curriculum developed by the authors, in conjunction with a playwriting curriculum created by Assistant Professor Dr. Parida Manomaiphiboon. These were used as the core frameworks for workshops conducted with participants, who included high school teachers interested in theatre production, university students and faculty in the field of dramatic arts, professionals from television, film, and media, as well as aspiring young actors from all four regions of Thailand. Participants ranged in age from 13 to 65 years, totaling 103 individuals. The project duration was one year and six months.

This initiative employed theatre processes and contemporary local knowledge to foster the development of innovators and facilitators, with a key emphasis on linking theatrical arts to the Thai social context, promoting cultural diversity, and providing a platform for community voices.

The central research problem addressed was: How can theatrical skills be effectively developed among a highly diverse group of participants so that they may collaborate to create works that sincerely and artistically express their own voices?

Competency Skills, Soft Skills, and Skill Development

Jindarat Phonok (2014) explains that skills are composed of two main categories: "hard skills" and "soft skills." Hard skills refer to the abilities acquired through formal education or vocational training, often involving academic or short-term programs designed for higher education or career advancement. In contrast, soft skills refer to personal attributes or individual characteristics such as intelligence, emotional capability, or moral values. These include personality, manners, politeness, sociability, communication, friendliness, optimism, maturity, initiative, emotional regulation, and understanding of real-world contexts. Soft skills enable individuals to coexist harmoniously with others and to achieve professional success, while hard skills make one technically proficient.

In this training workshop, both hard and soft skills were emphasized. Participants received training in the creation of theatrical works, including acting, scriptwriting, directing, and performance presentation. These skills involve understanding principles of acting; character's actions, conflicts, objectives and goal; developing coherent narratives; and integrating all elements into a unified theatrical message.

Soft skills development was equally crucial. The training aimed to foster: 1) Critical thinking and analytical reasoning. 2) Communication skills. 3) Collaboration and teamwork, emotional intelligence, and adaptability. 4) Problem-solving skills. And 5) Leadership, negotiation, compromise, and time management.

Parit Saisee (2024) proposed the following strategies for developing various soft skills:

Critical thinking: Engage in debates, brainstorming, problem-solving, decision-making, and information evaluation.

Communication: Practice active listening, clear and focused speaking, reading, writing, group work, public presentations, and negotiation.

Collaboration: Use games, workshops, relationship-building activities, co-problem-solving, shared frameworks, experience exchange, and reflective practice (Barrett & Williams, 2022, as cited in Parit Saisee).

Problem-solving: Group projects, creative experiments, games, and discussions.

Leadership: Goal setting and planning activities, problem-solving, presenting work, and observing coaching sessions (Gallo, 2022, as cited in Parit Saisee).

On "Soft Power"

Somkiat Onwimon (2023) interprets Joseph Nye's concept of "soft power" as the power to attract and inspire love—an influence that persuades without coercion or force, unlike "hard power," which involves military or economic means. Soft power comprises: 1) A beloved and accessible culture. 2) Sincerely practiced political values and ideologies, such as human rights and freedom. 3) A fair and legitimate foreign policy. This article demonstrates how the research team applied the principles and practices of soft power in developing local theatrical innovators and facilitators.

Research Methodology

This research was conducted in four regions of Thailand—South, Northeast, North, and Central—each with its own network of participating universities, local organizations, and selected participants.

The workshop in each region spanned six days of intensive training, totaling eight hours per day. In the South, Northeast, and Central regions, the workshops were held continuously over six full days. In the North, to accommodate participant availability and ensure adequate time for development, sessions were conducted over two weekends (Friday–Sunday), covering six days in total.

The sixth day in each region featured a public presentation and a reflection session. Community leaders, cultural and business figures, and educators provided feedback on the performances. This was followed by group and individual reflections from participants and facilitators. In the project's final quarter, summary meetings were held and the participants from the four regions were invited to review the knowledge gained and its application.

The research employed qualitative methods, drawing on phenomenology, practice-as-research, and eco-cultural frameworks. According to Pornrat Damhrung (2019), phenomenology emphasizes knowledge arising from perception, learning, practice, and action—knowledge that engages both body and mind and can be recorded, described, debated, and referenced. Practice-as-research emphasizes trial, error, and repetition to refine processes toward research objectives. The eco-cultural approach highlights the systems and structures within specific local contexts that support and shape cultural practices.

The study explored transformations and learning that occurred among participants after their involvement in the project. Data were collected from participants' individual and group reflections, interviews, discussions, and social media writings.

The Four Regions Workshop

Region	Participating Universities	Collaborating Local Organizations	Participants
Southern Thailand September 7–11, 2023	•Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Thaksin University •Songkhla Rajabhat University •Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani Campus (Department of Mass Communication)	•Ban Khian Charoen •AE Arts Space •Prince of Songkhla University Radio Station •Lee Gardens Plaza Art Gallery, Hat Yai -Southern Folk Artists Association	•University students from the three participating institutions •Artists from the Southern Folk Artists Association •Faculty members from Thaksin University, Songkhla Rajabhat University, and Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani Campus **Total: 25 participants**
Northeastern Thailand November 1–7, 2023	•Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University •Mahasarakham University •Loei Rajabhat University	•Treasury Museum •Six secondary schools •National Broadcasting Station, Khon Kaen •Thai Isan PBS, a regional branch of Thai PBS	•Students from the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Khon Kaen University •Youth members of the "Dek Thewada" Puppet Mor Lam Troupe from Mahasarakham •Teachers from six secondary schools participating in the Kaen Isan Wat Theatre Project **Total: 21 participants**

Northern Thailand March 11–16, 2024	•Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University •Faculty of Mass Communication, Chiang Mai University •Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University	•National Astronomical Research Institute of Thailand (NARIT) •Part Time Theatre •Kam Muan Studio •Lanna Wisdom Heritage Foundation	•Lecturers from Chiang Mai University and Chiang Mai Rajabhat University •Theatre artists •Members of Part Time Theatre •"Trainees" from Kam Muan Studio **Total: 32 participants**
Central Thailand and Bangkok Metropolitan Region April 6–12, 2024	•Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University •Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University •Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, Burapha University •Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University •Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University •Faculty of Communication Arts, Sripatum University •Faculty of Communication Arts, Huachiew Chalermprakiet University •Faculty of Communication Arts, Ramkhamhaeng University	•Thai PBS Arts and Culture Media Center •Bangpakok Wittaya School	•Faculty members from Chulalongkorn University, Burapha University, Silpakorn University, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Sripatum University, Huachiew Chalermprakiet University, and Ramkhamhaeng University •Professionals in the entertainment industry including actors, scriptwriters, and acting coaches •Theatre facilitators **Total: 38 participants**

The Process

Core Competencies Developed	Transversal Skills Developed	Developmental Approaches
Acting **Scriptwriting**	**Critical thinking:** analytical skills, and evaluative judgment **Communication skills** **Teamwork**	Engage in debates, brainstorming, problem-solving, decision-making, and information evaluation. Active listening, clear and concise speaking, reading, writing, public presentation, and negotiation

Directing	**Problem-solving skills** **Leadership skills:** Negotiation, conflict resolution, time management	Use games, workshops, relationship-building activities, co-problem-solving, shared frameworks, experience exchange, and reflective practice Group projects, creative experiments, games, and discussions. Goal setting and planning activities, problem-solving, presenting work, and observing coaching sessions

While the instructional team developed competencies in the three domains—acting, playwriting, and directing—through various activities, the process also simultaneously incorporated the development of five core transversal skills. The activities designed to enhance competencies in the three domains can be summarized as follows:

1. Acting

Core Competencies Developed:

- Foundational acting principles
- Understanding character's objectives, goal, conflicts, and actions

Developmental Methods:

- *Body & Mind* and *Relaxation* exercises
- Improvisation exercises
- Reflective thinking and experience sharing following exercises and activities
- Analyzing acting-related issues and proposing solutions, enhancing performance, and understanding the relationship between acting, playwriting, and directing

2. Playwriting

Core Competencies Developed:

- Structured narrative construction or linear plot
- Understanding character's objectives, goal, conflicts, and actions

Developmental Methods:

- *Object Dialogue* exercises
- Comparing characters or plot events with real-life people or news stories
- Analysis of plot structure, character core (objectives, actions, conflicts), and the roles of characters, situations, and the playwright's intended message
- Exercises: *Sacred Flaw*, *From Seed to Idea*, *Headline*, *Character Questionnaire*, *5 ACTs*, "TPR" rule (Time, Place, Resources)
- Visualization exercises through directing practices
- Group and intergroup collaborative reflection on scriptwriting experience, challenges, and solutions
- Collaborative development of regional scripts

3. Directing and Performance Management

Core Competencies Developed:

- Unified direction to communicate core messages
- Understanding character's objectives, goal, conflicts, and actions
- Director's roles and responsibilities

Developmental Methods:

- Exercises: *Matching Organs, Human Monument, Fill in the Blank, Mood and Tone, Silent Tensions, Visual Metaphor, Human Slides*, *Movie Teaser*
- Activities: Production Meetings, Table Work Demonstration, Rehearsal Coaching, Collective reflection, Collaborative development, and Presentation of regional performances

Regional Workshops and Creative Works

Participants from each region collaborated to develop a total of ten theatrical productions. These pieces reflected the voices of local communities and addressed issues that were meaningful to the participants. Experts, local leaders, and educators who attended the performances commented on the works, emphasizing their authenticity, cultural depth, and social relevance—often addressing themes absent from mainstream media. (Pornrat Damhrung, 2025)

Southern Region: *"Songkhla Sam Ros" (Three Flavors of Songkhla)*

The Tea House: Focuses on the decline of local tea house culture due to modernization and security concerns. The story centers on generational tension between a father who wants his daughter to leave the town and a daughter determined to return and reinvent the family business.

Relationships, Songkhla Style: A psychological drama exploring love in the digital age, virtual relationships, and the disappearance of individuals, set against a backdrop of university life.

Khao Yam: Begins with community backlash against the state's unilateral decision to designate a local dish as a "regional menu" without consultation. The play evolves into a nuanced story about culinary pride, memory, and reconciliation between modern celebrity chefs and traditional family recipes.

Northeastern Region: *"Blood Runs Deep Next Door"*

Pan Mool: Set during a mother's funeral, siblings argue over inheritance, revealing differing values about duty, career success, and familial piety. The conflict reflects changing cultural expectations in Isan society.

Auntie's Little Secrets: Centers on a nosy neighbor in an urban Khon Kaen community, exploring themes of surveillance, prejudice, and fractured unity in contemporary housing settings compared to traditional village life.

Northern Region: *"Dark Tales from Andromeda"*

Administrative Schemes: A workplace satire examining office politics, patronage, and personal ambition. It questions the existence of justice within corporate hierarchies.

No More Trust: Draws from experiences of domestic abuse, school bullying, and betrayal among teenagers. The story traces a youth's descent into psychological trauma, culminating in tragedy.

Central Region: *"SOB (Short of Breath)"*

This Baton Is for You: A surreal comedy set in a fictitious kingdom. A transgender queen hides her past, while palace secrets unravel. The piece critiques power, luxury, and identity.

The Monk in Pink: A controversy unfolds as a respected monk is exposed for dressing as a woman. The community grapples with issues of faith, tradition, and authenticity in religious life.

Shame: A dinner table drama about a couple's communication breakdown, emotional repression, and jealousy. The piece raises feminist critiques of marriage and the moral rigidity of domestic norms.

These performances critiqued Thai society from macro to micro levels—governance, religion, and family—highlighting tensions between personal truth and cultural expectations.

Reflections and Outcomes

Following each performance, the research team facilitated feedback sessions with the audience and reflective activities with participants. In the final project quarter, the summary forum provided space for participants to reflect on their growth in both hard and soft skills. Self-assessment of learning by participants can be extracted as follows:

Competency Development

The workshop help the applicants correcting some misconceptions and acquiring new principles/methods :

1. Acting

"Engaging in instinctive, sincere, and straightforward performance fosters authenticity and emotional resonance more effectively than aiming for uniqueness or profundity." (Participant 1)

"Fundamental acting techniques emphasize breathing, physical and mental readiness, and mindfulness prior to performance—areas often overlooked previously." (Participant 2)

"Acting tools enhance awareness of the body, mind, imagination, and focus. Repetition fosters physical, emotional, and cognitive memory." (Participant 3)

"Rooted in Thai classical dance, my movements possess distinctive form. Class exercises help me place the mind and body in a state of emptiness. Closing the eyes heightens other senses, such as listening or feeling, allowing emotions to flow into diverse movements. These exercises help me explore physical capabilities and limitations, offering opportunities to discover new possibilities by altering or reducing form. I gained tools for body-mind connection through imagination and repetition.". (Participant 4)

"The training provided performance tools applicable across diverse student age groups, allowing for appropriate adaptation in various learning contexts." (Participant 4)

"Embracing diversity leads to deeper and more holistic engagement with characters, ultimately unveiling personal and universal truths through "acting without acting." (Participant 5)

"Improvisational methods and performance exercises enrich the actor's emotional experience and serve as tools for scriptwriting and directing." (Participant 6)

"Demonstrations of best practices in acting, scriptwriting, directing, and ensemble collaboration by instructors included: self-management, character immersion, focusing on character objectives over emotions, avoiding harmful terminology, and fostering constructive communication. These inspired participants across fields—actors, playwrights, directors, students, educators, and media professionals—while promoting personal growth and well-being." (Participant 7)

2. Playwriting

"Previously unaware that scripts need not begin with a thematic issue—initial ideas can emerge from any point." (Participant 8)

"A playwright must possess a "need to express" key messages to the audience." (Participant 5)

"Learned to develop scripts through dialogue, questioning, and identifying whether issues carry enough narrative weight. Considered techniques to create believable characters and select events that compel character action." (Participant 9)

"Writing authentic human dialogue requires acknowledging the diversity of human beliefs and behaviors. This challenges the writer's ethical stance toward the characters and the audience." (Participant 4)

"Starting with a deep understanding of the protagonist facilitates alignment between story structure and the writer's core message while mitigating creative blocks." (Participant 10)

"Instinctive and sincere approaches yield more truthful and impactful scripts than forced attempts at originality." (Participant 11)

"Gained insights into participatory playwriting, beginning with issue-framing and discussion." (Participant 14)

"Theater processes help uncover and elevate ordinary community stories, imbuing them with meaning, significance, and value." (Participant 9)

"Tools such as the "20 Questions" framework enhance character and plot complexity. This process includes selecting real-world-inspired characters and events, developing plotlines with post-it notes that outline conflicts and decisions, making narratives compelling." (Participant 1)

"Emphasized the interplay between imagery and script as the core of performance. The writer must recognize this synergy to deliver meaningful content." (Participant 15)

"Character access" emerged as a key strategy for resolving difficulties in generating conflict and plausible situations." (Participant 16)

"The training provided tools for acting, playwriting, directing, and adapting for various student age groups." (Participant 4)

3. Directing

"Effective directing involves collaborative script and character interpretation with actors, focusing on character objectives and conflicts rather than dictating emotional outcomes (e.g., "cry here" or "act funnier")." (Participant 16)

"Instinctive, honest directing connects more deeply with audiences than attempts at intellectualized or stylistic innovation." (Participant 1)

"A director guides actors to fulfill character objectives and strategically positions them onstage to enhance communication of the play's central message." (Participant 17)

"Coaching-style directing employs interpretation, connection, and guided questioning to support actors' realistic and confident performances." (Participant 18)

"The process fosters collective empathy and responsibility for every character and detail of the work, using theatre as a communicative art form. At its core, theatre should sincerely portray real human experiences with renewed perspective, aiming for clarity and impactful storytelling." (Participant 19)

"The training offered tools adaptable to working with diverse student groups." (Participant 4)

"The directing process ensures narratives are communicated through character action, blocking, and scene work aimed at audience engagement." (Participant 20)

"Participants gained new insights into directing practices previously unfamiliar, appreciating the instructors' care and guidance—serving as role models for future teaching and directing." (Participant 21)

"The demonstration of collaborative creative practices inspired professionals across the theatrical and communication fields and provided a foundation for personal development and holistic well-being." (Participant 12)

Transversal Skills Development

1. Critical Thinking

"Merely opening our minds to differences becomes a pathway to deeper, more comprehensive understanding of our characters. Ultimately, it leads us to truth—the truth we perceive, embody, and inhabit—a form of performance that transcends performance." (Participant 15)

"The structured sequence of the learning process gradually enhances our understanding of students—how they feel during lessons, which tasks are challenging, and what emotions arise. This is crucial, as it allows us to adapt and apply those emotional insights to improve our teaching practices more effectively." (Participant 21)

"Taking notes on all feedback after each performance serves as a powerful and empowering form of constructive critique." (Participant 23)

2. Communication

"Understanding fellow human beings begins with members within the group—fostering mutual understanding among peers, between instructors, and between instructors and learners. This understanding must be rooted in empathy and non-judgment. It is a vital communication skill that enables the practice of "Storytelling and Theatrical Performance" in a way that is in-depth, sincere, and truthful. It allows for the representation of human beings in society as they truly are, empowering participants to pose questions, seek answers, and critically analyze societal issues—something often lacking in mainstream entertainment." (Participant 24)

"The structured learning process gradually enhances our understanding of students—how they feel during the learning experience, which challenges they face, and their emotional responses. This is vital in adapting teaching strategies to better suit students needs." (Participant 21)

"A teaching approach that honors and respects human dignity while treating all group members equally, using gentle communication, listening to all opinions, being patient, encouraging, and nonjudgmental, fosters a safe and enjoyable learning environment. It also enables participants to internalize positive practices for both communication and collaborative work." (Participant 25)

3. Collaboration

"The skill of writing a play individually differs significantly from collaborative scriptwriting. The latter requires a delicate process of selecting and integrating each group member's thoughts and feelings into a collectively created script, ensuring true co-authorship." (Participant 14)

"Team building involves more than just technique; it fundamentally requires self-awareness and understanding of others." (Participant 21)

"A teaching approach that honors and respects human dignity while treating all group members equally, using gentle communication, listening to all opinions, being patient, encouraging, and nonjudgmental, fosters a safe and enjoyable learning environment. It also enables participants to internalize positive practices for both communication and collaborative work." (Participant 25)

4. Problem Solving

"The project design provided exercises aimed at fostering active group participation. Tools used in directing, scriptwriting, and acting sessions invited participants to contribute personal experiences in brainstorming sessions through trial, discussion, and exploration of alternatives. Eventually, participants had to "choose" within the constraints of time, space,

and resources (referred to as "TPR" – time, place, and resources). This process cultivated shared empathy and accountability in both work detail and character development. It also exemplified how art can be used to communicate with audiences through participatory theatre, integrated with hands-on practice." (Participant 26)

"In addition to acquiring academic knowledge in scriptwriting, acting, and directing, participants gained valuable life lessons through collaborative work—an unforgettable and meaningful experience." (Participant 27)

"The training was truly intensive, with work-related pressures stemming from personal expectations, group responsibilities, fear of being a burden, and the looming performance for an external audience. Nevertheless, everyone committed to their roles, supporting one another, even through emotional moments, resulting in collective achievement powered by group solidarity." (Participant 23)

5. Leadership

"The structured learning process gradually enhances our understanding of students—how they feel during the learning experience, which challenges they face, and their emotional responses. This is vital in adapting teaching strategies to better suit students needs." (Participant 21)

"The co-creative theatre process allows participants to experience genuine democratic collaboration, cultivating leadership and teamwork skills." (Participant 11)

"The sequencing of lessons and exercises throughout the program was highly effective, enabling participants to gradually deepen their understanding of the subject matter, themselves, and their peers. Initial lessons laid the groundwork for more intensive learning activities in subsequent days and served as exemplary models for planning teaching and theatrical production." (Participant 16)

Research Findings

The development of theatrical creativity among training participants from all four regions of the country—comprising teachers, students, and professionals in media and performing arts—has enabled them to collaboratively create performances that sincerely, accurately, and powerfully reflect social realities, issues, and values that are meaningful to their audiences. To achieve this, the instructional team had to cultivate both technical competencies and transversal skills in the participants.

The technical competencies in this context refer to playwriting, acting, and directing, with an emphasis on core themes and conflicts within the narrative, as well as the objectives and actions of characters. Transversal skills encompass critical thinking, empathy, problem-solving, creativity, communication, collaboration, and emotional flexibility. These skills empower participants not only to create theatrical work but also to transfer knowledge and best practices acquired from the training to others—whether collaborators, colleagues, or students—effectively. Such knowledge transfer drama works a crucial role in the continued development of creative performance works as a form of regional and national "soft power."

The research team's reflections on the project can be summarized as follows:

1. It is essential to guide participants in understanding the interrelation between performance tools and their application in playwriting and directing. This integration enhances sensitivity and depth in writing and directing, allowing a more nuanced grasp of character psychology, which in turn informs the construction of coherent and compelling dramatic situations.
2. When participants recognize the interplay between the physical and emotional aspects of performance, they can develop more subtle and profound character portrayals and narratives. Understanding that acting tools can be flexibly adapted to suit individual styles and

specific contexts enriches the range of expressive choices. This also enhances participants' understanding of how to work with actors in both directorial and scriptwriting capacities.

3. Emphasizing the integration of the three disciplines—acting, playwriting, and directing—helps learners grasp the core of live performance. For example, a deeper understanding of character motivation in acting enables more purposeful playwriting and more psychologically grounded directing. This integrated approach also encourages participants to invest equally in all three areas of study.

4. Alternating between the three disciplines throughout the course remains necessary. It helps participants perceive the interconnectedness of theatrical arts and understand how each discipline supports the others. Even if some participants ultimately specialize in one area, recognizing these interdependencies can foster a deeper engagement with the entire training.

5. For participants with a solid foundation in storytelling, the main pedagogical task is to encourage authenticity in their writing. Regardless of their chosen presentation style, they should be supported in exploring beyond their comfort zones. Instructors should not restrict their imagination but instead encourage real-world application of their scripts to identify and address weaknesses through experiential learning.

6. Introducing directing lesson gradually—starting with exercises on spatial awareness and body placement—effectively links previous acting lessons. Follow-up activities on *mood and tone*, where instructors provide constructive feedback, further help participants clarify visual interpretations of their scripts. Demonstrations involving real-time interaction with actors—such as script analysis and initial staging—proved most engaging for learners.

7. For participants with little or no theatrical background, actor training should not focus solely on performance techniques. Rather, it must also create a supportive learning environment that connects to other necessary disciplines such as playwriting and directing.

8. The initial scriptwriting exercise, which asked participants to generate stories based on objects, proved effective for learners of all ages and experience levels. It encouraged imagination and served as a useful entry point for conceptualizing characters and plots. However, dividing the scriptwriting instruction into two separate weeks disrupted participants' momentum and collaborative problem-solving efforts.

9. The training must adapt to the specific needs of participants rather than applying a universal curriculum. Different ages and experience levels require different teaching approaches and levels of content complexity. Diverse participant profiles make it challenging to conduct large-group instruction effectively.

10. Collaborative playwriting requires a delicate process that incorporates the thoughts and feelings of all group members into a genuinely co-authored script. However, uncontrollable factors—such as participants' emotional maturity, personal backgrounds, and prior experiences—often complicate this process. A fully implemented *Devising Theatre* approach may be more suitable, or the program structure itself may need revision to avoid requiring collaboration among overly large groups (e.g., 10 members).

11. When conflicting viewpoints arise and no group member steps into a mediating role, instructors must intervene as neutral facilitators. They should mediate internal conflicts and model constructive communication practices that prevent emotional toxicity, which can hinder collaborative creativity.

12. Developing empathy begins with mutual understanding among group members, between instructors, and between instructors and learners. A nonjudgmental, emotionally attuned approach fosters the kind of deep, sincere storytelling and performance that reflects real people in real societies. This empowers participants to ask questions, find answers, and critically engage with societal issues—areas often neglected in commercial media.

13. Essential soft skills for collaborative theatre-making include deep listening, respect for difference, negotiation, and shared decision-making. These are also critical to the success of experiential and workshop-based training.

14. Beyond equipping participants to tell stories and perform effectively, the project aims to cultivate a refined aesthetic: the ability to tell meaningful, pointed, and honest stories with dramatic authenticity. Most importantly, it seeks to inspire a continued desire to engage in storytelling and performance. Success will not come from flashy new techniques, but from a renewed commitment to theatre's foundation—presenting ordinary human beings with honesty and fresh perspectives often overlooked in mainstream entertainment

Application of the Soft Power Concept

To effectively cultivate both technical competencies and soft skills among participants from diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise, it is necessary to employ a process that influences emotions and behaviors through *soft power*. As Joseph Nye posits, soft power—defined as the ability to attract and co-opt rather than coerce—comprises three primary components: an appealing culture, credible and inspiring ideology, and policies that show respect to others. These principles can be effectively applied to theatre education and collaborative artistic creation. Examples include fostering a culture of respect for diversity in collaborative work, upholding sincerity in acting, playwriting, and directing to reflect social and audience realities, and ensuring respectful communication among creators, learners, and audiences.

Central to the training process is the principle of mutual empathy and respect. Theatre pedagogy that allows learners to express their identities and create artistic works that reflect the voices of their communities serves as a concrete embodiment of soft power within the learning environment. Such methods help cultivate *"mana"* (the supernatural force or power) through deep listening, creative storytelling, and the creation of inclusive spaces for community voices to emerge. This nurtures participants' internal motivation and faith in the values and practices espoused by instructors—not through coercion, but by reinforcing individual strengths and supporting areas for growth. Consequently, participants are empowered to discover their own learning pathways, apply these principles in their creative endeavors, and transmit this approach to others with confidence and genuine commitment.

The authors believes that by consistently fostering both technical competencies and soft skills through this soft power-oriented approach, participants will, over time, contribute to a more robust and expansive body of knowledge in the field of theatrical and performance arts in Thailand. The workshop approach—based on mutual respect, active listening, and sincere engagement—was seen as a model for transformative learning. Many participants stated that the training provided them with frameworks they could apply in professional or educational contexts. The integration of theatrical art, local identity, and reflective practice was recognized as an effective method for developing "creative citizens" equipped to contribute to Thailand's soft power and cultural innovation.

Recommendation

Data collection using individual questionnaires often yields statistical results and quantitative responses to closed-ended questions, which may pre-emptively shape participants' answers rather than allowing for genuine self-reflection. In contrast, focus group discussions and group interviews tend to produce more in-depth qualitative data. However, participants often avoid repeating points already raised by others, which hinders the ability to capture frequency-based data. Therefore, researchers engaged in phenomenological inquiry should adopt comprehensive data collection strategies that capture multiple dimensions, in order to obtain the most accurate and representative findings

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The Kalavantulu Body and Repertoire as Signifiers of Resilience

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Abstract

This paper investigates the embodied knowledge, historical erasure, and aesthetic resilience of the KalAvantulu women—hereditary performers from coastal Andhra Pradesh—through an ethnographic and autoethnographic lens. Using oral history as a foundational methodology, the research uncovers how the repertoire of the KalAvantulu, particularly through compositions like the padam, varnam, jAvali, and swarapallavi, functions as an archive of marginalized histories. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks from performance studies and feminist historiography, including the works of Diana Taylor, Susan Foster, and Uma Chakravarti, the study foregrounds the KalAvantulu dancing body as both a site of resistance and a medium of cultural memory. The repertoire is analyzed not merely as artistic expression but as an assertion of agency against colonial, nationalist, and patriarchal redefinitions of Indian classical dance. Through the author's embodied engagement with the repertoire and intergenerational knowledge, the paper presents a critical reclamation of a performance tradition that continues to challenge systemic erasure and re-inscribe matrilineal memory.

Keywords: KalAvantulu, embodied memory, devadasi repertoire, feminist historiography, performance studies

Introduction

Ammamma was almost a hundred years old and confined to the bed in 2008. She wouldn't talk much by then. However, when I asked her about her paternal grandmother, Madhuravani, she had a flood of memories to tell me. Chinagandham Kausalya, my maternal grandmother was a little girl of about seven when she was tempted to watch the *MezuvAni* performance where Madhuravani danced and Picchayi, her sister, sang mellifluously. She and her sisters would watch stealthily as they were not allowed to be a part of these performances.

Ours is a large guild of hereditary professional women singer-dancers, called the *DevadAsi* and *KalAvantulu* (bearer of arts) in particular in the Coastal Andhra region in South India. Generations of marginalisation prompted these families to grab every possibility to change their identity and ensure assimilation in the mainstream society. My family is a part of this history. I became aware of my roots in my teens and began to reclaim them through practice and research. I am given this information in fragments as I piece them together and look at the socio-political history of the *KalAvantulu* through their repertoire. I see her stance and posture as a reflection of her power and position in society. I trace my journey as a female dancer, finding my roots in the memory of the disavowed *DevadAsi* families I am a part of, questioning the concept of caste and the seeming matriarchy in our families. These families and their repertoire were a crucial part of and even a decimated part of Nation building. Their lives and repertoire are the foundation for most of the neo-classical dances that took shape to meet European sensibilities and nationalists' demands. Their history is woven into the repertoire-not as choreographed pieces, but as powerful, aesthetic conversations with the audience. This article journeys through the complexity of their lives of resilience, strength, and subjugation while interrogating one set, of the many on songs

they perform in a typical *MezuvAni* performance. Braided into this narrative is my lived experience

This work draws from oral history, ethnography, and autoethnography to uncover and interpret the lived experiences, memories, and embodied knowledge of the *KalAvantulu* women. The repertoire is not merely a performance archive but a deeply situated embodiment of history, gender, caste, and resistance.

This research uses oral history to retrieve generational knowledge passed down through women like Ammamma, whose narratives become entry points into a cultural past both erased and remembered. Oral testimonies act as performative expressions of identity and memory, revealing how marginalized voices challenge dominant historical narratives. Ethnographic engagement is crucial in understanding the socio-cultural context in which these performances exist. Participant observation, field visits to temple spaces and sabhas, and interaction with contemporary *KalAvantulu* performers provide rich contextual grounding. Ethnographic methods are deployed in alignment with Pallabi Chakravorty's (2008) view that performance is both the object and method of cultural inquiry. Observing the *KalAvantulu* women and their performance practices offers insights into how art sustains and resists gendered and caste-based hierarchies. Autoethnography anchors the researcher's subjective engagement with the repertoire and the personal reclamation of a disavowed heritage. Following Urmimala Sarkar's (2006) methodology of 'embodied ethnography,' my own body becomes a site of inquiry. By dancing the repertoire, I re-enact memory and history, allowing the physical act of dancing to lead inquiry. These methodologies allow for a layered understanding where memory, embodiment, performance, and politics are in constant dialogue.

This article is framed by a multidisciplinary intersection of performance studies, feminist theory, and subaltern historiography. The theoretical underpinning lies in the understanding of performance as an archive of embodied knowledge. Diana Taylor's (2003) conceptual framework of the "archive" and the "repertoire" is central. While the archive comprises enduring texts and objects, the repertoire enacts embodied knowledge passed down through oral and performative means. The *KalAvantulu*'s repertoire—whether a *padam*, *varnam*, or *jAvali*—constitutes a living, breathing feminist history.

Susan Foster (1995) expands this view through her idea of kinesthetic empathy, where the viewer's understanding is formed through bodily resonance. Here, watching the *KalAvantulu* perform is not passive; it evokes memory, resistance, and recognition. The repertoire becomes a feminist historiographic tool that engages the senses and the intellect. Uma Chakravarti's (1993) feminist readings of caste and memory foreground the structural erasures faced by women, especially from marginalized communities. Her insights help frame the repertoire as both a site of agency and a target of nationalist erasure. Chakravarti's assertion that patriarchal narratives erase women's public roles is exemplified in how the *DevadAsi* was systematically de-sexualized, de-politicized, and disowned by her own community post-1947. The nationalist and reformist co-optation of the *KalAvantulu*'s repertoire re-scripted the dancer's body into sanitized, upper-caste aesthetics. Further, the writings of Urmimala Sarkar and Pallabi Chakravorty bring a South Asian feminist lens to performance studies. Chakravorty's (2008) concept of "politics of aesthetics" becomes useful to understand how shifts in patronage, public space, and caste status affected the physical vocabulary and symbolic meaning of performance. The repertoire, therefore, is not just artistic output but a political act.

Through this framework, the repertoire is read not only as cultural memory but also as feminist resistance, and performance politics. These perspectives enable the research to

engage with the *KalAvantulu* body as a site where history, identity, and resistance are continuously performed.

SwAri VeDalenu VArijAkshulu

The song you just heard was sung around the 19th C in the *Uregimpu melam* (procession) in Balipadu, Madanagoplalaswami temple, by the dharmakartas and the *KalAvantulu* women. The song always reminds me of ammamma's fragmented narrative of Madhuravani and Pichayamma. They were connected to a temple authority and to the zamindarof the Annavaram temple. They were not a part of the temple rituals, but were under the patronage of a temple authority. Madhuravani danced while Pichayamma sang. So proficient were they, that poets and story writers mention the beauty of their art.

SalAm Daruvu

The repertoire of the *KalAvantulu* also reflects the patronage of the day. The courtly culture and temple culture co-existed, supported mainly by the king. The king being elevated to or looked upon as god was also part of the rules. They became an integral part of the temple services through a certain ritual called *Katti KalyAnam* in Coastal Andhra. This was considered dedication to the temple and as Amrit Srinivasan observes (1985), these unmarried women were custodians of land given to them by the king or later, the zamindar who was also generally her patron. Her family survived on the produce of the land.

The temple dance repertoire did not differ from that of the court in many ways except for the rituals. *SringAra* or eroticism was a natural base for the expositions. The *salAmdaruvu*, '*Pari pari vidhamula prahlAduDu ninu'* from the Godavari region and is reflective of Colonial Tanjavur in Tamil Nadu, South India. The first two verses are addressed to Pratapa Ramaswami, worshiped in an 18th C temple on West Street in Thanjavur, today known as the Vijayaramaswami temple. These verses date back to the rule of Pratapasimha, who was the patron of composers like the Telugu brahmin composer Melattur Veerabhadriah (c. 1700-1770). Significantly, the name of the deity, Pratapa Rama is also applicable for the king, Pratapasimha.

The *salAm daruvu* is performed for the deity and/or the king and later, the zamindar, addressing him in lyrics and movement. Seamlessly weaving a little technique into the lyrics, the dancer extols the patron through straightforward movement and gestures representing the meaning of the lyrics. In this particular song which goes '*pari pari vidhamula prahlAduDu mimu…*', the former two stanzas are addressed to the Maratha king, Pratapasimha or God Pratapa Rama. The first one equates him with God Narasimha who vanquishes the evil enemy on the appeal of his devotee. The second stanza sees the dancer take a little liberty and admiringly describe his physical attributes. The third stanza, which seems like an add-on to the first two stanzas, bears a romantic angle, where she expresses her desire for the patron and demands as to why he does not respond to her.

A significant feature of the *SalAm daruvu* is the salAm or salute. Tanjavur was a melting pot of Tamil, Telugu, Mughal and colonial influenced Maratha cultures and this reflects in the repertoire of the *DevadAsi*. The colonial salute performed to the Persian word *Salaam* in the midst of a Telugu composition from Coastal Andhra, performed across Madras Presidency is a perfect example for the multiplicity that prevails in the lives of these dancers. Their repertoire is an embodiment of their histories and this is the history I carry on my body when I perform it.

Swarapallavi

The *swarapallavi* is a short, choreographed dance piece constructed purely on the technique of the form. It was a crucial component of the temple repertoire, performed during the ritual of *Bhogam* and even of the *mezuvAni*. I must mention here that *bhogam*, meaning pleasure or a sumptuous meal was a term used for the *DevadAsi* even when she was a part of the temple rituals. The term acquired a disparaging meaning during the nationalist movement

prompting the families to change the name of their families to a more sanskritised, '*KalAvantulu*' or bearers of art. This too was changed later to a masculine gendered term, '*Surya Balija'*, leaning towards agricultural communities. In short, there is a constant effort to conceal identity for acceptance.

The movements are at leisure, reflecting the lush green Konaseema on the banks of the Rivers Godavari in Coastal Andhra. The dancer is in full cognisance of the pulse of the audience and controls the tempo of the *swarapallavi* accordingly. The movements are uncomplicated and blend with the catchy tune. There are no complicated mathematical complications or cross rhythms.

The energy in the usage of the body is a natural flow with no effort to impress through show of stamina or hyper femininity. The spine is straight, but not unnaturally arched. Shoulders are open with conviction, but not to the point that the chest is projected. She is absolutely comfortable with her femininity, gradually drawing the audience' attention towards herself with a virtuosity attained through sheer organic practice.

When Pottemma (alias Manepalli Ratnakumari) taught me a *tilla na*, she would not hear of me pushing my waist to a side to make a point of my femininity. '*ADadAnivega*?!' (Aren't you a woman already?!), she exclaimed, as if to say I should not go out of the way to impress. I should be myself and allow the grace to flow through my body. How liberating!

Padam

The *padam* is an intensely erotic composition and a crucial marker of the *mezuvAni*. She performs these compositions in a seated position, mentally placing the hero or the person she addresses as one in the audience. She looks directly at the audience and communicates the content through her virtuosity of expression. Her life's experience, the intelligence of her body, her innermost emotions, and inner strength come across as she explores and presents the layers in the lyrics in a most uncomplicated exposition. The casual music only enhances the human experience. The *padam* chosen for this article is '*RAyabAramampinADa RAnu RAnu RAnoyanumI'* (Did he send a message through you? Tell him that I will never come).

"Did he send a message of truce through you? Tell him that I am just not coming. That Muvvagopala! The conjurer! One can never believe what he says. His heart is with the other woman but always wears a smile with me. He seems committed to me, but his feelings are all for her. He flirts with a different one every hour; if she is brazen, she is a treat for him. His path is twisted (his actions are crooked), but his tongue is smeared with nectar! (Sugar-coated words).

To Krishna(reverie/message to him): The love we made then is enough, my body does not harbor any yearning for you, Oh trickster, my Muvvagopala! I have had enough.

She says to the messenger: Tell him I will never come to him."

The eroticism in the songs in accessible Telugu language worked against the *DevadAsi*. The nationalist period saw the *DevadAsi*'s unmarried status and her position in society as a performer and bread-winner of the family as a threat to the image of the Nation which was at the threshold of independence. The indigenous language of Telugu made it necessary to direct all human emotions to god and maybe even create a male religious figure as the author of the songs, which were possibly written by women on women's desire (Kamath, 2019).

The *padam* was the marker of their virtuosity and the women who danced were very proud of it. I remember Maddula Janakamma challenging non-dancers from outside the *KalAvantulu* families who proclaimed themselves as bhogam or *KalAvantulu* women and began organised sex work. "*Okka padam pattamanu, Appudu oppukuntanu*!". (Ask them to perform one *padam* and I will accept them as one of us). Between anger that their lives too have been appropriated by other women and admiration for her strength and pride, I chose the latter. The stigma we suffer due to this form of appropriation even to this day is appalling.

However, Maddula Janakamma's challenge proved that the dancing body may not be wealthy, but is rich in courage from experience.

The *KalAvantulu* woman's dancing body did not dance in the modern meaning of the word. The power in her seated position was evident in her posture. The posture was unique to each dancer as it was her own life that manifested through her artistry.

The nationalists found themselves uncomfortable with the freedom and power that she held on stage. A reform movement was initiated. Alongside reform, was revival of the song and dance. Attempts to teach the art to upper caste bodies was initiated to 'preserve' the art, the origin of which was now believed to be Nataraja and the Sanskrit text, NATyasAstra (Allen,1997; Sarkar,2022).

Varnam

Ammamma was about a hundred years old and confined to the bed in 2007. She wouldn't talk much by then. However, when I asked her about her paternal grandmother, Madhuravani, she had a flood of memories to tell me. She was a little girl of about seven when she was tempted to watch the *MezuvAni* performance where Madhuravani danced and Picchayi, her sister, sang mellifluously. She and her sisters would watch stealthily as they were not allowed to be a part of these performances. As ammamma continued, I asked her about one particular composition, the Navroj *Varnam* that they were known for. Ammamma broke into a song with her aged voice and sang the long composition with her eyes closed before she slipped into slumber.

The musical composition called *Varnam* has a specific structure with two lines in the beginning and stanzas that follow with solfa syllables and lyrics in alignment to the musical pattern of the syllables. This is an important component of South Indian music and like most other genres was meant to be danced. Originally, the *varnam* was almost always based on eroticism where it is either the heroine pining for the person she loves or the friend of the heroine coaxing him to go to her. The *Varnam* carries the exciting complex history of the hereditary dancers at the crossroads of aesthetics, power, agency and the lack of it, caste, class and gender politics.

The friend asks the hero, a zamindar, Bangarecha, probably from the Vizianagaram district, if he has no mercy on her friend who pines for him. She desires you because you are good at heart. This is the right time to call her yourself. She is suffering the onslaught of arrows from the god of love; I swear on your feet! The bees torment her with their buzz. Take advantage, hug her close to your chest, and whisper into her ear! I have never seen a girl like her.

Her taut body shines brighter than the moon. She is the best for you. The moonlight is poking fun at you for not going to her! Her dark curls, nectar lips…she has no equal.

Her full breasts, mirror-like cheeks, fragrant navel like the *ponna* flower, elephant trunk-like thighs, sweet words, star-like nails, she is the best star, Dear friend! Go and make her yours.

As in the *padam*, the dancer is in a seated position as she cajoles, reprimands, and convinces the hero (seemingly situated in the audience) to go her pining friend. The tune is Navroj, a product of Persian influence. The dancer is expected to sing along with the accompanying singers, particularly, the solfa syllable patterns and perform to the lyrics. During the Colonial rule, a few dancers chose to perform a few movements for the solfa patterns through simple uncomplicated technique, eventually adding the practice of dancing on the edges of the brass plate and other acrobatic acts that attracted the attention of the audience. This change in their dance was construed as an off-shoot of fallen values and virtuosity. In fact, this is the narrative I was told by my own immediate family who knew close to nothing about the art. I was aghast! How is it that men and women born into the families of singer-dancers were so ignorant of the richness of the art? Constant, patient interaction revealed to me that these families chose to forget and disown the art, which was

life itself, when the Madras *DevadAsi* (Prevention of Dedication) Act was passed on October 9, 1947. The Act (1947) was a product of patriarchy and colonial approaches towards gender. The Act declared that the very act of dancing by these women was unlawful and these women could not be dedicated to temples or dance on any occasion, whatsoever. As a result, the non-dancers who camouflaged their identity by managing to register themselves under other castes to be educated and assimilated into mainstream society spoke differently from the ones from a lower economic status and continue singing (not dancing) in temples and religious gatherings. However, now the songs are all devotional. These women have no qualms in saying '*memu bhogam vallamu'* (We are from the *bhogam* families). However, the requirement to dance and move on stage may have also been a result of changing tastes and ability to comprehend the nuance in the audience. The audience were not the connoisseurs who were knowledgeable of and had an affinity for the indigenous language of Telugu and of Telugu culture, but those who saw the performance from the lens of Victorian Morality and patriarchy. By the early 20th century dance moved from the intimate confines of the zamindari to the cosmopolitan city of Madras where the women found employment through the gramophone record and cinema. The performances were now in public spaces called the *sabha*s for a varied audience. They were tailored to suit the stage where the dancer is at a height and distance from the audience. The wider space occupied by the audience and their varied nature could have been another reason for change in the stance of the dancer who now moved around on the stage, letting go of a part of the power she held when she sat at one place and commanded the attention of the audience.

JAvali

The *jAvali* is performed to simpler language and a catchier tune. The dancer is constantly moving back and forth, using spontaneous, gestures and ideas while performing. The *jAvali* is a clear product of colonial influence which comes across in the music, colloquial language, and gestures. Yet, expression of female desire is not compromised in these endearing compositions.

When I learn these *jAvali*s from the ladies and discuss the piece from just about every perspective, a small, light piece of love literature which I would have otherwise looked down upon, now becomes laden with historical significance. The song carries the words of the women. It may have been scripted by another, but it is owned by them and made a part of their lives. When I perform the piece, I am performing a slice of their lives to an audience they may or may not have approved of.

The piece becomes an invaluable possession for me. With this methodological approach, every performance is a pleasure. It is my privilege to be taught by them personally and told that that particular *padam* or *jAvali* is their family heirloom that they are passing on to me.

The *JAvali*, is a genre that came into existence in the 19th Century when the nationalists were beginning to project the Indian woman and so India as a pious land. The Indian woman was the 'chaste,' religious, domesticated homemaker. And here we have these *bhogamvallu* dancing to free-flowing, bouncy, playful, erotic songs in the heart of the colonial cities, much against the *padam*s written and performed in temples and courts, written and watched by the elite class! To make it worse, the popularity of the *jAvali*s during this colonial period rose.

The *jAvali*s were spoken as a reflection of women's morality! It is ironic that here they chose to equate the dance with what they portrayed as the dancer, but later the dance and the dancer were seen as distinct from each other to facilitate the appropriation of the art under the term revival to construct the neo-classical dances we have today.

It was almost like a snare!

The *jAvali* chosen here is '*Samayamu manchidira'*

This is an auspicious time, my love, rise and come to me. I am tired of the arrows of Manmadha.

My heart harbours so many desires. My handsome! I shall not disappoint you.

I have you tucked away in my thoughts for so long, describing your beauty,

My breasts swell and I sweat with longing for you, Oh! Ruler of Suryanagara!

The *jAvali* and the *mezuvAni* performance ends with a short, sprightly burst of spontaneous dance to the percussion instrument of table and violin. This is the *Gaptu varusa* or just *gaptu* to wind up on a happy note. The uninhibited flow of movement and the understanding between the musicians and the dancer gives a finale of abandon to the *mezuvAni* performance by the *KalAvantulu* women who I reiterate were addressed as *bhogamvaAru*.

In tracing the repertoire of the *KalAvantulu* women, I have not merely studied performance—I have lived it. This journey has revealed that what may seem like fragments of music and gesture are, in fact, embodied histories of caste, gender, and resilience. The *MezuvAni* performance, with its layered expressions of desire, devotion, and defiance, stands not only as an aesthetic experience but also as a radical act of memory. The body of the *KalAvantulu* dancer, situated between reverence and stigma, reveals how art can be both a site of oppression and a tool of resistance. Through oral histories, ethnography, and embodied autoethnography, I have come to understand that the repertoire is not static tradition but living testimony—an archive etched into the body, passed down through silence, struggle, and survival. To dance it today is to honour a lineage that refuses to be forgotten, and to reclaim the space.

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On ‘R’ - intermediate ‘R’ and the collective as a unit

Erika Matsunami

Abstract

Wittgenstein's "Ethics and Aesthetics are one" is the starting point of this research. "In the Notebooks, Wittgenstein states that 'the world and life are one', so perhaps the following can be said. Just as the aesthetic object is the single thing seen as if it were a whole world, so the ethical object, or life, is the multiplicity of the world seen as a single object". (Diané Collinson, The British Journal of Aesthetics, Volume 25, Issue 3, SUMMER 1985, pages 266-272)

Art transcends boundaries of race, nationality and gender. It is a creative act of unifying in the context of humanity, from the subject to the various topics, by asking questions. This point is the lack of "reality" (dealing with reality) from a sociological perspective. But it is impossible to define humanity and reality based on sociological statistics alone–is my perspective of Wittgenstein's "Ethics and Aesthetics are one". Thereby, I examine 'world and life' from the 21st century perspective.

In current artistic research Metamorphosis - Ethics and Aesthetics are One - from a Neuroscientific Perspective II (2025), I am exploring two types of communication "near and far", on-site community and long-distance community. Here, I refer not to community, which is a social function, but to methodologically about the intermediate 'R' between social and meta-knowledge and its notion of the collective as a unit. - on ‘R’

Thus, I challenge myself to deal with Mental Imaginary (Bence Nanay, 2023,OUP) Ch. III. Multimodal Perception and IV. Cognition in the context of a Neuroscientific Perspective.

Keywords: transversality; interface (interact); post-conceptual; assemblage; spatiality; randomness;

Introduction

“Neither the sense nor the meaning of a proposition is a thing. These words are incomplete symbols. It is clear that we understand propositions without knowing whether they are true or false. But we can only know the meaning of a proposition when we know if it is true or false. What we understand is the sense of the proposition.

To understand a proposition p it is not enough to know that p implies "p is true", but we must also know that -p implies "p is false". This shows the bi-polarity of the proposition. We under- stand a proposition when we understand its constituents and forms. If we know the meaning of "a" and "b" and if we know what "xRy" means for all x's and y's, then we also understand "aRb". I understand the proposition "aRb" when I know that either the fact that aRb or the fact that not aRb corresponds to it; but this is not to be confused with the false opinion that I understand "aRb" when I know that "aRb or not aRb" is the case.”

This artistic research in *Metamorphosis - Ethics and Aesthetics are One - from a Neuroscientific Perspective* (2024, Erika Matsunami) further explores the thesis that "nature has no answers." in *Metamorphosis - Ethics and Aesthetics are One - from a Neuroscientific Perspective II* (2025, Erika Matsunami) Namely, it explores the concepts of time and space in terms of aRb through art. On the preposition: “A and B”, “A or B” and “A into B”, and so on–it makes a new sense for us. Therefore the question is how ‘into’ might be possible to be a preposition? I mention a possible time and space in “A into B” and my suggestion is to explore it as an account methodologically. The question now is: What is a proposition?

Time and Space - from Niels Bohrto Albert Einstein:

My research perspective on Joseph Nechvatal's work is about the logic of time and space from the perspective of perception. We understand that time is not a tempo, nor a line, nor a circle, nor a line that connects the dots in the 21st century. Therefore, I explore this multifarious idea of time and space.

"For me, the validity of art noise rests on the assumption that while rhizomatic growth and inter-relations are unpredictable, this does not mean that they proceed randomly. Noise may break some connections, but connections will always continue to grow in other directions, creat- ing new thoughts and new affects. The notion of noise as creation itself is thus an important one that needs to be reconsidered and reevaluated." - Joseph Nechvatal in Immersion Into Noise (2011)

What is 'nature'?
What is 'human nature'?

Joseph Nechvatal explored *noise music* and *art noise* as well as a *noise* culture which was the 'desire' of artists in American Art and Culture in Post-War, but it was started before the end of the second world war II. He drew our human cultural desire in the art historical context. My focus in this artistic research Metamorphosis - Ethics and Aesthetics are One - from a Neuroscientific Perspective II (2025) addresses 'Subjective-Objectivity' by Joseph Nechvatal in *Immersion Into Noise* from the aspect of Bence Nanay's research 'Mental Imagery' which is based on Philosophy, Psychology and Neuroscience. For me, that is for an exploration of Proposition and Subjectivity and Objectivity between mind and logic, or mind and body.

In *B.O.D.Y.* Project:

What is 'Nature' into our body methodologically?

I explore thereby *Time and Space* - from Niels Bohr to Albert Einstein–On light and waves. What are the shape(s) and boundaries in our body? – towards transversal aesthetics.
As a conclusion I suggest methodologically about the intermediate 'R' between social and meta-knowledge and its notion of the collective as a unit–on 'R'.

The aim of this artistic research *Metamorphosis - Ethics and Aesthetics are One - from a Neuroscientific Perspective II* (2025) is a methodological exploration towards 'knowledge and peace' in the context of art and science in the 21st century. In other words, my challenge in this artistic research is to explore the ethical and aesthetic logic of regenerative, sustainable and coexistence. In fact, I have been exploring it in Berlin recently.

Preface 11

Immersion Into Noise

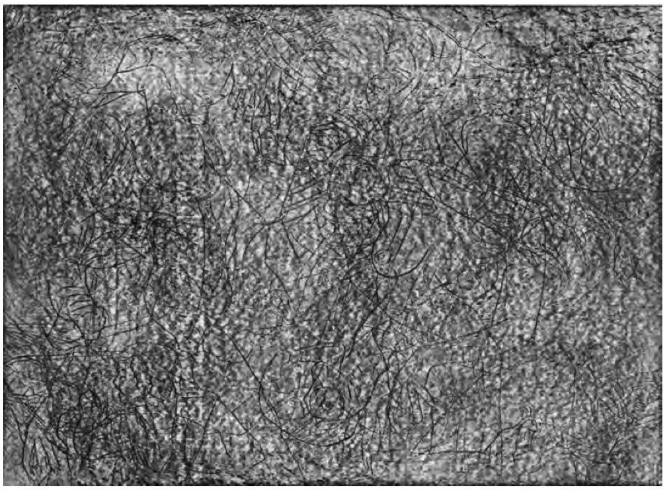


Figure 1 – Uplifting, 1983, 11 x 14", graphite on paper, Joseph Nechvatal. In the collection of the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota

I have been exploring in France based American Artist Joseph Nechvatal's contribution "Immersion Into Noise" (2011). Thereby I am challenging myself to explore his great contribution from the perspective of neuroscience. His contribution is not about what noise is, but rather about the creativity of facing noise and facing oneself. However, it also addresses the historical and cultural (philosophical) role of knowledge of noise - Imagination through knowledge.

"With this in mind, we shall now turn our attention to what I perceive as the genesis of immersive noise vision: the adorned prehistoric cave. We shall approach the resplendent prehistoric cave by keeping in mind that, according to Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980), form determines the action of mediation which determines meaning.
A prehistoric *painted cave* is all that, enhanced moreover through the emotional defamiliarizational powers of art.
(...)
Gradually during the Gravettian Period (approximately 20,000 to 25,000 years ago), people began to embellish the walls and ceilings of a few small shallow caves.
(...)
To enter a cave is to move into it and, as such, initially involves a directedness away from the periphery and to- ward depth, toward noisy density, and away from dispersion.

(...)

The regular waxing and waning of light is often dramatically altered in its character and intensity by the apparent vicissitudes of changing atmospheric conditions. In order to realize how essential this combination of direct and diffused light is to our sense of well-being, one need only recall the deadening aftermath of a heavy overcast day when the whole world seems to be enshrouded in a pervasive melancholy."

Maybe ancient memories in caves are close to the memories I have from when "I" was fertilized until I was born into this world from the darkness - to feel the light and to start to cry.
His exploration of *noise* culture extends beyond the advances in science since the modern 19th century to the origins of "human cognition, linguistics, and space-time."
What is human evolution? I believe it is semiotically linked to language. For example, DNA is code for life.

The insights generated by *Noise* went beyond Renaissance geometry and proposed a new economy of time and space in the 20th century. Probably, we live closer to nature today, but it is synthetic in the sense of *Simultaneously*, *Stimuli*, and *Simulation*. They go beyond the concepts of "materiality and immateriality" and bring us a new linguistic quality.

Joseph Nechvatal mentioned in the chapter *Noise Vision* "Now the noise eye and ear has been removed from the action of the rite and separated from the whole and
placed at rest, aloof and detached through distance by the mounting stone seats which semi-circle the spherical omphalos-based orchestra pit. What an emphasis on aesthetic immersion into noise does, is to place us back into a ritual position by dragging art down into the felt 360° noise-perspective of the enthusiastic and participatory (if we fight to
overcome cultural impediments)."While subjectively reading the cultural history of ancient Greece from the mind-boggling ancient murals, I feel that this essay *Immersion Into Noise* by

Joseph Nechvatal, which embodies the origins of Western art, is itself a dark underground cave. And then, I come out at the exit of the modern age.

Destruction, death, chaos, hallucinations - At the end of the world in the 20th century:

"As Rudolf de Lippe pointed out in his book *La Géometrisation de l'Homme en Europe à L'Epoque Moderne*, increasingly in the Modern era the geometricization of human vision became the general methodical condition in the West, characterized by an analytical sight which decomposes the immersive noise vision sphere into geometricized fragmented parts. This is a modern technological vision whose effectiveness lies in its tendency to isolate and decontextualize noise scope. Indeed, modern technology had an enormous social impact in the 20th century in this, and other, respects. The automobile and electric power, for instance, radi- cally changed both the scale and the quality of 20th century life, promoting a process of rapid urbanization and a substantial change in lifestyle through mass production of household goods and appliances. The rapid development of the aeroplane, the cinema, and the radio made the world seem suddenly smaller and more accessible. Since 1900, the speed of travel has increased by a factor of 10 to the 2nd power, known energy resources by 10 to the 3rd, explosive power of weaponry by 10 to the 6th, and speed of communication by 10 to the 7th power. Such new ways of understanding involve a change in perspective, and that change is marked in the 20th century by an extended propensity for immersion into noise."

I am grateful that Nechvatal's essay "Immersion Into Noise", is true. It strongly points to the need for the 21st century to break away from the 20th century Western concept of nation-state: Those are which imperialism is based on socialism in liberal economics and which militarism is based on socialism and communism, and which notion of 'universality' in worldview to move towards neocolonialism in the 21st century.

"I have deduced that something in the consciousness of society was altered following the war and have further deduced that the bombing of civilian centers in the course of the war (that is, Köln, London, Tokyo) culminating with the American atomic bombings of the civilian Japanese cities, Hiroshima on August 6th, 1945 (circa 140,000 victims) and Nagasaki on August 9th, 1945 (circa 70,000 victims), changed the world's sense of space radically.

(...)

The first nuclear weapons were bombs delivered by aircraft. War- heads for strategic ballistic missiles, however, have become by far the most important nuclear weapons. The U.S. stockpile of nuclear weapons, which included the hydrogen bomb that was first test exploded in 1952, reached its peak in 1967 with more than 32,000 warheads of 30 different types. The Soviet stockpile reached its peak of about 33,000 warheads in 1988. Throughout the ballistic missile arms race, the United States tended to streamline its weapons, seeking greater accuracy and lower ex- plosive power, or yield. Most U.S. systems carried warheads of less than one megaton, with the largest being the nine-megaton Titan II, in ser- vice from 1963 through 1987. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union, perhaps to make up for its difficulties in solving guidance problems, concentrated on larger missiles and higher yields. The Soviet warheads often exceeded five megatons, with the largest being a 20 to 25-megaton warhead deployed on the SS-7 Saddler from 1961 to 1980 and a 25-megaton warhead on the SS-9 Scarp, deployed from 1967 to 1982. Hence at mid-20th century, space became the range of both humanity's greatest fears (nuclear extinc- tion of life on the planet) and its boldest aspirations (co-operative peace- ful space exploration).

(...)

In terms of a transformation of our sense of internal space, I find it amazing that Dr. Albert Hofmann (a biochemist at the Sandoz pharmaceutical firm in Basel, Switzerland) accidentally

discovered LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide tartrate) the same year that rocket-launched bombs began to drop from the sky: 1943. LSD was first synthesized in 1938
by Hofmann but he did not know what he had synthesized until 1943 when he accidentally absorbed a small amount of LSD (which is color- less, odorless, and tasteless) and thus discovered its visionary properties. With this ingestion, Hoffman, after surveying the room he was in, realized that he now formed a nice noise continuum with everything in sight. The room seemed to shimmer in the sunlight, and he became aware of the atomic substructure that underlay the visible world of the senses."
The speed and sophistication of mobilization within the new world organisation of the erased borders, in the digital age in the 21st century, means that it showed us to have even more nuclear weapons than in the 20th century.

On March 15, 2025 according to Deutsche Welle, "US missiles in Germany: Germany has lived under the US nuclear shield for decades. Up to 20 US nuclear weapons are stationed at a Bundeswehr airbase in Büchel in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate. Only the US president has the code to release them. However, the Bundeswehr supplies the fighter planes that would fly them to their targets in an emergency. "Nuclear sharing" is what NATO calls this jointly organized nuclear deterrence with US weapons, and which also extends to other European countries." Would you entrust the future life, death, and destruction of humanity to the President of the United States or/and the president of Russia or both? – *To understand a proposition p it is not enough to know that p implies "p is true", but we must also know that - p implies "p is false".* – These military conflicts around the world, which at first glance seem to be caused by bipolar politics, but rather our *reality* of capitalism and the world economy and politics, so called the *world* and our *life*.
"This reciprocity of rupture and rapture is of utmost consequence. The rupture of noise is the embedded, immersive and immanent space from which the signal comes and to where it goes. Noise in art deconstructs signalness/thingness by functioning as a self-withholding ground for signal: something raw beneath and beyond conceptual language. (From Notes 389: In this sense, noise art equates to the sound of the rage of the sea—the sea being the source of all life.)
But noise has no inherent value. It can be awful for you, or grand. It can be grand when it reminds us of the marvellous: that preeminent primal energy that surrounds and forms us, both beneath and beyond us—and when it de-metaphors our techno-mechanical society. (Notes 390: For a probing investigation of this subject, see Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2008).)
But mostly, it is gradational and, as such, a conceptual tool for the judicious revolutionary: those that coordinate reason and irrationality, harmony and dissidence, lucidity and obtuseness in the interests of open-minded transformation."
How Joseph Nechvatal evokes through art *those that coordinate reason and irrationality, harmony and dissidence, lucidity and obtuseness in the interests of open-minded transformation* may not be far-fetched from the perspective of 21st-century molecular biology and neuroscience.

A problem with logic: Kant's idealist paradigm assumes that any difference from reality is a "false." - Is it true or false? For example, the difference between an indigenous Brazilian activism in Brazil (Private) and a poster of indigenous (anti-racism) by a white Brazilians' in Brazil (Institutional) about artistic research in Germany. In this case, I think it's not Kant's idealist (Idealism) paradigm that's false, but rather the problem lies in the ontology. Thereby, I am exploring a new polarity in my lithography studio in Berlin by contrasting (on porarity) lithography with the Japanese aesthetic of wabi-sabi is because I am exploring it for the invisible German culture that was lost in academia when the German Nazis burned books 100 years ago.

Is visible true? Or is invisible true?
– On *R*



Figure 4 –Lithography *Untitled*Synapse*, “Memory of the Stone”, Drawing on Stone (in the process) Erika Matsunami, 2025



Figure 5 –Lithography *Untitled*Synapse*, “Memory of the Stone”, Drawing on Stone (completed), Erika Matsunami, 2025

In the 20th century, Our creation was mainly intentional, but in the 21st century, we are exploring interactive and its diversity with half-automatic creativity – so-called *Human and Non-human society*.

What is a space (world) and time (life) in terms of ‘conscious’ and ‘unconscious mind’?:

I have been exploring Bence Nanay's research since I subscribed to and explored his book "Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception" (OUP, 2016) in 2016. Understanding art as philosophy led me to the question, "What kind of knowledge can art become, rather than a cultural custom?" However, I had doubts about Western "recognition" (the worldview of traditional epistemology that has become habitual over a long history).

Around the same time, I read an article about Aesthetics from Neuroscience (Neuroaesthetics, which was coined as a term by Semir Zeki in 1999), a presentation of the research of Dr. Semir Zeki who is a French and British neurobiologist and his research with Japanese neuroscientists.

The reason I am exploring Bence Nanay's research book "Mental Imagery" (OUP, 2023) is what we call "心象/shinsho" in Japanese. I do not translate "心象/shinsho" into English as mental image. What is the difference?: Is it the difference between written characters (象形文字/shoukei moji) and alphabets? No, more than that, I argue that the perspective is different. This perspective expression, I call "subjective objectivity."

“Here is an analogy that might be helpful for explaining the role mental imagery plays in these two experimental paradigms. Imagine a ball that has a letter A painted on one side. The ball rolls on, and the letter A is no longer visible because it is now at the side of the ball that is facing away from us. We know from the amodal completion studies that it is still represented amodally—by means of mental imagery. The same goes for the object-specific preview benefit cases.2 And, mutatis mutandis, for trans-saccadic memory. The general gist of my argument is that we should not underappreciate mental imagery. Mental imagery is intricately complex. And it can do all the jobs that object files were posited to do.”

The development of technology has put limits on our "knowledge through perception," which calls into question our human capabilities. - It changes in the "world"

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Beyond Orientalism: Islamic Social Justice as a Transnational Curatorial Praxis

Samah Ayesha

Abstract

This paper examines how Islamic social justice operates as a decolonial and transnational curatorial method to actively fight against the systemic marginalisation of artists. Taking the case study of My Name, Not Yours (MNNY) as a curated publication featuring Muslim artists from the UK, India and Kashmir demonstrates how Islamic core values can transform a field controlled by Eurocentric perspectives. This research questions the dominant orientalist epistemological violence present in curatorial practice historically and in contemporary times. It argues that a praxis formed with a theological perspective can create space for resistance, identity formation, and cross-border solidarities, thereby also increasing the accessibility of marginalised communities.

Keywords: Justice, Theology, Transnational, Curation, Islamic, Contemporary Art

Introduction

In an era marked by escalating Islamophobic rhetoric and policies across the globe, the cultural and artistic representation of Muslim identities remains deeply entangled with colonial legacies and epistemic violence. Marginalisation in this context is not simply a matter of exclusion; rather, it manifests in more insidious forms of erasure. Faith-based and inherently political creative endeavours are often depoliticised or rendered unintelligible within dominant liberal and secular frameworks of justice and representation. These frameworks tend to neutralise or obscure the epistemologies that underpin such work, ultimately constraining what Muslim creators are allowed or even able to produce within a cultural economy that privileges Eurocentric norms and aesthetics.

This paper enters into that tension with care. It begins by reflecting on the category of "Islamic Art", a label that is formed by Orientalist framing, historical exoticism, and ongoing epistemic violence. It explores what might happen if we refuse to accept narrow definitions and instead turn towards more expansive, relational, and plural understandings. How might we make room for the varied and contextual ways Muslim artists engage with justice, aesthetics, faith and culture?

With this grounding, the next section then explores Islamic frameworks of social justice. It considers the many forms of al-adl (justice) which manifest in the world around us. It speaks of the individual responsibility we bear as khalifas (custodians) and as global communities, having an identity that moves beyond race and borders.

To understand how these concepts translate into practice, I examine the publication "My Name, Not Yours" that I curated as part of my final MLitt in Curatorial Practice (Contemporary Art) project at Glasgow School of Art. It platforms marginalised artistic voices in response to intersecting global injustices.

In conclusion, the paper argues that Islamic conceptions of justice can offer more than critique and can guide curatorial work that is decolonial (& anti-colonial), feminist, generative, and relevant in contemporary frameworks of production.

Background and Research-

Marginalisation is often spoken about as if it's simply about being left out. But as Charles Varghese and Sheethal S. Kumar remind us, it's something greater, more structural and more personal. In their article 'Marginality: A Critical Review of the Concept', they explain, "Marginal situation distorts personality development, especially those from subjugated groups, which eventually affects their participation in the larger social processes and their capacity to influence it. This forms a vicious circle, and marginality eventually becomes acute."

This cyclical erasure becomes especially critical to examine when considering Muslim artists today and how their work is situated, or often sidelined within dominant curatorial frameworks. Liberal-secular models of representation frequently render Muslim creative expression either invisible or illegible while claiming neutrality. Expressions then rooted in faith or ethics often don't fit the expectations of aesthetic universality or political acceptability that many institutions still uphold.

To understand the weight of this marginalisation, it helps to return to an often-overlooked intellectual and artistic legacy of the 'Islamic Golden Age', (7th to 13th centuries) a term coined by 19th century western historians. This era saw the expansion of disciplines including art, mathematics, science, literature and philosophy. Due to many regions cultivating religious tolerance, scholars from different religious backgrounds worked together, enabled by the trade routes and pilgrimage networks. Many modern-day institutions grew from this epistemic cosmopolitanism, where knowledge was treated as both divine and communal.

Wendy M. K. Shaw, a Professor of the Art History of Islamic Cultures at the Freie Universität Berlin wrote an article titled "The Islam in Islamic Art History: secularism and Public Discourse". In it, she argues that in the present world, "objects from the period are frequently invoked to mitigate intercultural tensions in modern society. This utilisation often overlooks distinctions between historical and current contexts, as well as between religion, culture, and geography. When exhibitions do this, there is a threat of enhancing prejudices by romanticising the splendours of 'Islamic' culture as belonging to a distant golden age or by implying that the suitable realm for religion, particularly Islam, is rooted in the past rather than in the present. Rather than being represented, Islam as a contemporary faith becomes the subaltern of Islam as a historical culture."

Islamic art history has undergone significant transformations. Initially linked solely with design and aesthetic enjoyment rather than interpretive significance, it evolved through mid-twentieth-century themes of sociopolitical contextualization and iconographic intelligibility. In the early twenty-first century, there has been a shift towards emphasising specialised studies with meticulous contextualization. Elaborating on this, Shaw critiques,

> "Islamic art history examines art from societies dominated by Islam, but does so largely through epistemological structures grounded in Western modes of perception. Both Grube and Grabar limit their examination of religious art in manuscript painting to the depiction of patently religious subjects, such as the Kaʿba and the Night Journey of the Prophet, rather than examining the possible religious implications of a broader range of visual tropes in both painting and in literature. By maintaining such a strong distinction between secular and sacred, discourses such as these have conceptualised Islamic art as something that can be viewed but not understood, as though an inherently esoteric Islam were communicated by heritage acquired through osmosis rather than rational education."

Toby Katrine Lawrence also points out the hypocritical tendencies of western frameworks in "In Reimagined Curatorial Practice: Land, Labour, and Community" stating, "within western curatorial tradition is 'the pretence of 'objectivity'," as defined by Joachim, that "stands as a veiled means of enforcing Eurocentric standards for so-called high art—standards according to which non-European artistic contributions fall short of the criteria of excellence."

In his writing on what he calls "the silent theology" of Islamic art, Oludamini Ogunnaike explores how aesthetic forms, which include historical and contemporary architecture, calligraphy, or poetry, are more than just decoration. They are modes of knowing rooted in Qur'anic values like *jamāl* (beauty) and *ihsān* (excellence). He further mentions, "Despite the dissemination of virulent propaganda against Islam in the West, many people from Western societies queue for hours to admire the architecture of the Alhambra in Spain and the Taj Mahal in India, as well as exhibitions of Islamic calligraphy and miniature paintings... These most tangible and outward manifestations of the Islamic tradition represent its most subtle, inward, and essential realities."

Such a theological lens, while extremely insightful, may not fully encompass the multiplicity of muslim creative identity. Today, Muslim artists are engaging with faith through memory, resistance, abstraction, and political critique. Some work with traditional materials and symbols; others explore rupture, hybridity, and contradiction. Not all of it looks "Islamic" in the ways Ogunnaike or 19th-century historians might imagine, but it is no less sincere, no less anchored in a spiritual or ethical worldview.

This heterogeneity and lack of sufficient opportunities for marginalised folk within dominant systems speak to a need for curatorial approaches that can hold space for ambiguity, contradiction, and experimentation. Rather than relying on fixed categories of Islamic art, we might begin to imagine a responsive framework, attuned to the lived experiences, evolving identities, and diverse artistic strategies of Muslim creators. Such a framework does not simply include more Muslim artists, it asks questions that include: Who gets to define Islamic art? What does faith look like when it is speculative, decolonial, or intimate? How can we curate with care, rather than just categorise?

Justice in Islam

Islamic social justice encompasses a way of life that incorporates individual legalism with ethical, distributive, economic, and communal dimensions. It presents a more holistic model than many contemporary, secular justice systems, which often fragment or isolate these elements. Talking about these contemporary systems in place, Lawrence has extrapolated "For Byrd, the fused 'entanglement of colonization and racialization have worked simultaneously to other and abject entire peoples so they can be enslaved, excluded, removed, and killed in the name of progress and capitalism. These historical and political processes have secured white property, citizenship, and privilege, creating a "racial contract," as Charles W. Mills argues . . . [and] should thus be understood as concomitant global systems that secure white dominance through time, property, and notions of self."

Omar Suleiman, a contemporary Islamic scholar and founder of the Yaqeen Institute, reflects on the multiple facets in which justice (*al-ʿadl*) operates within Islamic thought. As he writes:

> "Justice [al-ʿadl] is a term associated with equality [musāwāh]. It has various meanings, depending on the context. In the context of potential, it is an innate human desire for equality. In the context of action, it means dealing fairly with others. And in the context of the Divine, it describes the complete orderliness of God's actions."

Here, justice is relational and not fixed. It names an inner human impulse toward fairness, a behavioural ethic in how we treat one another, and a cosmic principle rooted in the very nature of God. This constellation of meanings points toward a justice that cannot be reduced to law alone but is moral, metaphysical, and profoundly social.

Historically, Islam and its principles emerged in a context where tribal hierarchies, gender violence, and class stratification were the norm. The Qur'anic intervention, therefore, was radical in its theological claims and its social imagination. Consider a reflection by one of the Prophet Muhammad's companions, who said, "In the pre-Islamic era, we used to have no regard for women whatsoever. But when Islam came and God made mention of them, this caused us to realise that they have rights upon us."

The Qur'anic concept of *khalīfa* (custodianship) makes this relationship between the laws of Islam and their embodiment clearer. As Ramon Harvey, lecturer in Islamic Studies at Ebrahim College, explains:

"If the basic idea of the khalīfa within the Qur'an is the human steward charged with a duty to live according to the moral scale that God has set within creation, then in the social sphere this implies upholding justice, establishing His law, and rectifying worldly corruption."

There are also countless examples of how this ethos of ethical stewardship translated into concrete policies. During the caliphate of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, a shift occurred after he encountered a mother who was forced to wean her baby early to receive state support. Moved by the injustice of the policy, ʿUmar implemented reforms: the state began registering newborns and issuing stipends to their mothers, ensuring care from birth. What this moment shows us is the responsiveness of Islamic ethics. Justice here meant recognising intersectional vulnerability and designing systems that supported dignity, care, and wellbeing.

These principles are also central to Islamic jurisprudence. One of the foundational figures in Islamic legal tradition, Imām al-Shāfiʿī, drew a direct line between revelation and justice, stating:

"Justice is following [God's] revealed edicts."

For him and many others, divine guidance was not about control but about a principled orientation to the world, rooted in ethical reflexivity, relational accountability, and communal action. In this sense, Islamic justice offers not only a framework for governance but a model for curatorial, scholarly, and artistic engagement as well which is explored more in the next section.

Case Study: *My Name, Not Yours (MNNY)*

My Name, Not Yours (MNNY) is a transnational art publication with 14 Muslim artists from the UK, India, and Kashmir. It's a publication to bear witness and take action as one across borders for both individual and collective justice. The title is derived from the prominent activist, boxer Muhammad Ali, who declared, "I am America. I am the part you won't recognise. But get used to me. Black, confident, cocky. My name, not yours. My religion, not yours. My goals, my own. Get used to me." This idea resonates with contributing artists who assert their identities in the face of marginalisation and misrepresentation.

The pieces in the publication include poetry, essays, mixed media, photography, and more; films were also included in the effort and are showcased via the MNNY website. The topics explored create an inclusive oasis of otherwise sidelined ideas for identity, belonging, and cross-border solidarity, stressing that for many, simply existing is resistance. All the proceeds from the sale of the publication* are being donated towards Palestine including to organisations like The Abu Ghasaan Sittah Children's Fund, E-Sims for Gaza, etc.

**Sold UK wide*

Link to digital flipbook- https://mnny24.squarespace.com/flipbook



Fig 1. Copies of MNNY displayed at the Glasgow School of Art Degree Show

Methodology as Praxis: An Islamically-Informed Curatorial Ethic

The curatorial process of MNNY engaged various aspects of Islamic social justice throughout its ideation and implementation. Based on the tenets of *raḥma* (mercy), *ʿadl* (justice), *shūrā* (consultation), and *amāna* (trust), this process then foregrounds ethical care, spiritual accountability, and synergy detailed below.

1. Bearing Witness: Justice as Testimony

> "O you who believe, be persistently standing firm in justice, as witnesses before God..." (Qur'an 4:135)

MNNY rejects the tendency of art institutions to treat artists from occupied or racialised communities as purveyors of "issue-based" content for Western consumption. Instead, the works are presented as embodied testimonies, irreducible to spectacle and aligned with Spivak's (1988) critique of how subaltern voices are often appropriated by hegemonic systems.

Artist Malik Irtiza's film *'In Search of Apples, Almonds and Cherries',* for instance, navigates the grief and slow resilience of life under occupation. Her work speaks to suffering and the quiet forms of endurance and dignity held in waiting. Additionally, artist Farhin Afza's deeply striking work *"Dastarkhwaan"* showcases the dining cloth laid on the ground where muslim families gather for meals. She reflects on what constitutes dinner table conversation for families that face violence on a daily basis.

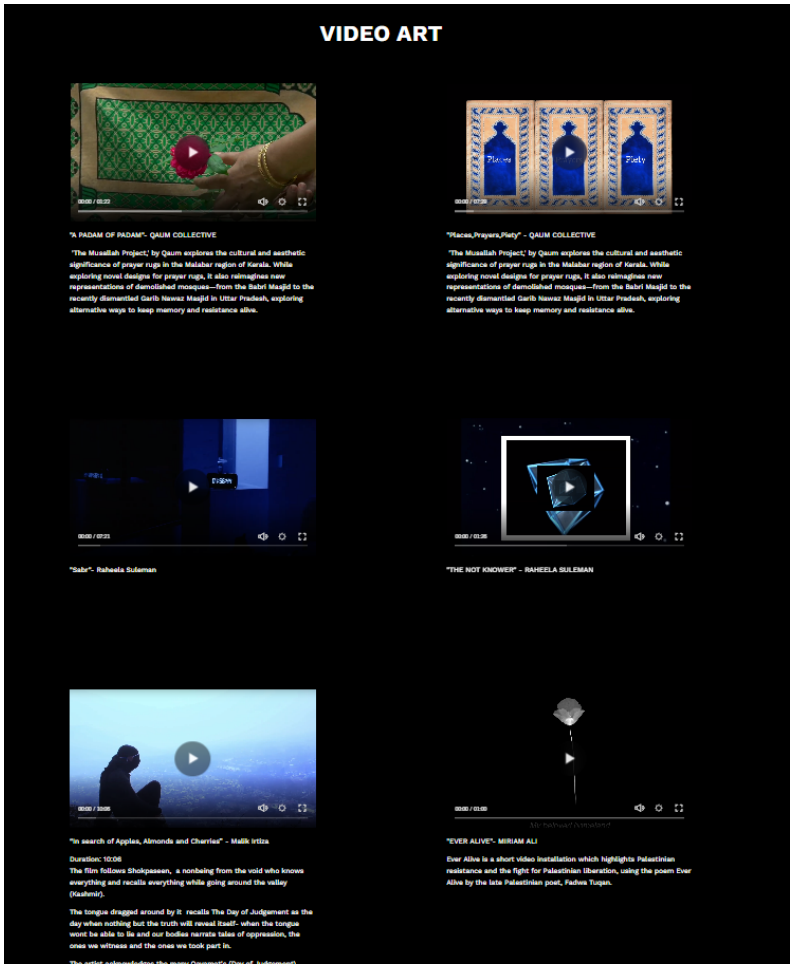


Fig2. Video art showcased on the MNNY website - mnny24.squarespace.com

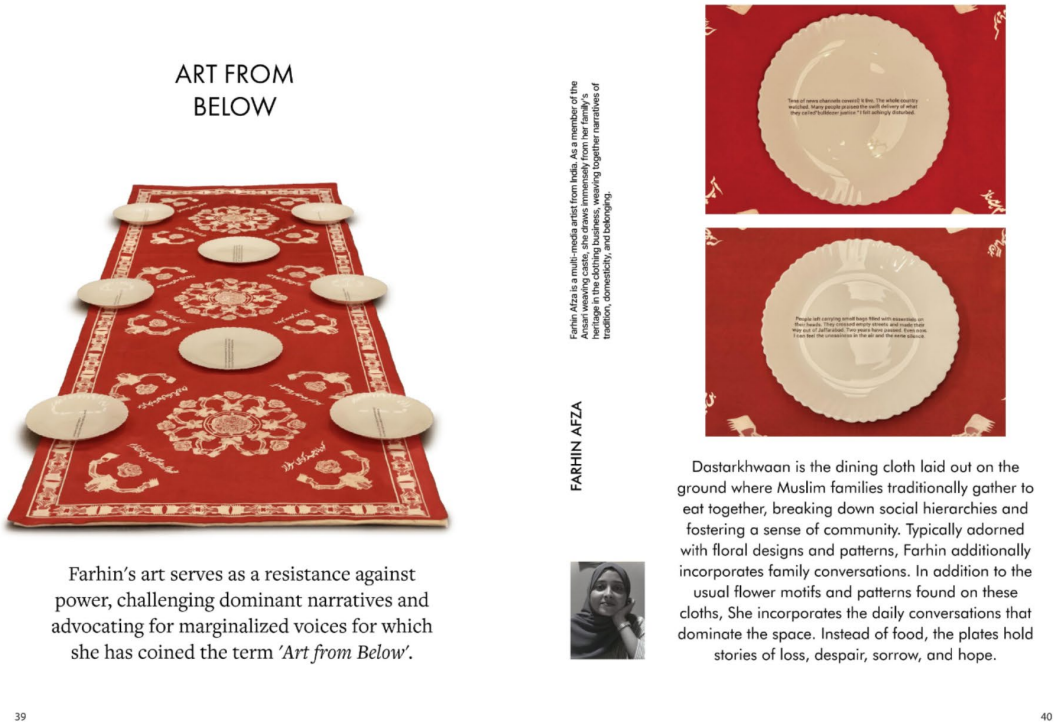


Fig.10. Pgs 39-40 from MNNY featuring artworks by Farhin Afza titled "Dastarkhwaan"

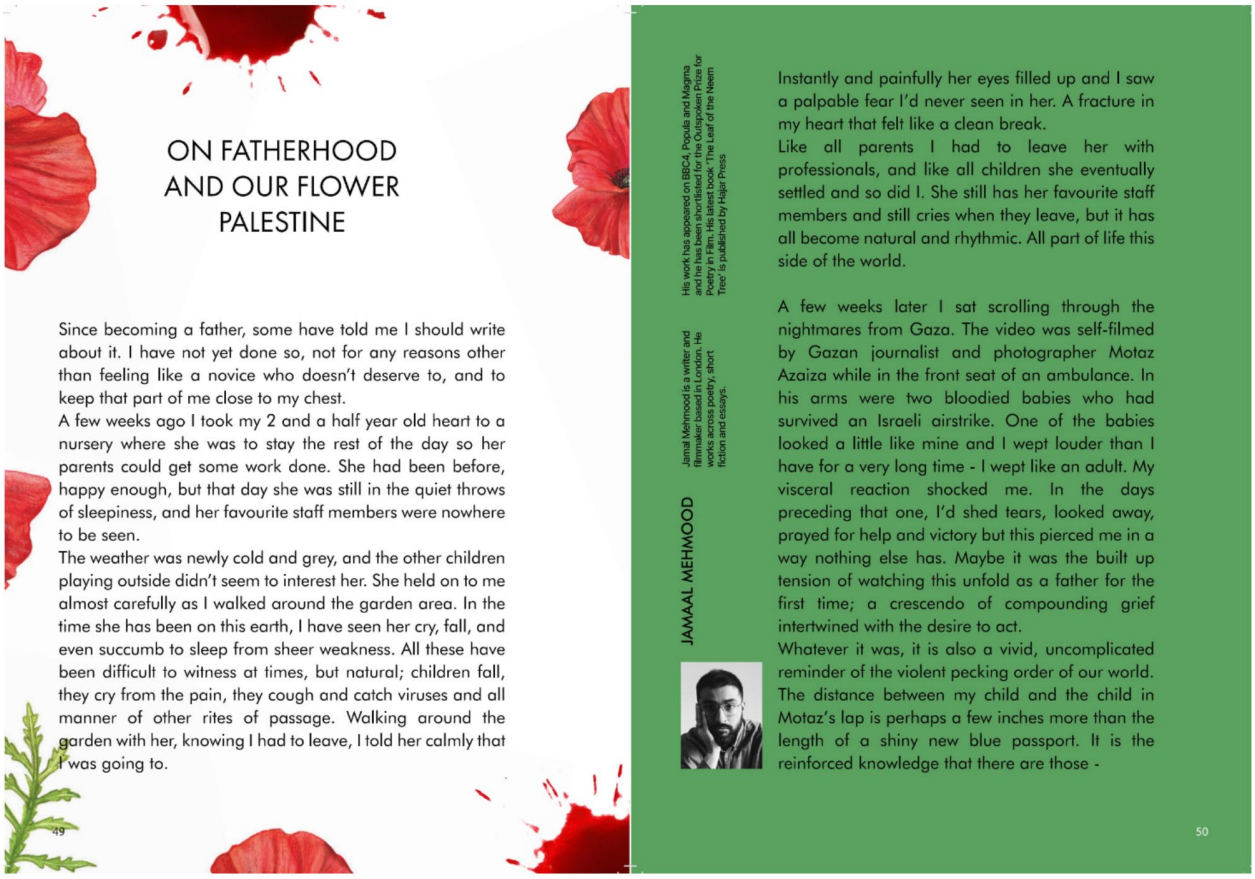
2. Justice as Mercy and Compassion

"Urge one another to patience and compassion..." (Qur'an 90:17)

Resisting neocolonial visual economies that valorise violence as spectacle, MNNY foregrounds alternative affective registers- grief, tenderness, and remembrance, as sites of political potency. Miriam Ali's film *"Ever Alive"* uses the poppy flower's life cycle as a metaphor for Palestinian endurance under occupation, while Jamaal Mehmood's essay *"On Fatherhood and Our Flower Palestine"* reflects on his experience of being a father while bearing witness to the genocide. Reflecting on a video by Gazan journalist Motaz Azaiza filmed inside an ambulance, cradling two bloodied infants who had survived an airstrike- Mehmood describes being pierced by an unprecedented grief. The child's resemblance to his own triggered a torrent of tears, unlike any he had shed before, a reaction he attributes to the accumulated weight of witnessing such atrocities for the first time as a father: a crescendo of layered sorrow intertwined with an urgent will to act.



Fig.3. Screening of the film "Ever Alive" by Miriam Ali at the Glasgow School of Art



ON FATHERHOOD AND OUR FLOWER PALESTINE

Since becoming a father, some have told me I should write about it. I have not yet done so, not for any reasons other than feeling like a novice who doesn't deserve to, and to keep that part of me close to my chest.

A few weeks ago I took my 2 and a half year old heart to a nursery where she was to stay the rest of the day so her parents could get some work done. She had been before, happy enough, but that day she was still in the quiet throws of sleepiness, and her favourite staff members were nowhere to be seen.

The weather was newly cold and grey, and the other children playing outside didn't seem to interest her. She held on to me almost carefully as I walked around the garden area. In the time she has been on this earth, I have seen her cry, fall, and even succumb to sleep from sheer weakness. All these have been difficult to witness at times, but natural; children fall, they cry from the pain, they cough and catch viruses and all manner of other rites of passage. Walking around the garden with her, knowing I had to leave, I told her calmly that I was going to.

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JAMAAL MEHMOOD

Jamal Mehmood is a writer and filmmaker based in London. He works across poetry, short fiction and essays.

His work has appeared on BBC4, Popula and Magma and he has been shortlisted for the Outspoken Prize for Poetry in Film. His latest book 'The Leaf of the Neem Tree' is published by Hajar Press

Instantly and painfully her eyes filled up and I saw a palpable fear I'd never seen in her. A fracture in my heart that felt like a clean break.

Like all parents I had to leave her with professionals, and like all children she eventually settled and so did I. She still has her favourite staff members and still cries when they leave, but it has all become natural and rhythmic. All part of life this side of the world.

A few weeks later I sat scrolling through the nightmares from Gaza. The video was self-filmed by Gazan journalist and photographer Motaz Azaiza while in the front seat of an ambulance. In his arms were two bloodied babies who had survived an Israeli airstrike. One of the babies looked a little like mine and I wept louder than I have for a very long time - I wept like an adult. My visceral reaction shocked me. In the days preceding that one, I'd shed tears, looked away, prayed for help and victory but this pierced me in a way nothing else has. Maybe it was the built up tension of watching this unfold as a father for the first time; a crescendo of compounding grief intertwined with the desire to act.

Whatever it was, it is also a vivid, uncomplicated reminder of the violent pecking order of our world. The distance between my child and the child in Motaz's lap is perhaps a few inches more than the length of a shiny new blue passport. It is the reinforced knowledge that there are those -

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Fig.4. Pgs 49-50 from MNNY showcasing an essay by writer Jamaal Mehmood

3. Ethical Storytelling

Prophetic justice in Islam begins with listening to the oppressed. The Prophet Muhammad warned:

> "Beware the supplication of the oppressed, for there is no barrier between it and God."

In his book "A Pedagogy of Witnessing" Roger I Simon asks a paramount question - how to present the suffering of others so as to provoke sustained attention, concern, and corrective action?. MNNY's ethical curation reframes trauma narratives as testimonies, inviting active engagement rather than passive consumption.

Ufaq Fatima's photography traces the resonances between *Palestinian and Kashmiri* struggles, while Akram Alashqar's documentary '*First Picture'* recounts the harrowing experience of a Palestinian child born and detained in an Israeli prison. Such works demand that viewers move beyond spectatorship toward ethical responsibility.



Fig.5. Pgs 13-14 of MNNY featuring photographs by Ufaq Fatima

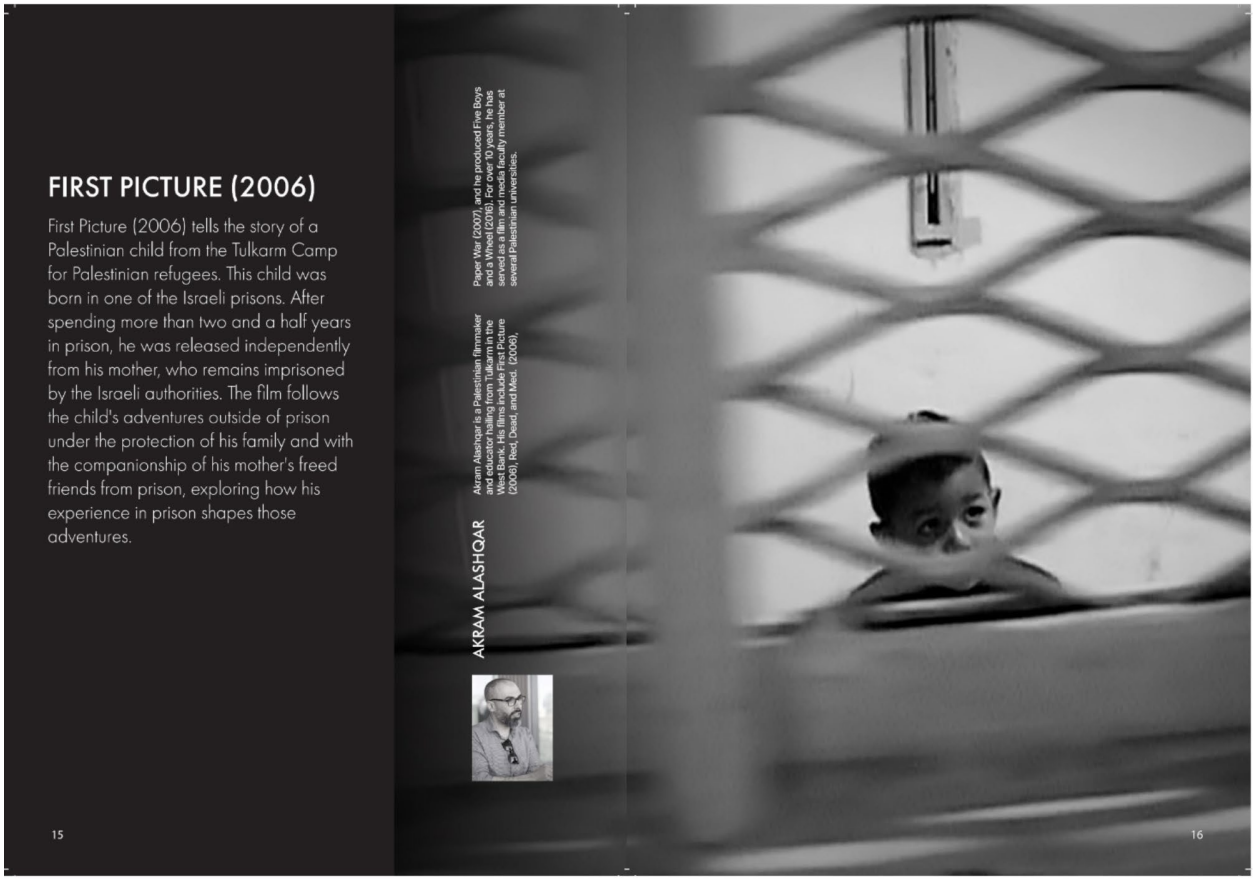


Fig.6. Pgs 15-16 from MNNY featuring documentary film “First Picture” by Akram Alashqar

4. Justice Beyond the Human: Ecological and Communal Care

> “There is no creature on Earth or bird that flies except [that they are] communities like you.” (Qur’an 6:38)

MNNY recognises that justice extends to land, memory, and non-human life. Haneen Hadiy’s intimate photographs of Iraq’s date palms for instance, highlight the arboreal as repositories of memory, challenging anthropocentric paradigms of justice and invoking modes of relationality with land and non-human life.

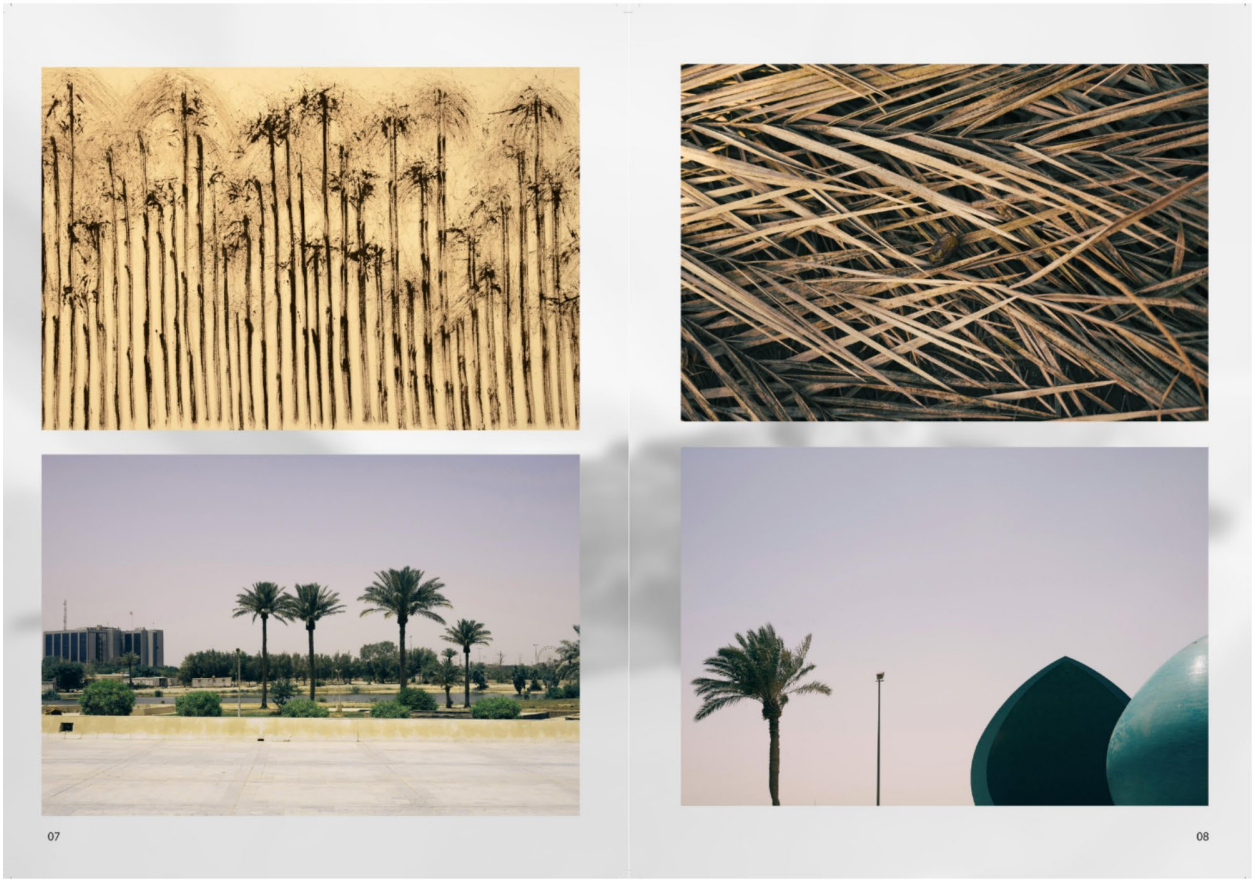


Fig.7. Pgs 07-08 from MNNY featuring photographs by Haneen Hadiy

5. Transnational Solidarity

In the Prophet’s final sermon, he declared:

> “There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab... only in piety.”

This ethos informs Habib Khan’s essay on Bengali Muslim consciousness, which critiques Eurocentric universalisms and proposes faith-informed frameworks for global solidarity. MNNY thus enacts a transnational ethic that resists the borders and hierarchies imposed by neocolonial geopolitics.

6. Gender Justice and Intersectionality

In a well-known account, the Prophet Muhammad corrected a man who kissed his son but neglected his daughter, asking, “Why did you not treat them equally?”

The Prophet's insistence on equal treatment is reflected in MNNY's intersectional approach, which recognises the entanglements of Islamophobia, misogyny, and racialisation. Zahra Fathima's *"Things I Wish I Could Trade My Headscarf For"* critiques liberal multiculturalism's failure to deliver substantive justice, exposing the contradictions of visibility under neocolonial regimes of tolerance.



Fig.8. Pgs 01-02 from MNNY featuring poem "Things I Wish I Could Trade My Headscarf For" by Fathima Zahra

7. Reflexivity

"There can be no just society without people of justice."

Drawing on thinkers like al-Rāzī and Naquib al-Attas, the contributors approached their work as a spiritual and intellectual practice, accountable not only to their peers but to God.

Furthermore, MNNY's process included the prophetic principle of *shūrā* or consultation, inviting artists to shape how their stories were told. The exclusive Interview with writer and director Raheela Khan explores faith and creative practice and the various intersections of *muslim* identity. The interview didn't seek to simplify or translate complexity, but to hold it, honour it, and let it connect with readers in unique ways.

We also see this in Ayan Farooqui's *"Scapegoat"* photo series where he juxtaposes images of goats with Muslims as a metaphor. He critiques how Muslims in different societies are constructed as symbols of blame and unpacks how visual culture can either reproduce violence or, as in this case, challenge it.

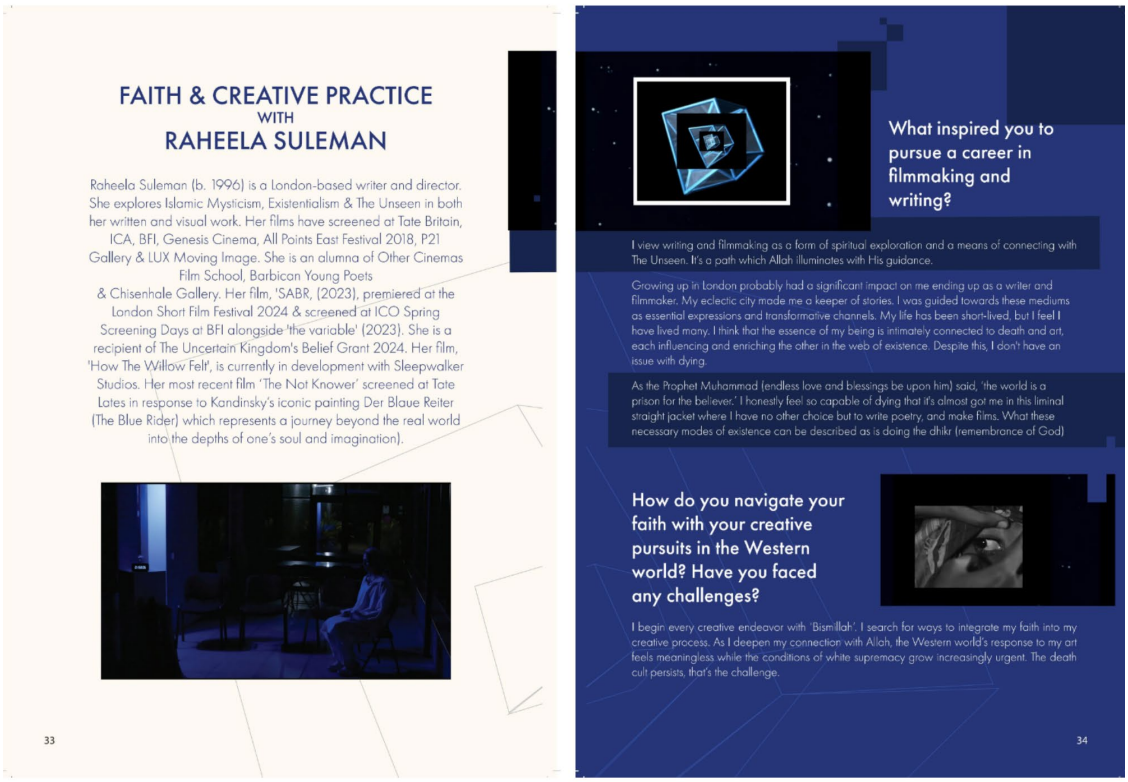


Fig.11. Pgs 33-34 of MNNY featuring an exclusive interview with writer and director Raheela Suleman



Fig. 9. Pgs 27-28 from MNNY featuring photography series “Scapegoat” by Ayan Farooqui

Conclusion

In Curating as Ethics, Jean-Paul Martinon reminds us that ethical curatorial practice requires more than representation, that it demands relationship. For those working with artists from structurally marginalised communities, this means curating *with* rather than *about*. It means creating space for co-authorship, deep listening, and a shared commitment to justice. My Name, Not Yours (MNNY) takes up this charge with intention. It approaches the work of curating as a pedagogical act of care for the stories being shared, for the artists who carry them, and for the audiences who are asked to bear witness. Roger I. Simon argues for a curatorial model that is inherently pedagogical and political . He writes-

> "Materialized as the design and development of a mise-en-scène into which a person would enter, a curatorial project is enacted through judgments as to: what is to be shown, the placement of such in space, the discursive environment that will inscribe that space and the materials in it (including such texts as object or image labels, brochures, and press releases), and the "programming" initiated to dialectically foster thought and understanding in a manner that might make evident shared concerns and various perspectives held by people visiting a given exhibit. It is axiomatic that such practices are inherently pedagogical and by implication integrally political"

MNNY further recognises that conveying stories of displacement, racialisation, occupation, and erasure requires emotional and spiritual labour. And it holds that labour with gentleness and accountability. Simon also states that, "remembrance itself can become a radical act…a desire for a future time different from the past/present as an affectively driven by a force to thought with the potential to generate critical insight into the complex, often contradictory terms and conditions of everyday life."

Ameliorated further in MNNY is a *khalīfah(custodian)*-oriented form of production, one that honours the *amāna* (trust) of storytelling, protects the *karāma* (dignity) of its contributors, and moves between spiritual accountability and political urgency with care. And in doing so, reframes curation not as a neutral display but as a relational, transnational, and spiritually grounded act of decolonial justice. Zahid Shakir, an American Muslim scholar, speaks to the expansiveness of this vision:

> "We can say that an Islamic view of justice involves relations between friends and enemies and between the strong and the weak… It is the gift of revelation, yet it benefits from reason… It addresses the soul, the individual, and society… It exists as a transcendental ideal. Yet it is an ideal that humans are enjoined to actualise in our lives."

This approach is part of a growing shift in ethical curatorial discourse. In describing decoloniality, Toby Katherine also invokes Catherine E. Walsh to describe it as the ongoing dismantling:

> "Decoloniality denotes ways of thinking, knowing, being, and doing that began with, but also precede, the colonial enterprise and invasion. It implies the recognition and undoing of the hierarchical structures of race, gender, heteropatriarchy, and class that continue to control life, knowledge, spirituality, and thought, structures that are clearly intertwined with and constitutive of global capitalism and Western modernity. Moreover, it is indicative of the ongoing nature of struggles, constructions, and creations that continue to work within coloniality's margins and fissures to affirm that which coloniality has attempted to negate."

It is equally important to acknowledge that certain works in MNNY are not merely decolonial in orientation but explicitly anti-colonial, speaking directly to the conditions of neocolonialism. As Alpesh Kantilal Patel notes in *Post-/Anti-/Neo-/De- Colonial: Theories*

and Visual Analysis (2024), such a distinction is crucial. To elaborate, Patel cites Palestinian exile Hudha Salah's 2020 practice-based MFA thesis:

> "[a]s someone from an actively colonized country, it is hard to talk about a postcolonial status. This term works in postcolonial countries such as Algeria or South Africa. The same cannot be said when discussing Palestine or even the land of Canada where Indigenous people continue to experience an active displacement and cultural elimination. My very own existence here today is evidence of that fact"

Nkrumah (1965) described Neocolonialism as the continuation of imperial control through economic, cultural, and epistemic domination after formal independence. The publication's geographies are all shaped by the lingering architectures of empire, where military occupation, resource extraction, surveillance technologies, and global Islamophobia function as instruments of control. By rendering these connections visible, it aligns with what Patel identifies as the necessity of confronting neocolonial realities alongside colonial histories, resisting the sanitising tendency to frame such struggles as resolved.

In conclusion, what emerges is an alternative curatorial model rooted in shared authorship, political clarity, and spiritual responsibility that unites anticolonial critique, confrontation of contemporary imperial formations, and a transnational ethic of care. MNNY demonstrates that artistic practice can operate simultaneously as an archive of lived resistance and a site for imagining liberated futures.

"No one is free, until we are all free"

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An Artistic Approach To Intangible Heritage Documentation In Vietnam: Xoan Singing

Nguyen Ngoc Quy

Abstract

This research explores generative art as a method for preserving Vietnam's intangible cultural heritage, specifically focusing on Xoan singing, a traditional practice combining ritual singing and dancing with significant communal value. Traditional archival approaches such as static video and audio recordings often fail to capture the dynamic and embodied nature of these cultural practices. Adopting a practice-led research methodology, this study investigated how generative art systems can document and interpret the intangible aspects of Xoan singing. Through artistic experiments, sound, dance movements, and ritual objects related to Xoan singing were transformed into dynamic, real-time visuals, emphasising the interplay between cultural symbolism and digital aesthetics. Instead of creating fixed archives, the project developed practical workflows that position generative art as a creative tool for cultural preservation. This thesis includes an analysis of case studies and experimental outcomes, illustrating how generative systems visually represent symbolic elements, such as repetition, cyclical patterns, and embedded ritual symbolism. It also explores broader implications, providing new methodologies for artists and cultural researchers and interactive educational tools for younger audiences. By prioritising artistic innovation over static preservation, this research contributes to discussions on the role of contemporary art in cultural heritage. This demonstrates how generative art can effectively bridge traditional expressions with digital practices, ensuring that intangible heritage such as Xoan singing remains accessible and relevant for future generations.

Keywords: Intangible heritage, Generative arts, heritage safeguarding

Introduction

Cultural heritage preservation is vital for maintaining societal identity (Universal Business School, Karjat, Raigad et al. 2024). Although advancements have improved tangible heritage archiving, safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH)such as traditional music, dance, and ritualsremains challenging. UNESCO advocates video archiving on platforms such as YouTube (Pietrobruno, 2013), yet researchers have highlighted that textual documentation abstracts ICH from its landscape context (Nic Eoin et al., 2013). Static methods, such as video and audio recordings, often overlook the fluidity and contextual depth of ICH, prompting the exploration of dynamic digital representations. Generative systems that respond to real-time inputs, such as sound and user interactions, offer a more dynamic alternative. Using a visual programming platform for real-time media creation, this research investigates generative systems as an artistic approach to preserving Xoan singing, a complex Vietnamese practice integrating rituals, dance, and communal participation. Targeting art practitioners and researchers in generative art and cultural preservation, this project provides insights into experimental workflows, data visualisation, and audio-driven interaction using TouchDesigner. By translating sound, dance, and symbolic objects into real-time visuals, this approach facilitates deeper engagement and broader accessibility, particularly for the younger generations and educational audiences.

Intangible Cultural Heritage

Definition and the differences between ICH and tangible heritage

In 2003, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) convened a seminal conference, "Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage," endorsed by 130 countries. This gathering articulated five key elements of cultural heritage and solidified a definition for intangible cultural heritage as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities recognise as part of their cultural heritage'(UNESCO, 2003) (UNESCO, 2003). ICH encompasses elements that are non-physical yet culturally significant, such as performing arts, rituals, stories, and traditional knowledge systems, often referred to as 'living heritage'. This heritage is characterised by its transmission within communities across generations and can also include the non-tangible significance attached to physical items and locations (Deacon, 2006).

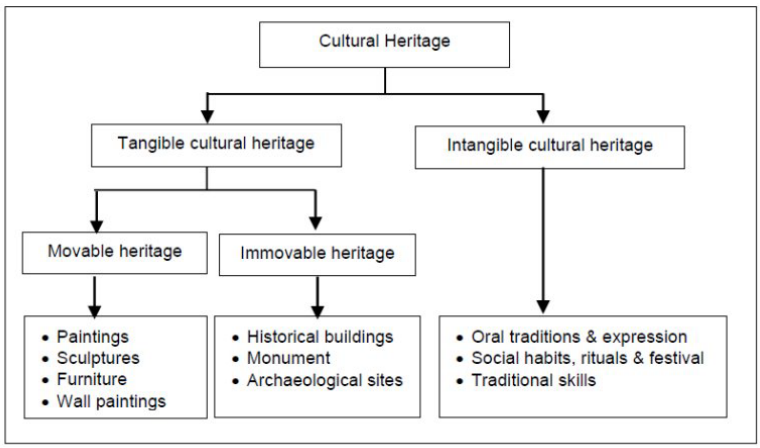


Figure 23. Cultural Heritage Classification from UNESCO

Tangible heritage, as defined by Deacon, 2006), includes physical objects and places of historical, aesthetic, and cultural value while (Condominas, 2004) noted: "The most tangible manifestations of heritage are simply anything material." The evaluation of intangible heritage is a complex process that often involves comparison with tangible heritage (Rosaldo, 2013). This heritage is dynamic and constantly evolving through practices that communities actively maintain and transmit, such as the verbal and hands-on transmission of craftsmanship skills, as described by Wan Isa et al. (2018). For example, a master woodworker might instruct an apprentice to "Hold the plane in your right hand and watch the angle", integrating speech, gestures, and tradition into the learning process (Condominas, 2004). The dynamic and evolving nature of ICH, along with its dependence on community participation and oral transmission, often makes it less valuable than tangible heritage, which can present challenges in its preservation (Rosaldo, 2013).

Toward Convergence

The concept of convergence in preserving heritage is increasingly recognised as crucial in cultural preservation, highlighting the interdependent nature of these heritage sites. Despite having separated definitions and categorisations, UNESCO was still "considering the deep-seated interdependence between intangible cultural heritage and tangible cultural heritage' (UNESCO, 2003). This holistic approach to preservation emphasises that the significance of tangible heritage often resides in intangible experiences and associated practices, thereby requiring integrated conservation strategies that address both forms.

(Munjeri 2004) and Hallam (2008) both highlight the need for a more integrated approach, with Munjeri emphasising “Intangible heritage provided the larger framework within which tangible heritage could take shape and significance”. This perspective promotes a deeper analysis of how cultural artefacts interact with and reflect their surrounding cultural, social, and environmental factors, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of heritage and history. (Hassard 2006) and Lane 2016) explore the ideological and practical implications of this convergence. Hassard criticises the division between tangible and intangible heritage, whereas Lane supports a closer integration of ethnoarchaeology. This integrated approach to heritage conservation emphasises the interconnectedness of tangible and intangible elements, highlighting the importance of considering both preservation strategies (Maharjan and Barata, 2018). In 1994, the Expert Meeting on the "Global Strategy" and thematic studies also emphasized the importance of understanding "the multiple reciprocal relationships that each piece of evidence had with its physical (i.e., tangible) and non-physical (i.e., intangible) environment." This perspective encourages a deeper analysis of how cultural artefacts interact with and reflect the surrounding cultural, social, and environmental factors. This offers a richer and more interconnected understanding of heritage and history.

ICH Preservation in Vietnam: Challenges and Opportunities

My cultural background as an artist and researcher from Vietnam deeply informs the focus and direction of this research. Having been immersed in the rich traditions of Vietnam, I developed a profound appreciation for the country's intangible cultural heritage, including practices such as Xoan singing, which are rooted in communal participation, symbolism, and rituals. This personal connection to my cultural landscape motivated me to explore how contemporary digital tools can not only document but also meaningfully engage with these traditions. My situated knowledge, encompassing an understanding of the cultural, historical, and spiritual layers of Xoan singing, uniquely positions me in approaching this project with both insider awareness and critical sensitivity. This perspective enables me to identify nuances that external observers may overlook, ensuring that the generative system developed in TouchDesigner reflects the aesthetic depth and cultural significance of practice. My decision to work with generative art stems from my personal interest in merging traditional storytelling with emerging digital technologies, using creative systems not solely for preservation, but also to invite active engagement with cultural narratives. This project represents both a reflection on my personal connection to Vietnamese heritage and a critical exploration of how digital tools can help sustain cultural knowledge for future generations.

This study focuses on intangible heritage documentation and archiving in Vietnam, with eight intangible cultural heritage items honoured by UNESCO (Hong, 2015). Vietnam's cultural policymakers and academic institutions have shown marked openness to employing new technologies to document and sustain cultural practices. The scope of this research concentrates on a specific, yet significant facet of the broad field of heritage safeguarding, which involves considerations ranging from financial aspects to tourism and legal frameworks. Specifically, this study focuses on the methodologies used in archiving and displaying heritage with an emphasis on intangible cultural heritage. This includes examining the existing limitations of these methods and exploring the opportunities available to artists to contribute to the archival process.

Currently, the academic sphere features diverse perspectives on the safeguarding and promotion of cultural heritage, leading to ongoing debates. G. J. Ashworth, a British scholar, summarised the views on heritage preservation in various countries, categorising them into three distinct viewpoints: intact safeguarding, inheritance-based safeguarding, and safeguarding and development. The current state of heritage safeguarding in Vietnam can be examined through the lens of the three viewpoints proposed by G.J.. Ashworth. These

categories provide a structured framework to evaluate the strategies employed in Vietnam to preserve its rich cultural heritage, particularly intangible cultural heritage (Từ Thị Loan, 2019). Vietnam's increasing openness to innovative methods, including artistic approaches, to safeguard its intangible cultural heritage highlights the potential for generative art as a medium of exploration for Vietnamese artists.

Generative arts

Generative art, as defined byMonro (2007), refers to the creation of art through an autonomous process. This approach to art creation is rooted in the concept of a generative system, which involves actively making sense of information and applying it to new situations (Edmonds 2017)(Fiorella 2016). This element of randomness and the system's autonomy often result in each output being unique and not entirely foreseeable by the artist, thus introducing the concept of emergence (McCormack 2007). Frieder Nake (2009), a pioneer in computer art, describes generative art as **"art that is in a state of becoming, of emergence"**. Emergence in generative art refers to the complex patterns, forms, and behaviours that arise from relatively simple rules and interactions but cannot be predicted from those rules alone. The beauty of generative art often lies in this emergence, as unexpected aesthetics or concepts materialise from the computational process, providing a rich field for exploration and interpretation by both the artist and audience (Edmonds, 2017). Dorin (2001) and Galanter (2003) highlighted the role of generative processes in art production, emphasising the freedom and unique means of artistic expression they offer. In the 1960s and the 1970s, artists and mathematicians, such as Frieder Nake and Harold Cohen, further advanced the field of generative art by exploring the intersection of mathematical principles and artistic expression. This period marked a significant expansion in the understanding and use of algorithms as a medium for creative exploration and aesthetic productions. The subsequent discussion examines selected projects and provides a critical analysis of their approach to generative art and intangible elements.

Hong Kong Martial Arts Living Archive

The Hong Kong Martial Arts Living Archive (HKMALA) is a collaboration between the International Guoshu Association (IGA) and the City University of Hong Kong (CUHK) to preserve martial arts as part of Hong Kong's intangible heritage (Lau, 2022; Chao et al., 2018). Facing social change and the risk of decline, Chinese martial arts require cultural safeguarding (Fan, n.d.). HKMALA seeks to "enliven heritage" rather than "fossilise" fossilise' (Kenderdine, 2020). Masters wear body sensors to record speed, torque, torsion, and force, and translate movements into precise digital data (Fan, n.d.). This motion capture archive preserves Southern Chinese kung fu styles with technical and expressive accuracy, hosts exhibitions such as *Kung Fu Motion*, and advances academic research on digital heritage.

Voice Gems

Voice Gems: 1000 Year Archive is a generative art project that preserves voices—from endangered bird calls to celebrity voice notes—by transforming them into digital "gems." High-quality recordings capture the nuances of pitch, resonance, and emotion, which algorithms then analyze to generate unique gem designs and colours. These are presented through interactive installations and online platforms, allowing audiences to explore and listen to the voices. Creator Harry Yeff (Reeps One) describes the work as both artwork and monument, existing in forms from small sculptures to building-sized projections. The project reframes voice as a tangible aesthetic object, merging sound, memory, and symbolism. This convergence transforms an ephemeral element into a visual artefact, bridging traditional oral heritage with contemporary digital archiving. While these algorithmic translations offer emotionally resonant and visually engaging preservation, they are interpretive rather than exact representations, raising questions about authorship, authenticity, and cultural mediation.

Nonetheless, *Voice Gems* demonstrates how generative art can expand archival practice, engaging audiences through multisensory, symbolic preservation that goes beyond storing data to reimagining how it is experienced.

Archiving the Intangibles through the Lens of Generative Art

Projects like *Voice Gems* and the *Hong Kong Martial Arts Living Archive* use generative art to turn intangible cultural data—such as voices or gestures—into interactive, multisensory forms. Algorithms analyse unique patterns in sound or movement and translate them into visual or auditory outputs, engaging contemporary audiences who prefer experiential encounters over passive viewing. This "living archive" approach (Edmonds, 2017) allows real-time, evolving representations of traditions, enhancing cultural education and accessibility (Candy & Ferguson, 2014). *Voice Gems* exemplifies this shift, converting vocal qualities—pitch, resonance, timbre—into unique digital sculptures. This process is not a direct technical translation but an interpretive one, shaped by aesthetic choices and cultural context. The visual outcome may diverge from the sonic "beauty" of a voice, underscoring how identity is reframed when sound is mapped to image. Generative systems thus act as intermediaries, making intangible identity markers tangible.This practice reflects broader "ocularcentric" tendencies (Jay; Crary), where vision dominates cultural memory, and aligns with Bolter and Grusin's (1999) *remediation* theory. Yet generative art departs from remediation's fixed-source model: instead of refashioning an existing object, it creates work in real time, distributing authorship among artist, code, machine, and sometimes viewer. While this openness invites bias and raises questions about authenticity, it also redefines heritage as a living, iterative process. Generative systems remix rather than simply record, translating rhythm, symbolism, and atmosphere into evolving visual forms. Where remediation asks how an object is refashioned, generative art asks what counts as an object when its form is never fixed.

Methodology

The research predominantly employs a practice-led methodology augmented by focused case studies and field research. These methods include iterative experimentation with generative systems, direct observation of cultural performances, comprehensive documentation of ritualistic spaces and artefacts, and a systematic collection of audio-visual materials. Collectively, these approaches offer both creative insights and essential contextual foundations for investigations. Prior to the more detailed discussion in this chapter, the table below illustrates each component of the overall approach and their interconnections.

Table 2. Methodology: Quick Roadmap.

Method	Details	Core Aim	Key Actions / Tools
1. Case-study focus (Xoan singing, Phú Thọ)	Literature review	Ground the project in cultural, historical, and academic context; identify the importance and basic structure of Xoan singing	Literature and archive review; UNESCO documents; existing recordings and scholarly texts
	Field visits	Collect primary data and directly experience the practice in its cultural setting	On-site visits during and festival; audio, video, photography, notes; informal conversations with performers and locals
⇅			
2. Practice-led research (with generative art)	Data collection => Data processing	Convert raw recordings, imagery, and observations into usable inputs	TouchDesigner for sound/ image analysis and parameter mapping
	Generative System build	Re-encode rhythm, tonality, text, and spatial forms as real-time visual behaviors	TouchDesigner node networks (CHOPs, SOPs, TOPs, GLSL)
	Iterative evaluation	Test visual expressiveness, cultural resonance, and system stability	Studio playbacks, journal reflections, visual comparisons

Case Study Focus

As the foundational methodology, this research adopts a case study approach centred on Xoan singing, a UNESCO-recognised form of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) from Phú Thọ, Vietnam. Rather than generalising across various Intangible Cultural Heritage practices, the project strategically centres on this culturally rich, context-specific tradition. This focused strategy allows for a more profound exploration of Xoan's intricate elements, including musical composition, ceremonial significance, spatial arrangements, and oral transmission methods. The selection of a single case enables a detailed examination of how generative art systems can effectively translate and reinterpret intangible practices in contemporary new media art. The original Xoan villages, situated in Phú Thọ Province, are conveniently located near the researcher's base in Hanoi, facilitating frequent field visits, engagement with local performers, and the direct observation of performances in authentic settings. This accessibility fosters continuous engagement, ethical collaboration, and iterative data collection, which are all vital for practice-led research.



Figure 2. Live Xoan singing performance inside a communal house in Phú Thọ Province.

Practice-Led Methodology

This study adopts a practice-led research methodology (PLR) to engage in intangible cultural heritage. PLR emphasises practice as central to knowledge production (Barrett & Bolt, 2014) and recognises creative processes as valid forms of scholarly enquiry (Hamilton & Hansen, 2024). Unlike traditional detached research methods, PLR integrates experiential knowledge and theoretical frameworks through artistic creation (Stewart 2006). This approach is particularly suited for intangible heritage, such as Xoan singing, which integrates musical, ritualistic, and social dimensions. Using generative arts as the primary medium, this study examines Xoan singing, an intangible cultural heritage practice in Vietnam. Selected for its cultural significance and researcher accessibility, Xoan singing combines ritual singing, storytelling, and symbolic dance movements, thus offering rich possibilities for generative art. Generative art employs computational systems that evolve in response to sound, lyrics, and movement, resulting in emergent visual forms (Annunziato and Pierucci 2002; Seevinck 2015).

PLR methodology embeds the researcher within the process, fostering a deeper understanding through direct interaction with generative systems (Hamilton & Hansen, 2024). These dynamic frameworks facilitate iterative experimentation and adaptation as cultural expressions evolve. Reflective documentation captures the interplay between practice and researcher insight (Nimkulrat, 2007) and contributes to innovative approaches to cultural preservation (Brown, 2020; Lawson, 2012). Ultimately, this practice-led approach views intangible heritage as dynamic, creating documentation that itself evolves, reflecting the ongoing creativity and vitality of Vietnam's Xoan singing tradition (Stewart 2006).

Field Study within a Practice-Led Research Framework

To complement the experimentation and theoretical framing of this research, a field study was undertaken in Phú Tho province, the birthplace and active home of the Xoan singing tradition. Rather than adopting an anthropological or ethnographic approach, this fieldwork was conceived as an embodied, sensorial engagement intended to inform artistic practice. The

researcher approached the site as an artist observer, attending Xoan performances both within and outside the ritual context, engaging in informal dialogue with local practitioners, and absorbing the spatial, atmospheric, and social dynamics of animate tradition. These direct experiences became a form of "material sourcing", providing culturally grounded insights that informed the development of generative system experiments.

Xoan Singing (Case study)

The Intangible behind the Performance

This project uses case studies and practice-led research to explore how data from Xoan singing transforms into generative art. Recognised as part of Vietnam's intangible cultural heritage, Xoan singing reflects national identity and local preservation efforts. Originating in Phu Tho Province, it blends singing, dancing, costumes, and rituals, central to spring festivals where entertainment, spirituality, and social interactions converge. Historically, it has deep roots in Vietnamese religion and culture, combining song, dance, and drama inspired by legends and expressing the spirit and patriotism of the Phu Tho people (Phuong et al. 2024).

Xoan has two forms: ceremonial and festive. Ceremonial singing features 14 *Qua Cach* recitations, prayers and stories for peace and prosperity - performed in three parts: *Giao Cach* (solo), *Dua Cach* (male lead with female artists), and *Ket Cach* (female lead closing). Festive singing is dynamic, with troupe members and young locals performing together. Spirituality plays a key role, with performances often starting with incense offerings and ancestral veneration. Singing techniques and improvisation, such as An Thái guild's subtle pitch and tempo changes in *Hát Xướng*, are integral yet difficult to capture in written or recorded forms. Lyrics like those in "Nhập Tịch Mời Vua" invite ancestral rulers to join celebrations, linking past and present through evolving oral traditions. Rituals, such as symbolic offerings in Phượng Lâu village, reflect shared values and unity. Social participation—seen in events like Hội Đình Hùng Lô, where audiences clap, respond, and dance—turns spectators into contributors. Together, spirituality, cultural memory, vocal skills, storytelling, ritual, and community solidarity shape the intangible heritage of Xoan singing.



Figure 3. Xoan Singing performance in Phu Tho province, Vietnam

Data Collection and Categorization

The Xoan singing case study began with a structured, yet flexible process of data acquisition and classification to identify the tangible and intangible elements of this heritage. The aim was to determine which components could be effectively translated into generative art while recognising the challenges posed by abstract, spiritual, or relational aspects. Data encompassed sounds, movements, symbolic artefacts, and spatial arrangements, collected in iterative cycles, where each artistic experiment informed further refinement. This responsive approach mirrored tradition's fluid nature. Materials were categorised by cultural significance and technical viability: direct inputs such as vocal recordings or photographs shaped visual outputs, while intangible elements such as communal ambiance or ritual meaning guided tone and symbolism. Distinguishing tangible from intangible components, common in heritage discourse - served here as a practical framework for creative decision-making, leading to the table of key elements observed during fieldwork in Phú Thọ.

Table 3.Tangible and intangible components of Xoan Singing

Element Type	Subcategory	Examples from Xoan Singing	Relevance to Research / Notes
Tangible	Performance Space	Communal houses (Đình), village courtyards, temple grounds	Architecturally significant; visually documentable; can be recreated in GA environments as spatial context.
	Objects and Materials	Mats used during performance, ceremonial offerings, incense holders, decorative items	These artifacts carry symbolic weight but are physically accessible and visually distinct—ideal for object-based representations.
	Costumes and Props	Traditional attire of Xoan singers, headscarves, fans or drums (if used)	These physical features mark roles and traditions; useful in designing avatars or referencing visual styles.
	Written/ Recorded Materials	Documented lyrics, video footage, photographs	Useful reference materials for analyzing and reinterpreting performance in generative systems; essential for sound analysis.
Intangible	Vocals/ Singing	Melodic structures, rhythm, improvisational flow, call-and-response, conversation	Translation into visual or audio-reactive forms; central to GA experiments involving sound input.
	Ritual Meaning and Spirituality	Songs performed to welcome ancestral spirits or invite the king; symbolic gestures	Deeply embedded in local cosmology; difficult to visualize without risking misrepresentation or simplification.
	Atmosphere	Quiet, respectful, focused ambiance during ritual performances (vs. festive tourist shows)	Affects how sound and visuals are composed—atmospheric qualities inspire aesthetic decisions.
	Oral Knowledge Transmission	Songs passed down by memory through generations, informal learning from elder guild members	This form of cultural continuity is non-visual and difficult to externalize in generative systems; must be acknowledged as background context.
	Community Interaction	The way performers coordinate, the relationship between the singers and local audience	Hard to encode in GA but contributes to the interpretation of collective energy and group dynamics.
	Cultural Values	Respect for ancestors, seasonal and festival alignment, gender and age roles	Symbolically present but non-material; not easily embedded in generative systems without risking misreadings.

Acknowledging both tangible and intangible aspects ensures that generative representation moves beyond visual abstraction and offers a layered experience that reflects symbolism, participation, and cultural depth. This dual focus enables the generative system to act as a dynamic archive, linking traditional heritage with digital tools so that physical artefacts and performative knowledge remain accessible. A second categorisation assessed which intangible elements could be translated into generative experiments and which could not, involving not only technical but also cultural, ethical, and conceptual considerations. The table below outlines these decisions:

Table 4.Intangible Elements – Suitability for Generative Arts (GA)

Intangible Aspect	Included in GA Experiments?	Why Included / Not Included
Vocal qualities (rhythm, tone)	✓	Mapped into visual patterns using audio analysis in TouchDesigner. This offered a direct, reactive link between sound and image.
Oral transmission of lyrics	✓ (partially)	The linguistic complexity and poetic symbolism embedded in the lyrics could not be easily represented visually without reducing their meaning.
Spiritual/ritual meaning	X	These layers are culturally specific and often ineffable. Representing them visually risked over-simplification or misinterpretation.
Communal participation and emotional atmosphere	✓ (partially)	Translated into immersive ambient visuals to evoke a sense of shared space and energy, though limited by lack of intersubjective engagement.
Improvisation & live dynamics	✓	Reflected through the generative system's incorporation of randomness and real-time visual shifts.
Cultural identity and historical memory	X	These aspects go beyond sensory representation and require narrative or contextual framing that falls outside the capabilities of GA tools alone.

Several intangible aspects of Xoan singing were excluded from the generative experiments, not due to a lack of importance but because of practical limits. Conducted within a short timeframe and using a practice-led approach, the project prioritised hands-on experimentation and data-driven visual output. Elements such as oral transmission, spiritual meaning, and cultural identity require extensive ethnographic research, historical study, and cross-disciplinary collaboration—beyond this study's scope. These aspects also demand interpretive frameworks beyond generative systems, visually representing spiritual significance, such as risk misinterpretation. Therefore, the focus shifted to elements more readily translated into responsive visuals, such as sound quality, performance dynamics, and communal atmosphere. This selective approach acted as both a methodological filter and an ethical stance, recognising the limits of digital translation in working with living heritage.

Experiments and discussions

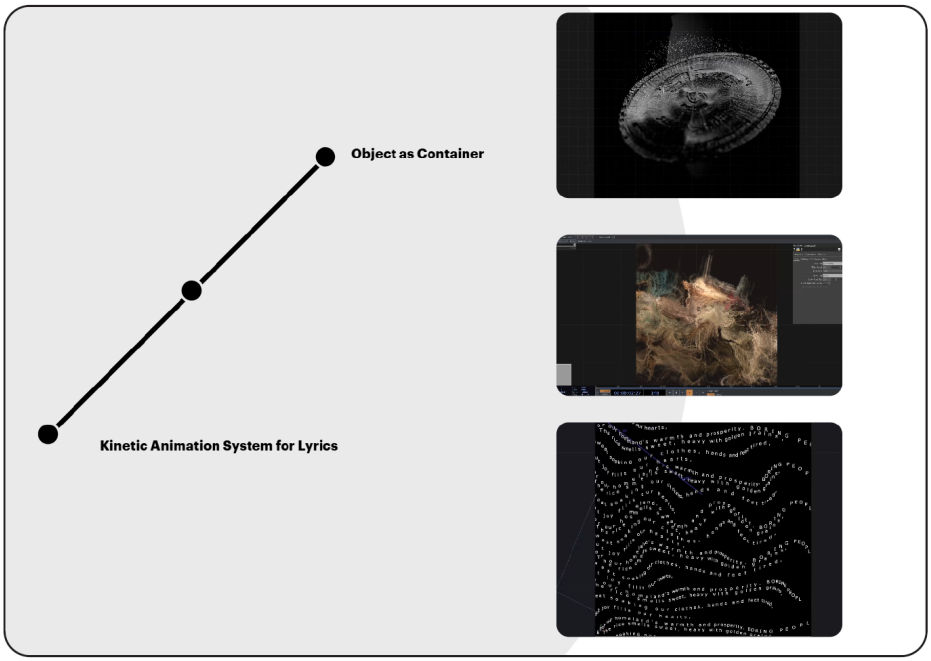


Figure 4. The main directions for the generative system experiments were as follows

Data Processing

The data processing phase transformed fieldwork and archival materials into structured inputs for generative experimentation. Cultural data, lyrics, audio recordings, ritual gestures, and symbolic artefacts were analysed and formatted for TouchDesigner, prioritising the preservation of cultural nuances alongside creative manipulation. Each experiment required tailored datasets to produce distinct visual and interactive results and to bridge traditions with computational representation.

- **Transcription and Analysis of Lyrics**

Xoan lyrics were transcribed from field recordings, YouTube videos, and institutional archives in Phú Thọ, then translated into English to preserve poetic and cultural detail. Lyrics were categorised into themes, such as ritual invocations, agricultural work, blessings, and myths, revealing recurring motifs and cyclical narratives. This classification linked lyrical meaning to choreographic gestures and framing performances as microarchives of ancestral life.

One example, *Hò nhịp gặt lúa* (Harvesting Song), celebrates rural resilience and communal labour through a call-and-response format. Within the generative system, its rhythmic simplicity drove animated text and wave-like visuals, evoking agricultural cycles and a collective identity.

Table 5. Performances, songs are categorized based on the order of performance in cultural event

Category	Purpose	Themes	Performance Style
Hát Thờ	Sacred ceremonies, spiritual	Blessings, prosperity, gods	Slow, reverent, ceremonial
Hát Quả Cách	Storytelling, moral lessons	Labor, history, nature	Call-and-response, symbolic lyrics
Hát Hội	Festivals, communal celebrations	Love, playfulness, bonding	Lively, dance-driven, participatory

- **Extraction of Patterns from Tangible Elements**

Visual motifs were drawn from mats (*chiếu*), architectural carvings, and ritual instruments photographed in Phú Thọ. Mat patterns were converted into height maps and imported into TouchDesigner as reactive textures controlled by the vocal frequencies. Architectural carvings have become layered backgrounds, providing a cultural context without literal replication. Owing to the lack of point cloud scans, still images were repurposed into particle systems simulating the depth and motion in response to sound. This adaptive approach reflects the iterative, practice-led nature of the work, ensuring that visuals remain culturally grounded, yet dynamically responsive.



Figure 5. Architectural motifs extracted from field photographs for generative visual processing.

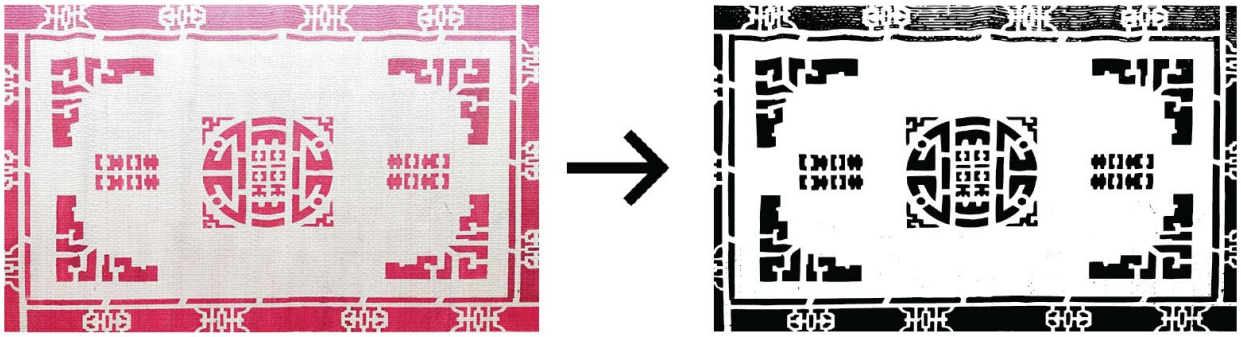


Figure 6. The traditional mat pattern is converted into a black-and-white height map for generative design.

- **Sound and Singing Analysis**

TouchDesigner's audio tools (Audio Spectrum CHOP, Audio Analysis CHOP, Band EQ CHOP) converted sound data into visual parameters: low-frequency altered scale and brightness, and high-frequency triggered particle dispersion. Songs like *Nhập Tịch Mời Vua* shifted from solemn to celebratory, with visuals reflecting tonal changes through light, motion, and density. Ambient sounds—villagers' chatter, temple footsteps, drums, and rustling leaves—were layered to enhance the atmosphere and situate visuals within the place and context.



Figure 7. Different sound analysing technique test for Xoan singing using TouchDesigner

The mapping diagram (Figure 8) shows how cultural inputs—sound, lyrics, objects, and gestures—were grouped under themes (instrumental, voice, material, and symbolic) and translated into generative outputs, such as particles, animated text, point clouds, and reactive lighting. Cross-influences between layers create an immersive interplay, allowing intangible

heritage to live within a responsive system. Balancing the data structure with poetic interpretation is central to this practice-led approach.

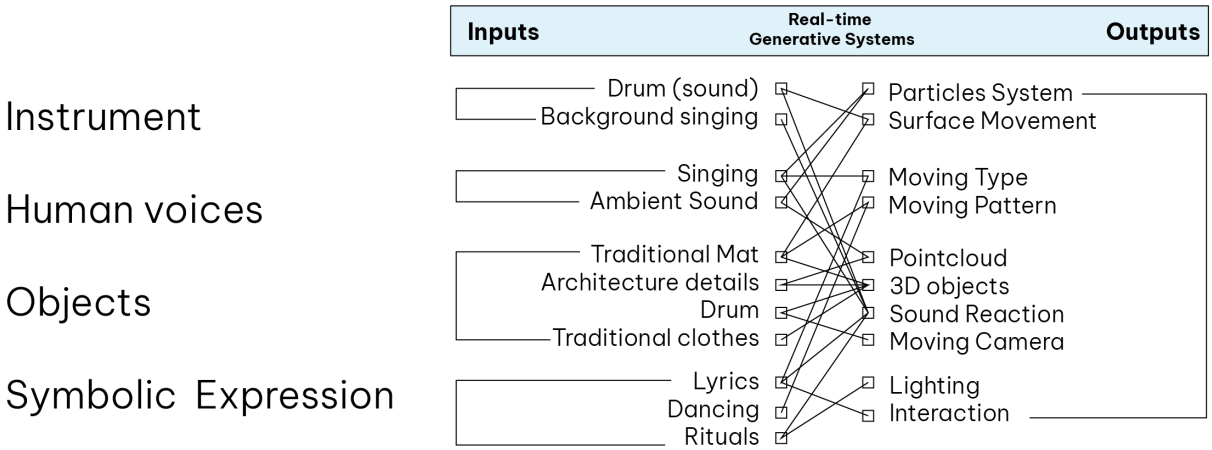


Figure 8. Mapping of inputs for generative arts

Physical Object as a Container for Sound and Symbolism

This experiment reimagined Xoan singing's ritual objects, mat, drum, and architectural motifs as active, responsive elements within a generative system. Instead of static symbols, they became dynamic vessels that reacted in real time to the ceremonial songs. Audio frequencies were mapped onto 3D representations, allowing material forms to reflect intangible values, such as ritual rhythm, vocal cadence, and communal energy. Traditionally, mats and drums are spatial anchors of performance; embedded in a generative system, they extend their cultural role to the digital realm. The woven pattern of the mat was pulsed with vocals, while the drum surface responded to low-frequency beats. This convergence of tangible and intangible heritage reflects Munjeri's view that the former gains meaning through the latter (Munjeri 2004). The result is a hybrid form in which generative visuals extend tradition, making the connections between objects, sounds, and symbolic depth visible.

The experiment focused on three tangible components central to Xoan singing: the mat, drum, and communal house (*Đình*), each chosen for its physical form and symbolic ties to rituals, rhythm, and communal space. The drum, the sole percussive instrument, anchors the performance's beat, while the mat serves as the physical and symbolic ground for singing, dancing, and acts such as *Nhập Tịch Mời Vua*. In the generative system, mat motifs are applied as textures to the drum model, creating a hybrid object responsive to both beats and vocal frequencies—pulsing, deforming, and shifting in colour and ripple motion. The *Đình* was represented through a point cloud particle system simulating its interior and exterior. Initially, generic files were used to rebuild the model from field photographs processed into custom point clouds animated by ambient audio to evoke the interaction of sound with architectural space. While the system lacked full navigable depth, it conveyed ephemeral and communal energy of the performance. Guided by cultural logic and the performance context, these design choices visualise convergence by uniting tangible and intangible heritage in responsive, symbolic forms—preservation as an active and embodied process.

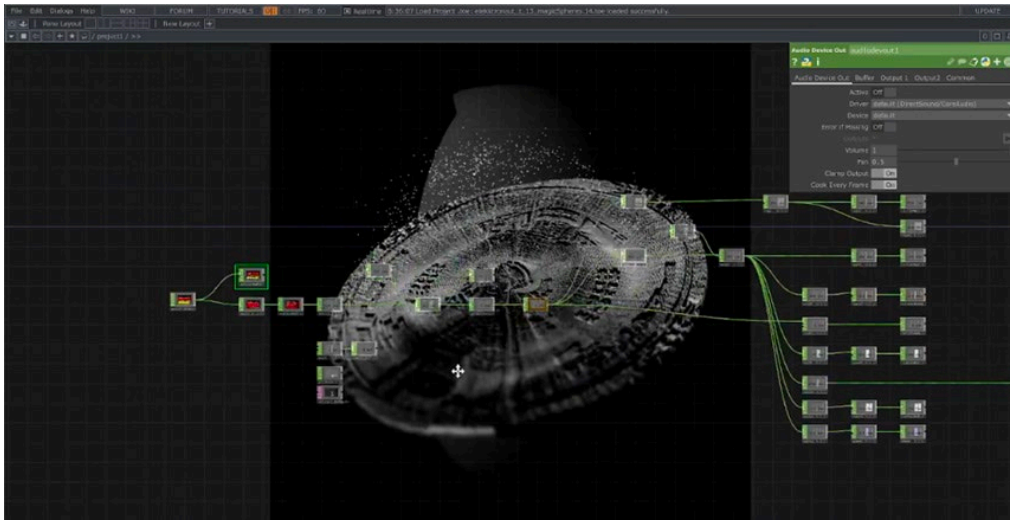


Figure 9. Diagram illustrating the audio spectrum mapping process in TouchDesigner.



Figure 10. Image-to-particle workflow simulating a point

Transforming static artefacts into sound-responsive surfaces reinterpreted the Xoan performance space and demonstrated how generative art can connect physical forms with symbolic meaning. The most effective outcome was the mat's dynamic response to vocal frequencies, with visuals drawn from textile motifs pulsing in sync with the audio, preserving aesthetic continuity, while adding temporal variation. Kinetic text animations further enriched the experience by aligning visual rhythm with a lyrical cadence. Limitations included visuals that occasionally overwhelmed cultural specificity, with texture layering and particle behaviours remaining abstract and lacking ritual logic. Sound–visual interaction, based on generic frequency bands rather than content-aware analysis, sometimes produced arbitrary rather than semantically aligned responses.

Kinetic Animation System for Lyrics

This experiment explored how Xoan lyrics, particularly those depicting everyday life activities, such as harvesting, fishing, and washing clothes, could be translated into kinetic visuals that reflect their poetic structure, rhythm, and cultural symbolism. These songs were chosen for their accessibility and symbolic depth without requiring the extensive cultural and spiritual contextualisation demanded by ceremonial pieces, making them ideal for early stage visual experimentation.

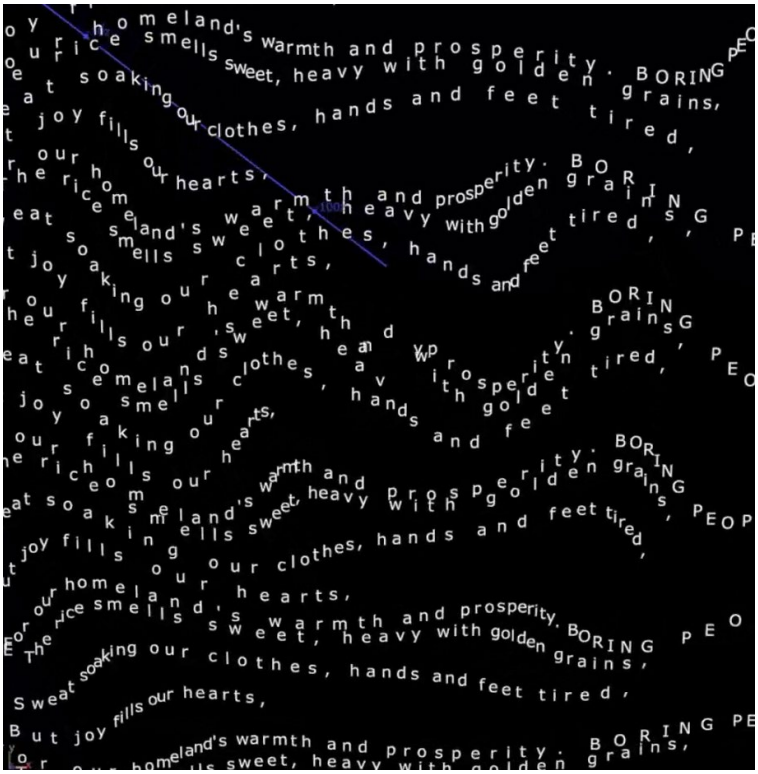


Figure 11. Screenshot of real time kinetic animation

The generative system developed in TouchDesigner was designed as a looping and flexible framework, allowing lyrics to be updated in real time through a dynamic text box. This feature mirrored the adaptive and iterative nature of oral transmission in Xoan singing, where songs change depending on the context, performer, and occasion. Animated with wave-like motion, the text visuals symbolised cyclical patterns of oral performance and natural rhythms, such as water flow and seasonal change, central to Vietnamese agricultural life.

Functioning as a complementary layer to other generative experiments involving mat, drum, or ritual space, the dynamic lyric system adds narrative richness and highlights the emotional and performative nuances of Xoan. In doing so, it reinforced the role of language, delivery, and poetic metaphors as vital carriers of cultural memory, enhancing the capacity of the generative system to represent intangible heritage in a layered and meaningful way.

Layered Convergence

The final stage combines elements from previous experiments, stacking sound, space, text, and symbolic patterns within one generative system to represent Xoan singing's convergences: voice with space, objects with rituals, and rhythm with memory. The point cloud environment from the field trip imagery was layered with animated lyrics (Experiment 2) and sound-reactive patterned surfaces (Experiment 1). Each element responded to a

different audio band: low frequencies deformed the mat-patterned drum, mid-range vocals animated kinetic text, and high frequencies/ambient textures influenced the point cloud particles.

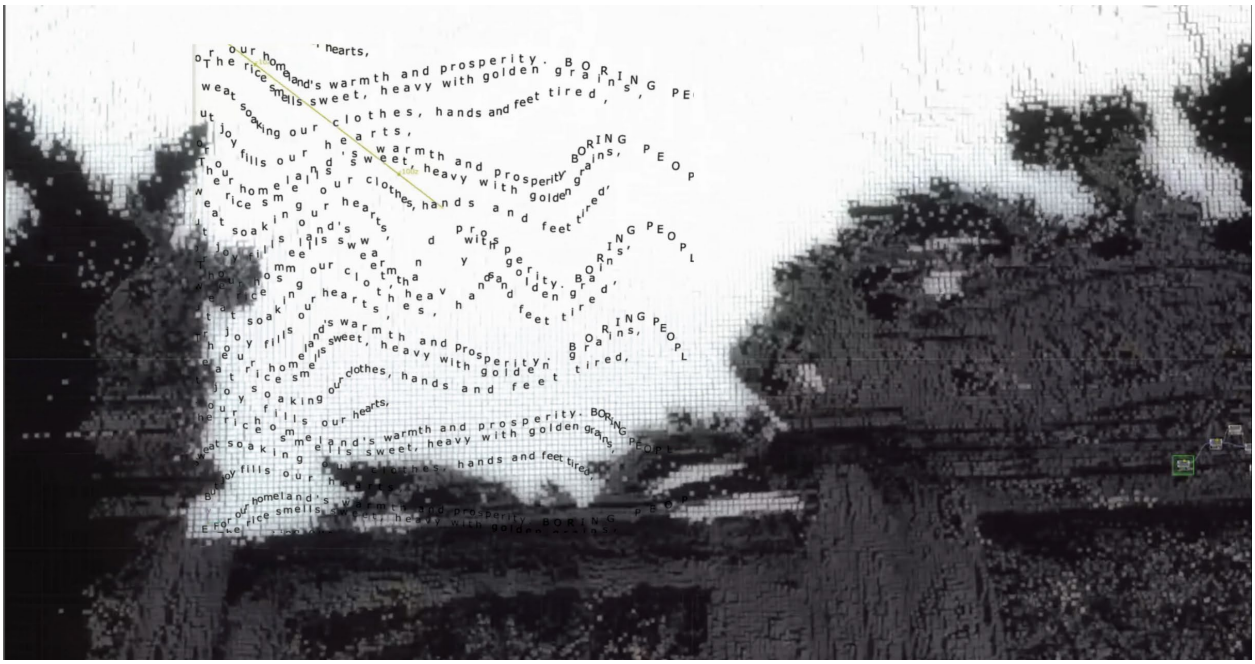


Figure 12. Layered Convergence experiment combining text, sound, and spatial imagery.

The result was a dynamic composition in which spatial, poetic, rhythmic, and symbolic qualities coexisted without replicating the ritual in full. Instead, it illustrates how generative systems can combine multiple interpretations and sensory channels. The strength of generative art lies in layering and interconnecting textual, sonic, spatial, and symbolic data without flattening them, thus creating a flexible, evolving archive.

The experiment also revealed the following challenges: symbolic transitions lacked fine control, some visual elements competed for attention, and the absence of authentic 3D scans reduced spatial specificity. Future development will focus on incorporating accurate point cloud data, structuring the temporal arc of Xoan performances, improving symbolic cohesion, and adding interactive audience input. This marked a shift from isolated tests to an integrated multimodal framework to represent living heritage.



Figure 13. Layered Convergence experiment combining text, sound, and spatial imagery.

Conclusion

This research explores how generative art can engage with Vietnam's intangible cultural heritage by focusing on Xoan singing from Phú Thọ Province. Rather than aiming for static preservation, it seeks to evoke and reinterpret tradition's ritual rhythms, storytelling, and spatial symbolism through real-time visual systems built in TouchDesigner. Generative art is positioned as a medium for cultural reanimation, enabling heritage to be experienced in a dynamic and evolving manner.

The project adopts a practice-led methodology that balances creative experimentation with cultural sensitivity and critical reflection. Fieldwork in Phú Thọ, including participation in the Hùng Kings Festival and direct engagement with Xoan practitioners, provided invaluable insights into the social and symbolic dimensions of the performance. In addition, archival materials, audio recordings, transcribed lyrics, gesture analyses, and visual references to ritual objects and performance spaces were also collected. This combination of tangible and intangible data ensured that generative outcomes remained grounded in authentic cultural contexts.

Working with intangible heritage in Vietnam presents a challenge. Distinguishing between tangible and intangible aspects is complex, and oversimplification risks stripping away nuanced meanings embedded in performance traditions. Access to reliable archival resources is limited, and specialised expertise is often needed for advanced processes, such as spatial modelling, interactive system development, and accurate cultural interpretation. These constraints highlight the importance of collaboration with experts in anthropology, digital humanities, architecture, and interactive media.

This research reflects on how generative systems can offer new methods for cultural documentation— those that adapt to the evolving nature of living traditions. This study proposes a model of heritage representation that is participatory, immersive, and open-ended by transforming sound, gestures, and symbolic forms into responsive, layered digital environments. This approach aligns with contemporary safeguarding strategies that value ongoing cultural vitality over a fixed preservation.

Ultimately, the project reframes intangible heritage as a living process rather than a relic, with generative art serving as both a creative tool and framework for cultural storytelling.

The methods developed here suggest possibilities for broader applications, from deeper collaboration with cultural practitioners to immersive installations and real-time interactive systems. Through this lens, traditions such as Xoan singing can continue to resonate with diverse audiences while maintaining relevance and embracing the possibilities of the digital age.

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Conception of SYS: The Smell Of A Mysterious Being

Jeanette Mueller

Abstract

This presentation explores the conceptual design process behind *SYS: The Smell of a Mysterious Being*, an arts-based research project within the broader framework of *Sensing Living Systems*. The work investigates how olfactory experiences can be reimagined as a medium for interspecies connection, sensorial imagination, and artistic inquiry. Departing from traditional visual-centric approaches, the project emphasizes smell as a powerful yet underexplored channel through which human beings can sense and relate to the living environment.

The design process integrates philosophical reflection, sensory experimentation, and spatial composition. Inspired by ecological thinking and post-humanist discourse, the project conceptualizes "SYS" as an ambiguous lifeform that exists through its scent rather than visual form. This approach challenges anthropocentric perspectives and encourages participants to engage with unfamiliar modes of perception. Through iterative prototyping and participatory encounters, the installation invites audiences to navigate a performative space where smell triggers emotional memory, curiosity, and a sense of presence.

By foregrounding olfaction as a central design element, *SYS* opens a dialogue between artistic practice, sensory research, and ecological awareness. The project not only proposes new ways of experiencing art beyond the visual but also reflects on how design can foster more intimate relationships between humans and other living systems. This presentation highlights the theoretical foundations, creative strategies, and experiential outcomes that shaped the work, offering insights into art as a mode of speculative sensing and environmental imagination.

Keywords : arts-based research, systems awareness, GST, senses, sense-ability, smell, multisensory scenography, democracy, voting processes, communities, present-oriented systems awareness, future-oriented collective intelligence, sustainability

Introduction



Why do we ask this simple yet complex question ‘HOW WOULD IT SMELL LIKE?’, why do we ask people to imagine a mysterious being in a specially developed multisensory voting booth? And why in the course of our arts-based research project “SENSING LIVING SYSTEMS - Exploring the Potentials of Multisensory Scenography for Systems Awareness”, which is about conveying an understanding of living, complex systems - whether in nature, society or art? – We ask because we realise that a not yet tangible being emerges. We decided to call it SYS.

What kind of being is the SYS? Animal, human animal, spirit, plant – or a hybrid of all of them? We do not know it yet, but we set out on a search and start with an olfactory approach. What we already know: it is a being that can easily cope with the complexity of the world, and is rooted vibrantly in communities to guide towards thriving futures.

But before we take a deeper breath of a possible SYS-Smell and explain why and how we installed a multisensory voting booth, let's start with the motivation for SENSING LIVING SYSTEMS. – What is this artistic research project all about?

SENSING LIVING SYSTEMS (SLS)

First of all, we would like to give an insight into the intentions of SLS: The world we are living in is a *living system* and humans are living systems, which can only survive in living systems. (Bertalanffy 1968, Laszlo 1972). But modern economic and political systems unintentionally put business in conflict with society and humanity in conflict with nature (Dixon 2017).

As Thai intellectual Sulak Sivaraksa wrote in *The Wisdom of Sustainability* (2009), “Through meditation and art, we can connect with our Mother Earth and affirm our cooperative nature by acknowledging the environment as part of ourselves." Following this intent our arts-based research project focuses on the (non-visual) senses to address one of the fundamental problems that hinder consonance between humanity, their economic systems and nature: poor mental preconditions, a lack of ‘sense-ability’ for sustainable systems change, which is necessary for human civilization to continue existing and prospering in this biosphere.

French philosopher Merleau-Ponty defined the task of phenomenology as a rediscovery of the perceived shape of the world, which remains hidden under the sedimented layers of subsequent information and knowledge. He considered the "identification of obstacles" as essential for discovery (Merleau-Ponty 1959). In the context of our project we assume, that the lack of *sensing* of living systems and systems principles constitutes a significant obstacle, thus the lack of in-depth understanding. We are in urgent need for mental skills to deal with global challenges and our increasingly complex environment (self-evidently *a living system*) towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs - as a compass for transformation / systems change is implied in the SDGs). To cope with this deprivation we suggest the creation and exploration of multisensory scenographies as a catalysts for increasing *systems sensing* capacity in an expanded *world of experience* (German: *Erlebniswelt* – cf. Glasersfeld 1996).

An interdisciplinary team of artists, systems scientists and scholars from different fields from Europe and Southeast Asia co-create, explore and analyze the potentials of the multisensory scenography together for addressing the perception of living systems, through sensory experience. Regarding to relational skills we hereby are focusing on *sense awareness* (German: *Spürbewusstsein* – Schellenbaum 1992). Regarding to cognitive skills we are focusing on the sensing and the understanding of systems principles (i.e. boundaries, entities and relations) and their handling.

Understanding artistic research as *perceptual work* (Baecker 2018), the multisensory experimental settings and processes directly address sense awareness in particular focusing on the sensory domains: smell, audio, and haptics. A multisensory scenography is featuring

multiple artworks/sensual artefacts: scent installations, soundscapes, objects and spatial interventions are merged and orchestrated to enable an immersive experience. Based on findings concerning different senses and the predominant character of the visual sense (Roque, Kendrick et al. 2015, Divjak 2016), the visual sense is deliberately ranked after in our approach and experimental arrangements. Visual information is reduced, it follows the function of the scenography but is not further emphasized by the use of visuals, images et al. MUELLER-DIVJAK´s (Jeanette Mueller and Paul Divjak) past experiences and findings in the field of scent-, audio-, and expansive spatial installations function as studies for the project. The expertise on empathy and trust (Müller 2009) and *Integrative Scenographies* (Divjak 2012) also benefit the process.

Past and current research on the senses and the impacts of connectedness to/empathy with nature (Keninger, Gaston et al. 2013; Tam, 2013; Franco, Shanahan, Fuller 2017) as well as on the capacity of nature-based stimuli to enhance mindfulness, connectedness and imagination, were taken into consideration. (Howell, Dopko et al. 2011; Bates, Hickman, Manchester et al. 2020; Beer 2021).

Arts, sustainability, and systems science

The entanglement of art and sustainable development ideas and strategies has been outlined and explored by a large number of artists, researchers, and scholars, and has re-emerged as an important field also of artistic research during the last decade. There is no doubt that art practice aims at bringing social and environmental issues to the public's attention is significant (Kent 2010 et al.). Sociology is increasingly interested in the link between arts and sustainable development. Social science studies suggest that art can contribute to shaping environmental behaviour (Curtis 2007, 2011; Curtis, Reed & Reeve 2014).

In the context of environmental education, David Curtis (2011) outlines, that art can have the ability to communicate information and create awareness by creating a space for concern in the realm of a general conversation but also staging and entertainment. Other advantages for using art for environmental education and awareness building include, inter alia, the engagement on an emotional and personal level with a matter usually seen as intangible. Art can create awareness that leads to individual agency and collective action in prevention and adaptation, provide embodied experiences and learning by using the senses. (Marks, Chandler & Baldwin, 2014; Roosen, Klöckner & Swim, 2017; Bentz, 2020). Preliminary studies concerning "art, empathy and socio-ecological sustainability" – such as Tanja Beer´s research on "Eco-scenography" are taken into consideration as well (c.f. Curtis 2009, Beer 2021 et al.).

Yvonne Volkart has stated that relationality and concerns for the "natural environment" are generated less by technological sensing techniques than by the aesthetics of sensing (Volkart 2020). Fien explanes that appreciating the aesthetic and intrinsic value of nature is important in people's willingness to conserve natural environment (Fien 1993, 2003). Many other authors have expressed that this willingness can be encouraged by art (Eastburn & Milligan 1998; Green 2002). On the base of their study "Towards ecological sustainability: observations on the role of the arts" David J. Curtis, Nick Reid and Ian Reeve propose that art can help to shape environmental behaviour by "creating empathy towards the natural environment" (Curtis et al. 2014, p. 174). This cannot only be enhanced by art, but is also supported by the ability of systems thinking and systems research outlined and presented in detail by systems science (Bertalanffy 1968; Meadows 2008; Laszlo 2015, Meadows 2020).

Systems science as a transdiscipline enables the integration and translation of domain specific scientific knowledge from the self to the collective and environment (epistemology), observing (science) and intervening (design). Especially its focus on "systems awareness", which combines systems thinking and systems sensing serves as basic fundament for our research. Whereas "systems thinking" is dealing with analytical and conceptional capacities

to understand complex interdependent phenomena, “systems sensing” is focusing on intuitive understanding of complex interdependencies. “Systems sensing” is less established as an academic term, because it leads to approaches concerning learning and teaching more common in the creative arts, than in classical mental, analytical education. (cf. Senge 2010, Rousseau, Wilby, Billingham, Blachfellner 2018, et al.)

Stefan Blachfellner, Managing Director of the BCSSS, Sustainability & Innovation expert, Felix Tretter, BCSSS Vice President, philosopher, psychologist and psychiatrist, who already emphasized the importance and innovative character of the collaboration of art and science as early as in the 1980´s, and Alexander Laszlo, BCSSS President, international renown systems scientist, who could be won as member for the project´s advisory board, are essential agents in the collaborative arts-based research process.

Hypotheses

An innate system intelligence exists within us. According to this view everyone starts out with a systemic *sense-ability*, a tacit appreciation of systemicity in the experienceable world. As individuals as well as collectives, humans develop the mental capacity of themselves separated from their environment to the extent of their disconnection. The purpose of systems science is developing an in-depth understanding of connectiveness and interdependencies to contribute to sustainable systems solutions. Systems literacy as a common language intends to give people the capability to articulate and reflect on their innate *sense-ability* and act on it in a considered way, expressed as a responsible and effective capability.

Developing and strengthening systems literacy cannot be a sole academic endeavour. Especially as the structure of scientific education is one contribution for separating direct experience from conceptualization and embodiment from learning. Courageous approaches are needed for expanding the scientific paradigm. The mental capabilities for a holistic systemic worldview can be supported by insights stemming from the arts and arts-based research.

Our project starts from the assumption that the interconnection and merging of scenographic methods with systems science epistemology can lead to novel access of system awareness, system *sense-ability* and ultimately systems literacy.

Project objectives

The creation and promotion of relational skills is the research guiding motive beyond disciplinary, cultural, gender, age and worldview boundaries - and its artistic and systemic exploration, documentation and reflection.

1. The scenographic studies and the multisensory scenography aim to be an embodied learning experience for recipients to sense themselves as living systems embedded in living systems.
2. The scenographic studies and the multisensory scenography aim to further establish the field of scenography as a means for arts-based innovation and transformative research.
3. The scenographic studies and the multisensory scenography informed by systems science aim to support systems science education from systems sensing to systems literacy.

To summarize, it can be said that we live in a world that is permeated by systems, whether in nature, technology, business or society. A deep understanding of systems is crucial for the creativity to solving complex problems, making better decisions, anticipating future

developments, coping with change and creating sustainable futures. It is important to understand that everything in our world is part of a larger system and is interrelated, from biological cells, humans and animals to trees and governments. We have an innate ability to perceive systems and their interdependencies, but often unlearn this through linear thinking, fragmented perception and mechanistic world views. The SENSING LIVING SYSTEMS project explores – with a special focus on the senses of smell, hearing and touch – how direct sensory experiences by staging olfactory, auditory and haptic artworks and stimuli artistically, i.e. by way of specially arranged spaces, can contribute to heightening our awareness of nature and civilization (societies, their included communities - and their rules and relations) and to developing a deep understanding of living systems and imparting systems literacy.

SENSING LIVING SYSTEMS expands the field of scenography as a means for arts-based innovation and transformative research and supports systems science education, from systems sensing to systems literacy. Living systems encompass cells, organisms, ecosystems, and global biospheres. They are characterized by complex interactions and adaptive mechanisms. Their study allows for a better understanding of life on various levels and provides critical insights for addressing communal and global challenges.

To understand the development of the aforementioned multisensory voting booth and to grasp why it has generated an astonishingly high voter turnout and resonance - let's dive into insights and reflections on the olfactory sense.

THE OLFACTORY SENSE

About democracy, odours and living together

When we think about how we want to live together, we think about democracy as a suitable form. When we think about democracy, we often don't think very sensually.

Not all people who live together have the right to choose who should represent ‘the people’. And very many living beings/entities have no right of co-determination as to how we determine and organize living environments and forms of coexistence. Animals, plants, the biosphere - we still often see nature as separate from the human community.

If we perceived and thought more sensually - could we live together differently? Our senses are crucial to how we experience and engage with the world around us. They enable us to gather information, communicate with each other, appreciate diversity and build relationships.

If we think of a democracy of the senses, there is a leadership, a predominance of the visual sense, followed by the acoustic sense. What would democracy look like if the olfactory took centre stage? What influences, what currents would we smell? Would we be able to perceive reciprocal influences and dependencies? Would we experience our communities and democratic processes differently? Would we be able to shape them differently, more inclusively?

If we were to force a more conscious perception of all our sensory impressions and refine them, would it perhaps be conceivable to have parliaments in which the voices of other living beings, other entities - even if they were not humanoid mammals - would also count? Plants, animals, the entire biosphere as stakeholders (entities that have stakes, that have something to lose or gain) in human societies?

How could we imagine and realise our interaction and coexistence with all life if all our senses were considered equally important and sounded together? To approach this question, we have staged the ‘SYS-Smell-Voting-Booth’, in which a democratic process is used to choose from six different odours. The electorate is extremely diverse, as will be explained in more detail in this paper (in the section about the AIL). A high level of diversity is much more likely to produce creative results, as Jeanette Mueller discussed in her dissertation ‘Trust and Creativity’: homogeneous groups find it easier to build trust, but communities with a high

level of diversity are more creative. (Mueller 2009) A variety of different 'tastes'/'styles', views, ideas, experiences and inputs is particularly valuable for our art-based research process.

Every breath opens up possibilities

'All breathing is potential smelling.' (Divjak: The smell of the world, 2016). In fact, smelling cannot simply be switched off. Even when life evolved on our planet and still took place in the darkness of the oceans, living beings were able to smell even before they could see or hear. The first sense to develop in an embryo is the sense of smell. Nevertheless, it is often taboo and regarded as a forgotten, secondary sense. Perhaps because the human species is so proud of its 'reason' and odours cannot be controlled with the help of our intellect. They are imbued with versatile forces that can suddenly unfold their molecular power. The cerebrum cannot monitor them; they have a direct effect on the limbic system and thus influence our emotions, triggering affects and memories. Scents influence our mood - they can trigger hope, sympathy, rejection, fear, lust, generosity or withdrawal. The sense of smell affects our lives, actions, imaginations and thoughts on many levels, even if we are often not even aware of this fact.

To explore more about the possibilities of olfactory artistic research we developed six special concept fragrances especially for the Austrian Democracy Lab. The unusual perfume compositions of our fragrance installation *'Democracy of the Senses' - The Austrian Democracy Lab Fragrance Edition* gave visitors the opportunity to take in the scent for the first time at the opening of the Austrian Democracy Lab's final conference *'Perspectives on Living Together - Towards Democracy'* (Künstlerhaus Wien, December 2022). The six fragrances *Toxic Masculinity* (Gender Liquid), *Humanista* (Ultra Light), *Acqua Coloniale* (Intensa), *Solastalgia* (For Her/Him/Them), *Moral Grandstanding* (Privé) and *Woke Water* (Organic & Fairtrade) reflect discursive currents and raise questions. They create an expanded access to democratic debates and ideas of the world in which we (want to) live together - not only through language, but also through the sense of smell. They stimulate a discourse evoked through the nose. The scent compositions stimulate conscious perception, immediate emotional reactions (which manifest themselves as spontaneous curiosity, laughter, joy, pleasure, enthusiasm, approval, amazement or even aversion), as well as the sharing of associations, stories, inherent knowledge - and shared experiences.

These findings were also incorporated into the multi-sensory scenography 'Conception of SYS'. When we talk to each other about odours, we are talking about subjective impressions. It is important to be aware that smells are perceived subjectively and that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' smells. What is perceived as pleasant by one person may be unpleasant for another. In this sense, the sense of smell can also help to remind us that we are all different and that it is important to respect our diverse needs and preferences.

From nose to nose

Our imagination is stimulated and our vocabulary expanded when we talk about smells, because we need and develop a language that goes beyond the reductionist dichotomy: 'stinks' - 'smells good'. We can talk about associations and images that arise in us through the shared perception of smells. By talking about emotions and the shared primary experience, we can recognise ourselves as subjects who perceive the senses. We experience that we can also react very differently to smells. We realise how unnecessary and pointless polarisation is and how we blossom when we allow ourselves to perceive, think and communicate beyond opposites.

The six fragrances in the *Austrian Democracy Lab Fragrance Edition* act as olfactory mediators, they help to build bridges between different sensory perceptions and cognitive systems and stimulate democratic dialogue and an exchange of knowledge about communal life - from nose to nose, so to speak. Fragrances enable us to design, describe, negotiate - and ideally also help shape - living environments without marginalisation and devaluation.

Discussions and debates that go beyond preconceived opinions and world views - often already created by algorithms and influenced by them - can take place.

Our sense of smell enables us to perceive the world around us in a more differentiated way, which can enrich and increase our appreciation of it. Fragrances and odours that are (re)remembered and perceived together as shared olfactory experiences can help to create a sense of connection. Thinking and talking about smells and scents open up a meaningful playground for olfactory artistic research, which focused on direct exchange with others, getting to know a wide variety of living environments and facets of perception as well as the importance of olfaction in current and future living spaces and communities. Smells contribute to awakening thriving desires in us, they help us to learn, to recognise the present and to develop ideas for our common futures. Our project, our art-based research, allows us to do just that - and its success also has a lot to do with the place where it mainly takes place: the AIL.

THE AIL

The AIL, Angewandte Interdisciplinary Lab, at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna, is serving as both a platform and an instrument to develop, test and explore the project´s sensual approaches. Alexandra Graupner, Head of AIL, dedicated to managing art and artistic-research projects, facilitating discourse between various fields of knowledge and connecting partners from the fields of science, arts, design, research and business against the background of the resources of the University of Applied Arts, not only guarantees the transdisciplinary aspect of SENSING LIVING SYSTEMS and its scenographic studies and multisensory scenographies, but also ensures a professional project management. The AIL, a location at the interface of art, different fields of research and the public, is a hub for artists, artist collectives, diverse creative communities and other agents of innovation and change and their meetings and events. The AIL serves us as an important prerequisite for the unfolding of the project´s very potential, knowledge transfer and transformation, unforeseen synergies and emergence.

The AIL is located in one of the most beautiful and impressive buildings in Vienna - the former Postsparkasse, built according to plans by Otto Wagner between 1904 and 1912. Otto Wagner (1841-1918) was an Austrian architect, architectural theorist, visionary and urban planner in the Belle Epoque and Fin de Siècle. The AIL building is one of his most important Art Nouveau buildings. Several classes and studios of the University of Applied Arts and the Academy of Sciences, national science funds, real estate companies and other enterprises are also housed in the building, and students and visitors are always present in the AIL, as it is located in the very centre of the building, in the former cashier's hall. The venue, at the centre of which is our ‘SLS cabin’ with its scenographic studies and multi-sensory installations is located, is open to the public. Tourists and visitors from all over the world also meet there in the Café Exchange. Opened Monday till Saturday on average, there are 450 visitors a day. School classes and students from other universities also come to our regular exhibitions and presentations and these many different people enable a unique participatory exchange, and artistic research processes that do not take place behind closed doors, studios or labs, but ‘right in the centre’.






MULTISENSORY SCENOGRAPHY

Theory

Since perception is fundamentally shaped by synesthetic interaction of all sensory modalities, the staging of interaction of complex sensory modalities is at the core for our research design. An understanding of sensory perception as a multisensory attempt is state of art in science today. Our brains continually integrate information across the senses to reduce perceptual ambiguity, improve perceptual performance and enhance valuation. (Spence, Driver 2004; Nudds 2014)

The multisensory scenography is defined by its manifestation as an integrated, interdisciplinary staging of a participatory space for the co-creation of multisensory experiences in order to enable processual happenings in the cultural field, enabling bodily experience, sensual resonance, and fostering self-reflection, knowledge exchange and empower actionability (Divjak 2012). Multisensory and immersive experiences in the arts, and *expanded scenography* are increasingly discussed in a broader context (Brejzek, 2011; McKinney, Palmer 2017; Pursey, Lomas 2018; Velasco, Obrist 2020; Beer, 2021). Artistic research of multisensory scenographies suggests, that sensory interaction and the temporary deprivation from one vital sense (e.g. the visual) is leading to a more immersive experience by the responding audience ("Dreaming Chamber" by Karen Casey, 1999, "Sensory Experience Design Studio" by Kornbongkoch Harnpinijsak, 2019 et al.) Others proclaim, that our sense of smell and sense of hearing could have a significant impact on our self-image and body perception (Brianza, Memoli 2020).

For the design and implementation of artworks for setting multisensory stimuli as impulses for sensing and sense awareness – sound, smell, haptic in particular – we are referring to insights from scientific research and applied research on "sensing nature" and the resulting benefits (Keninger, Gaston et al. 2013; Franco, Shanahan, Fuller 2017) and our own artistic preliminary research (see: following sections A, B, C). This results in an innovative experimental, physically experienceable scenographic setting.

Our interest lies in the staging of subtle physical materializations, stimulation and examination of specific sensual-bodily sensations and experiences addressing the non-visual senses, creating and exploring a physically accessible environment for participation and co-creation, a "narrative space" as research setting. (Mohammed, 2019). The arts-based placement and translation of complex interrelations, and the investigation of overarching multisensory effects and their impacts are aiming at the benefit to advance inspiring visions,

create a bigger picture, and empower inner development and outer actionability concerning systems awareness.

A. Emphasizing smell as a scenographic agent

We live in a culture permeated by the visual and pay far less attention to other sensory information. Despite the archaic priority of the sense of smell, which is closely related to that of taste – perceived molecules are directly addressing the limbic system triggering emotions and memories (Hatt/Dee 2011) –, it still remains subordinate, probably not least because its inherent surprising, uncontrollable, and potentially anarchic potential (Divjak 2016).

Artists like Marcel Duchamps, Olafur Eliasson, Jannis Kounellis ("Unitled"), Sissel Tolaas ("The smell of fear the fear of smell"), Karla Black, Clara Ursiti ("Eau clair"), Robert Jelinek ("Cash"), Wolfgang Georgsdorf ("Smeller 2.0"), or Peter de Cupere have worked with scent. The olfactory artistic work and expertise of Paul Divjak functions as an important prerequisite for the implementation of smell as a scenographic agent in our project. Building on and expanding his cultural-theoretical publications (e.g *Der Geruch der Welt* (*The smell of the world*), 2016), and his artistic research projects working with *smellscapes* (Porteous 1985, Young 2020) and scent installations (e.g. "Diffusing Molecules", Neue Galerie New York, 2003; "Last year in Jerusalem", Jewish Museum Hohenems, 2016; "The Smell of the Moon", Natural History Museum Vienna, 2019, "Diffusing Terpenes: The Effects of Forest Bathing", KMH, Liechtenstein, 2022) the olfactory approach for the development of scent installations/smellscapes for the multisensory scenography is not least based on Divjak´s comprehensive experience in that field. This includes his profound knowledge concerning essential oils, aroma chemicals and other olfactory substances, as well as their use and application as a potentially powerful – and still often underrated and -developped – scenographic agent. In particular, a promising study, which identified the aroma-chemical HedioneTM as a scent that excites a human pheromone receptor (VN1R1) and thus has the ability to influence human interactions in terms of cooperative behaviour (cf. Berger, Hatt, Ockenfels 2017) or the use of (natural) scents that trigger either aversive or compassionate behaviour, negative reactions or increasing positive resonance, will be subject to closer examination.

Preliminary experience and findings concerning the sensation of smell and the impact of fragrances on humans (Weber, Heuberger 2008; Cavanaugh 2013; Franco, Fuller et al. 2017, Barwich 2020), smell as an aesthetic experience (Shiner 2020), scent as art, olfactory artefacts and scented scenographies (e.g. Di Benedetto, 2018; Kjellmer, 2021) are taken into consideration. Within the methodological framework of our research, the specific use of scent as staged artefact / olfactory agent consideres as a crucial, key interacting factor in the development and exploration of the multisensory scenography.

B. Emphasizing haptics a scenographic agent

We are "beginning to feel the ground slip away beneath our feet*"* Bruno Latour states. (2018, p. 14) This remark is more than just a metaphor, it´s literally a description of how humans perceive the state of the world today. In times of massive soil sealing, the haptic approach for our project features the use of natural materials and soil, with reference to Latour, taking up the concept of the "Future Walkways" as developed and implemented in various research settings, galleries and museums by Jeanette Mueller (Princess Sirinthorn Gallery, Nakhon Pathom, 2016, Galerie Gugging, 2018, küfermartishuus, Liechtenstein, 2018, Künstlerhaus Bregenz, 2020 et al.). Participatory observation and qualitative interviews with students at the Silpakorn University (at occasion of MUELLER-DIVJAK´s exhibition "The Transition Show") have shown that a barefoot walk on the natural walkways in and outside the Gallery suggested a change of perception regarding the mindfulness towards one´s environment. These observations as well as studies on the impact of walking environment and connectedness to nature (Birdsall, Harvey 2016) and haptic perception in interaction with the

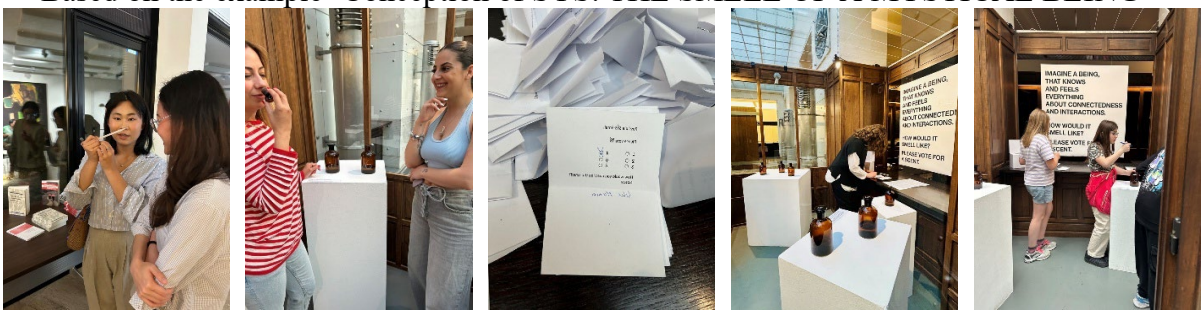
other senses (Helbig, Ernst, Grunwald 2008, Stokes, Matthen, Biggs 2017) are essential research findings for our project. The creation and application of pathways and artefacts made from human-made and nature-based materials functions as an essential space-creating measure for our testing arrangements, and the staging of a series of experiments concerning spatiality, multisensory qualities and sense awareness.

C. Emphasizing sound as a scenographic agent

Referring to studies suggesting that natural sounds have a "specific value in creating space for imagination, particularly when delivered with care and as part of the co-creation of sensory experience" (Bates, Hickman et al. 2019) the concept for the auditive approach, which is taking place in close cooperation with electronic musician and composer Bernhard Fleischmann features interactive multi-track sound installations based on field recordings from Europe and Southeast Asia. The collaboration with artists Jiandyin and Baan Noorg Collaborative Arts and Culture (TH) and musician/composer Tuntun Taratawan Krue-On - hereby enables an essential cross-cultural approach. The soundscape´s development and implementation are rooted in the tradition of *acoustic ecology (ecoacoustics)* or *soundscape ecology*, which involves the interrelations and effects of acoustic impressions on human beings (Schafer, Truax, 1978). In this regard previous sound art projects and research by Paul Divjak, which examined effects of field recorded soundscapes on human beings (e.g. the soundscapes "harvested" in bee hives in the Austrian alps, and being performed at MAK – Museum for Applied Arts, Vienna (*Bee Pop*, Divjak/Schlögl, 2012), or a sound installation featuring the swelling of sea waves recorded around the globe ("The Great Wave/Dream Island", MUELLER-DIVJAK, Künstlerhaus Bregenz, 2020) served for the development of soundscapes for underpinning the experiential setting and modulation in the focus area.

Practice

Based on the example 'Conception of SYS: THE SMELL OF A MYSTICAL BEING'



The question posed in the staged voting booth concerned the knowledge and sensory perception of connections / connectedness, relationships, and interdependencies - as a kind of essence of "SYS-consciousness" - and can be seen, in a way, as the very aim of the multisensory scenographies and the project as a whole. For our arts-based research process, it is revealing what very different people associate olfactorily with this - what smells and olfactory images they have of it.

A sound installation is also integrated into the voting booth, which makes breaths, the deep inhalation of odours and a conscious inhalation and exhalation audible. This subtly creates an almost meditative atmosphere. We assume that every breath can be possible smelling, but also possible meditating.

The six different smells were mainly developed and realised by Paul Divjak and the artist duo MUELLER-DIVJAK. One of the scents was curated by them during their research trip to the USA and was created by Sanaa Al-Sagnia Amar, a young scent artist, based in Manhattan and rooted in West Africa. All the scents are compositions of a variety of natural and synthetic ingredients. Some of them were developed especially for this scenographic study, others were already part of previous artistic interventions, installations and performances.

We deliberately kept the coordination very simple and analogue. For several reasons, we decided against using an online app for voting:

-To support handwriting - and to tap into the appeal of an act that has become increasingly rare.

-The act of writing on an old-fashioned piece of paper, the experience of folding it up and placing it into the ballot box – we wanted to offer and incorporate all these different tactile experiences into our sensory approach.

-To promote independence from smartphones.

-To encourage playful engagement with a democratic act.

We discovered that many people genuinely enjoy voting – even when they do not stand to gain or lose anything from the outcome. And how willingly they share their thoughts, ideas, and associations when they are invited to do so – and when they feel that their input is appreciated.

THE SYS

Let's look back at the beginning of the paper and ask the question again: Why do we use the phrase 'How would it smell like?', why do we ask people to imagine a mysterious being?

Yes, because we realised that a not yet tangible being, which we call SYS, emerges. But it arises because we have called it. Because we have explored and discovered that we need SYS.

Assuming there is a powerful multisensory scenography that conveys a profound and lasting understanding of living systems to the people who visit and pass through it within a reasonable period of time: what would these people be capable of afterwards? What would they be able to become, how would they behave? - We think that an artistic elaboration of a positive anticipation of this possibility offers a chance to awaken a longing, and that a desire, an identification with a magical possibility is exactly what we need to get beyond the narrow confines of our educated, but limited perception.

SYS is the imagination and anticipation of what is to be achieved. The embodied, internalised systems knowledge and wisdom, the present systems awareness:

SYS has 'embodied' all knowledge about living systems. It is a sensual being that combines 'sense' (the meaning of life) and 'senses' (sensory impressions).

The SYS is still a mystery - a mythological and at the same time contemporary real being, an entity who has developed systems awareness and is very much at home in a complex and challenging, constantly changing world - and enjoys it. An embodiment that copes with multiple developments and crises in the socio-, eco- and techno-sphere, and gets along with a wide variety of people and entities and contributes to the well-being of all beings.

It's not really there yet, but here's what we know about it: The SYS is a being that shows great joy and resilience. It is fully 'embodied', perceives very intensely with all senses and trusts its sensory impressions. Its entire body serves as an instrument for perceiving situations in which it finds itself. It is fully aware that it is a sensitive living system that is embedded in and dependent on other living systems.

The SYS has developed a special sense for living systems and it is therefore not possible for it - or only possible with great overcome and effort, and associated with pain - to behave destructively towards life. It has the impulse, a kind of instinct, to behave benevolently towards all living systems. The SYS is very sociable, but also needs a lot of time on its own. It avoids too many stimuli. - And it likes to roll around on the floor. The SYS is very playful and aesthetics are very important to it. It does not tend to be a know-it-all and does not insist on its convictions, but allows itself to be touched by new insights and impressions, including those of others, and likes to calmly weigh up what overall picture it can form from the different

data. The SYS assembles the fragments of phenomena it receives and perceives into a larger whole.

SYS-beings are not interested in judgments and evaluations. They assume that everything is always in motion and changeable. For a SYS, enjoyment is an important value. Enjoyment and appreciation in the present. Very mindful in order to enable future enjoyment. SYS-beings prefer to walk barefoot and use the soles of their feet to feel the surfaces, the different floors and ground textures, the earth, carpets, grass, sand, snow, stones, mud, wood, moss and asphalt. They sense the temperature, the texture, the moisture or dryness, the cracks, the peaks or the softness.

The SYS laughs at every opportunity. Above all at itself and at life itself and its challenges. It also shows humor in serious matters. Its behavior is characterized by friendliness and politeness. Its thoughts and actions are very generous.

The SYS sleeps when it is tired. More or less no matter where and when. It lies down in a hammock, curls up on a blanket, stretches out on the sofa or bed, leans back in a chair, closes its eyes, smiles and sleeps. Trustingly, without a guilty conscience, regardless of the time of day or night. The SYS knows that it cannot be attentive when it is tired. If the body and mind need rest, then it is of great importance and shows great intelligence to make this possible. No substitutes, no distractions, no screens - just sleep. SYS-sleep.

Without sufficient sleep, sensory perceptions become inaccurate, reactions careless - big mistakes are made. Apart from that, the SYS knows that sleep is a wonderful means of not doing anything stupid - resources are conserved during sleep, unnecessary excitement and waste are not possible, dramas and expenses, CO2 consumption and overloads are reduced. When you sleep, you love - yourself and life. When you sleep, you are peaceful. When you fall asleep, you practise letting go. When you sleep, you trust, when you sleep time doesn't matter, when you sleep you can be anywhere, you are mobile without transportation. When you sleep, you need less. The SYS likes to lie alone and also with others. It hugs and sleeps.

Sources / inspirations:
- Research results from interviews and in-depth discussions with Southeast Asian and European artists and systems scientists,
- feature and documentary films from Thailand, Korea, USA, Southern and Eastern Europe
- Participatory observations and analyses of contemporary art exhibitions and videos
- Reflections on own performances and installations
- In-depth interviews with audience members and participants of our performances and installations

VOTING RESULTS

Over 1,900 people took part in the scent-based vote as part of the fifth installation in our *Series of Scenographic Studies* ‘Conception of SYS - THE SMELL OF A MYSTERIOUS BEING’, primarily at AIL Vienna, but also at MIT Boston, the SAR Artistic Research Conference in Porto, the Austrian Embassy in Bangkok and the Songkhla Art Centre (TH) and other temporary voting booths.

Countless voters not only ticked one of the six odours but also wrote down their associations and thoughts on it - and often on all smells. Often accompanied by small drawings.

From where we stand today (end of May 2025), there is a neck-and-neck race between two smells. Anna Irgang keeps precise tables and electoral registers. All ballot papers will soon be available and analysed. We are incredibly excited to see the final results.

Data availability

The enumeration of all election results will be completed by 11 June 2025. The presentation of the election results will take place on 12 June 2025 as part of a research presentation at the AIL in an analogue and local format. From July on, the results will be able to make publicly accessible. The detailed analyses of the results, their explanations and artistic interpretations will be presented in a follow-up paper and further developed multisensory scenographers in the coming weeks and months.

Conclusion

We only perceive the world we live in partially, not as a whole. And we rely mainly on our eyes. What we consider to be our reality is only a fragment, moreover, we are currently dealing with an unprecedented revolution in the digital world, while facing global crises and challenges. The effects of the rapid multimedia AI impact on the individual, on perception, societies, communities, countries, regions and the entire globe are beyond human imagination. Image, text, and sound: nothing anymore is evidence of what is actually happening. Everything is potentially possible – and that, in already challenging, critical times. Will we increasingly perceive the world only in categories, in patterns that AI prescribes to us, that it drives into our consciousness with every click? How can we cope with this digital revolution and promote direct experiences, and sense-ability, and awareness for the complexities and interdependencies of living systems? Well, we´re not sure, but at least we need to give it a try … to sense, to touch, to listen to and smell the status quo and emerging realities – **to become SYS** in a way – in order to celebrate the presence of life and to create thriving futures for creative communities on this wonderful planet.

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Management of Contemporary Folk Theatre Production: A Collaborative Theatre Production Between Community Members and Outsiders Case Study: The Red Ship Warrior at the Eng Kor Festival 2025

Phanat Nikhom[1], Chonburi Province[2]

Abstract

The management of the contemporary folk theatre production The Red Ship Warrior is a practice-based research project. The objective of this study is to explore the methods and strategies used in managing a community theatre performance. This theatre project, The Red Ship Warrior, was a collaboration between people from inside and outside the community. We used this performance—which was part of the Eng Kor Festival 2025 in Phanat Nikhom, Chonburi—as a case study to explore how community theatre can be creatively managed. As the researcher also served as the production manager and is an outsider to the community, the research question was formed: How can we creatively develop and manage this theatre production in a way that truly reflects the community's stories and fosters a sense of pride among local people? The findings of this research revealed several key strategies used by the researcher in managing the production, as follows:
(1) redefining the role of the manager as a facilitator, (2) creating inclusive spaces for learning and co-creation, (3) managing resources with a focus on local capacity-building, (4) maintaining clear communication to foster unity, (5) budgeting with sustainability and community benefit in mind, and (6) shaping a shared artistic identity rooted in local voices.
These strategies highlight practical approaches for artists and cultural workers seeking to engage meaningfully with communities through theatre. The researcher hopes that this study will contribute to their own professional development by offering insights and experiences gained through the process. More importantly, it aims to identify effective approaches for managing community-based theatre productions that are co-created by both local and external collaborators. At the heart of this collaboration is a shared commitment to using theatre as a tool for personal and community development—empowering local participants and enhancing the long-term capacity for creative expression within the community

Keywords: Olfactory design; Artistic research; Sensory experience; Conceptual art; Ecological thinking

The Contemporary Folk Theatre The Red Ship Warrior at the Eng Kor Festival 2025, Phanat Nikhom, Chonburi Province

The Eng Kor Festival 2025 was held from February 14th to 16th, 2025, in Phanat Nikhom, Chonburi Province. The festival aims to develop the city through cultural capital to promote sustainable growth, elevate the local economy and identity, foster collaboration within cultural networks, and support tourism, traditions, and local arts and culture. The festival emphasizes honoring local identity through cultural capital and encourages children, youth, and residents to recognize the value of cultural heritage conveyed through Eng Kor performances. Efforts focus on revitalizing, preserving, and extending the Eng Kor tradition as a symbol, identity, and cultural heritage of the people of Phanat Nikhom.

This initiative is supported by a network of agencies under the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI), Thailand Science Research and Innovation (TSRI), Office of National Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation Policy Council (NXPO), Program Management Unit on Area Based Development (PMU A),

Silpakorn University, Phanat Nikhom Town Municipality, the Panat Nikhom private business group (Baan Sanjai), local schools both inside and outside the town municipality, and Cherry Theatre, a theatre group for development, where the researcher serves as the production manager for the contemporary folk theatre production The Red Ship Warrior.

The Red Ship Warrior is the first contemporary folk theatre production of Phanat Nikhom and was presented during the Eng Kor Festival 2025. The play features live music and runs for approximately 90 minutes, with an audience capacity of 350 per performance and a total of three shows. The production aims to develop and continue the legacy and spirit of the traditional Eng Kor performance of Phanat Nikhom and to narrate the historical journey of the Teochew Chinese ancestors in the area.

Working closely with the director, Boonpong Panich, a theatre practitioner from Cherry Theatre and, like the researcher, an outsider to the community, the production's direction was set to be a contemporary folk theatre piece telling the community's story. The play is not merely a biography of Eng Kor or a straightforward retelling of the Teochew ancestors' history as found in traditional literature. Instead, it creatively draws on the community's cultural capital to produce a collaborative theatre work between local residents and outsiders. The spirit of "The Fighter" serves as a foundational theme, integrated with the long-standing local Eng Kor dance tradition. The narrative weaves together stories from community members, local history, and researched materials, co-created imaginatively with children and youth, following the devised theatre approach characteristic of contemporary theatre practice.

Moreover, the director incorporated local handicrafts, specifically bamboo and basketry, as key scenic elements. The distinctive "Dok Pikun" flower pattern of the community's basketry was translated into musical rhythms composed by Phassawas Katekaew, while Kanasak Nakrob designed choreography that combines basketry and bamboo elements with the powerful movements of warriors. These artistic choices further express and communicate the identity of Phanat Nikhom through the performance.

The Red Ship Warrior : Eng Kor – The Martial Dance of Phanat Nikhom From the Red Sampao of Teochew Chinese to the Fighting Spirit of Phanat Nikhom's People

As outsiders to the community tasked with telling its story, the director and the researcher began their work by posing the question: How can we create a community history play that tells the story of Eng Kor in a way that truly belongs to the community and fosters a sense of pride among its people? They had to consider the boundaries of storytelling—what should or should not be told—and began the process by approaching the community with humility: observing, listening, and striving to understand. They conducted field research, interviewed community members, and explored the meaning behind Eng Kor and what it means to be Phanat Nikhom people, in search of the core ideas and identity that would shape the narrative.

They discovered that Eng Kor is a traditional performance art form inherited from Chinese culture, rooted in the classic Chinese novel Water Margin, the legend of 108 heroic outlaws from Liangshan Mountain. These characters, common folk from all walks of life, joined forces to resist oppression and reclaim their homeland. In Eng Kor, performers disguise themselves in vibrant costumes and painted faces—such as red or black beards—to represent these characters, performing martial dance movements while rhythmically clapping wooden sticks in coordination with drum beats. One performer, positioned as the "snake," signals formations for the group. The formations vary from traditional to modern styles, adapted by each troupe over time. Today, Eng Kor continues to be a vibrant part of local festivals and rituals in Phanat Nikhom, Chonburi Province, evolving in form while preserving its cultural roots and meaning, particularly among younger generations.

Historically, the Teochew Chinese ancestors of Phanat Nikhom arrived from mainland China on red sampao—trading ships with red-painted bows. They brought little with them in terms of possessions, but one of the most enduring things they carried was the tradition of Eng Kor, a performance deeply embedded in their cultural identity. After settling in Thailand, these migrants had to fight hard not only for a better quality of life but also to preserve who they were. The rhythm of the wooden clappers in Eng Kor became a powerful expression of identity—a way of saying, "We are still here. We still have our own voice."

But Eng Kor is not the only fighter. The director and researcher came to a shared understanding: the fighting spirit runs through the lives of all people in Phanat Nikhom. This town is a multicultural community made up of Teochew Chinese, Hokkien Chinese, Thai, and Lao peoples. Though each group lives with its own rhythms, they ultimately come together in harmony. One thing unites them all: the spirit of resilience—the will to fight for a better future. This insight led the director to weave the narrative around the fighting spirit, tracing it from the past to the present, linking Eng Kor to the lived experience of the community. Through community history, local wisdom, and the rhythm of daily life, the story of The Red Ship Warriors emerged.

Beyond the storytelling and choreography of The Red Ship Warrior and the martial dance of Eng Kor, the director collaborated closely with a music composer. They incorporated live percussion music that resonated with the rhythms of the dance and the clapping of wooden sticks, mirroring the heartbeat and life journeys of characters who had migrated from many different places. The music combines traditional Teochew Chinese folk elements with Lao musical influences, reflecting the diverse ethnic composition of Phanat Nikhom. While honoring the legacy of Eng Kor and its Teochew roots, the production also pays homage to the Thai and Lao cultures that coexist within the community.

From Creative Drama Practice to Devised Theatre, Evolving into Community Theatre

As this theatrical production began with the goal of having children and youth serve as performers to tell the story of their own community, the central challenge became: How can we enable children and youth from the community—many of whom have no prior experience in stage acting—to perform and play a crucial role in co-creating this play? The use of Creative Drama was introduced as a foundational training process because it is a developmentally appropriate and safe method that suits young people and is one the director regularly employs with expertise. Creative Drama is more than just skill training in acting—it is a method that allows the director to pose questions and invite the young actors to improvise, which then helps discover storylines and develop the script collaboratively. The ultimate aim is to empower the youth—who will one day become future community leaders—to become storytellers of their own community.

Through this process, the youth gained theatrical tools and collaboratively created this devised theatre production. Devised theatre draws from a multitude of materials and approaches, and through selective blending, becomes a form of art that speaks to a particular audience in a specific time and place. This method benefits not only the creators and participants but also the audience and community members. For example, some Eng Kor performers came to realize that what they were doing was not merely repeating traditional movements, but reimagining and creatively revitalizing their cultural roots. They discovered the story and spirit within each gesture. Even parents of the young performers came to appreciate the value of the project, understanding the purpose of the work and offering their full support to the team.

This theatre production is not simply a reproduction of historical accounts—it is a co-creation by the people of Phanat Nikhom. It was developed through theatrical processes that stimulate imagination, encourage creativity, and invite participants to share personal stories, feelings, and life experiences, uncovering narratives imbued with the true spirit of the people

of Phanat Nikhom. The script itself was co-created with youth through an imaginative prompt: “What will Phanat Nikhom look like 100 years from now?” Meanwhile, adult members of the community were invited to share memories and experiences of their lives in Phanat Nikhom, and to reflect on questions like “What does being a fighter mean to you? Can you share a moment when you had to overcome obstacles, and what inner strength helped you do so?” These stories became voices, thoughts, and emotions of real people—far more meaningful than narratives told only through the lens of outsiders. This approach ensures that the production connects with the community’s lived experiences and fosters a deep sense of local pride.

Additionally, the director and researcher visited several sacred sites within the community to develop the play’s spiritual dimension, drawing on the life-giving energy that such places represent. In this process, they experimented with incorporating messages from Chinese divination sticks (siem see) into the narrative. These messages revealed new layers of meaning, stories of individuals, and especially internal journeys—like whispered spiritual guidance that deepens the connection between the story and the community. The siem see used in the production came from the sacred shrine of Chao Mae Kor Leng Chue Pui Niew, a revered site where locals and believers from outside the area seek spiritual advice and emotional encouragement in their lives.

The contemporary folk theatre "The Red Ship Warriors" opened up a space for community members—Eng Kor teachers and dancers, local artisans, young people interested in the arts—to come together and share imagination, creativity, beliefs, life experiences, and unique local histories. The goal was to discover meaningful stories that could be transformed into theatre. The researcher emphasized that the work must go beyond a one-time event; it must also serve as a platform to develop the potential of local youth through the tools of theatre. The community already has young Eng Kor dancers with strong movement foundations and others who are interested in theatre arts. This process aimed to equip them with theatrical skills, spark inspiration, and foster a sustainable cultural legacy—one that instills community pride and shares the local narrative with audiences beyond.

It is clear that the heart and philosophy of this community work did not begin with the creators placing themselves at the center, but rather with respect for the direction led by the community. Everyone in the team understood the destination. Along the way, they contributed unique elements that made this production truly site-specific—a performance that could not be replicated elsewhere or at another time. It is a once-in-a-lifetime production, deeply rooted in memory.

Thus, The Red Ship Warriors is a true community theatre work, telling the story of a whole community. It is not the story of a single individual, but one in which everyone is a main character, both in the process and in the final outcome. The creation of this play has fostered immense pride among community members and introduced outsiders to Eng Kor and the indomitable spirit of the people of Phanat Nikhom.

Personnel in the Co-Creation of Theatre Between Community Insiders and Outsiders

Pornrat Damrung discusses the idea of theatre that fosters community pride in her book Applied Theatre: The Use of Theatre for Development (2014), stating that performances developed from a community’s cultural capital are activities that can unite people and present the life, stories, or history of the community. Such storytelling benefits the community by enabling them to learn about and remember their history and beliefs. At the same time, it draws upon the community’s historical and cultural resources. Creative activities like these can be performance-based and involve collaborators from outside the community who co-create works with locals, resulting in tangible outcomes that bring pride to the community (Damrung, 2014: 72).

The creation of this theatre piece required the involvement of practitioners from outside the community who had experience working with communities and could develop contemporary theatrical works. These individuals also had to collaborate closely with local community members, including young performers and adult team members. This was crucial to achieve the project's goal of encouraging children, youth, and local citizens to appreciate their community's cultural heritage, to train them in contemporary theatre practices, and to empower them with the skills to independently continue this artistic work in the future.

This creative process brought together many sectors: a team from Bangkok, a team from Phanat Nikhom, community-based artists, local private-sector groups, young people from schools both within and outside of Phanat Nikhom town municipality, as well as masters and performers of the Eng Kor tradition. It was the first time that all four Eng Kor troupes had come together to collaborate on one production. The theatre project involved approximately 26 personnel and 24 performers in total, including:

Cherry Theatre's team, a theatre-for-development group from Bangkok, contributed 14 members. These included the production manager, director, stage manager, movement designer, composer, erhu (Chinese fiddle) musician, sound engineer, vocal coach, lighting designer, and documentary film crew. Due to limited funding, the team had to commute weekly between Bangkok and Phanat Nikhom and focus on developing a theatre work that empowered youth. Hence, it was essential that team members were highly aware of and adapted to these constraints.

The local Phanat Nikhom team included 12 members: the community leader, local coordinators, welfare officers, equipment providers (for lighting and sound), set and props team, costume team, makeup and hair team, publicity team, ticketing and ushering team, stage manager, and Eng Kor teachers. These local workers had to take on multiple roles, contributing to both the theatre production and the broader festival activities.

The cast and musicians, totaling 24 young people from Phanat Nikhom, included: high school students from Phanat Pittayakarn School with a keen interest and talent in theatre, students from Tessaban 2 Wat Klang Thummavas "Siri Uppatham" School with expertise in Eng Kor dance, and students from Wat Na Krarok (Arunrat Uppatham) School and Ban Bueng Industrial Welfare School who performed in the pong lang traditional music ensemble. All were aged between 7 and 17.

Given the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the personnel involved, a key question arose: how could the project be designed so that individuals from different regions and with different levels of experience could collaborate smoothly? What kind of environment and working atmosphere would support such cooperation? What communication strategies could best encourage the mutual exchange of experiences and knowledge?

The aim was to ensure that this theatre production genuinely developed local capacity and brought community knowledge to the forefront of the creative process—making it a true community theatre, created with the community, by the community, and for the community.

Strategies for Managing the Folk Theatre Production The Red Ship Warrior

From the research question outlined above, the researcher explored strategies for managing a community theatre production that was a collaborative creation between local community members and outside professionals. As the researcher also took on the role of production manager—a person from outside the community—the key question became: How should one manage and develop such a production so that it genuinely becomes the community's voice and fosters local pride? The research findings revealed the following management strategies:

1.) Defining the Role of the Production Manager

In the contemporary folk theatre production The Red Ship Warrior, the researcher assumed the role of the production manager. Rosenberg and Prendergast (1983) explain that the production manager's responsibilities are clear: to manage resources, secure funding, select artists and team members, coordinate and support team operations, and oversee the entire production to ensure it runs smoothly and meets its objectives. However, when working with children, the production manager may also need to take on a role similar to that of a director (Rosenberg and Prendergast, 1983: 208–209). As such, the researcher worked alongside the director in conducting field research, writing the script, casting performers, and directing rehearsals.

As an outsider managing the production, one key consideration was understanding: Who am I in the context of this community? What responsibilities should I take on? Where should I step back to create space for local participation and learning? What approach and communication style would help the local team understand the collaborative process of contemporary theatre, in which everyone experiments and learns together?

Pornrat Damrung (2014) states that leading theatre activities with communities requires a deep understanding of both the science and art of theatre. The facilitator must be a skilled practitioner who can apply theatrical knowledge effectively. Artists and facilitators play a critical role in enriching, supporting, and compensating for gaps while creating opportunities for everyone to express themselves—not acting as authoritative controllers. Entering a community must bring value to that community by fostering an environment conducive to learning and sharing. Activities should be designed to encourage listening, participation, and mutual trust so that stories and ideas can be exchanged and collaboration can happen (Damrung, 2014: 32).

Working with communities often resembles a familial model—everyone sees one another as siblings. Community projects operate through networks of faith and commitment, much like organizing a merit-making festival. Given limited funding, each individual often takes on multiple roles based on their capacity. In this context, the researcher's role was not merely that of an event organizer who hires the community team to complete assigned tasks. Instead, the researcher had to act as a facilitator, designing processes that foster co-creation and learning between local and external collaborators.

Furthermore, as the theatre project primarily involved children and youth aged 7 to 17, the researcher also assumed the role of a teacher—training young participants with no prior experience in acting to perform professionally. Additionally, the researcher encouraged local team members working behind the scenes to draw from their indigenous knowledge and local wisdom to help design solutions and contribute artistically. This allowed them to bring forth what already existed within them and express it through art.

2.) Creating a Collaborative Space for Learning and Skill Development through Theatre

Since the personnel in this production came from different regions to collaborate on the theatre project, the researcher needed to create a safe space for everyone to work together. This involved shaping the theatrical environment into a medium for shared learning and practice. In contemporary collaborative theatre, all participants must come together with shared intention—not simply as hired hands—but as co-creators with a unified vision of what they want to communicate. Working together with sincerity, communicating openly and respectfully, and collaborating to create and solve problems fostered an atmosphere in which everyone felt at ease. It encouraged participants to take creative risks, express their thoughts and emotions, and exchange experiences with one another. This atmosphere of mutual trust and shared purpose helped bridge the gap between the artists and crew from Bangkok and

the local people of Phanat Nikhom. The resulting work, therefore, could genuinely be considered a collective creation.

As Kuppers (2007) points out, community performance does not belong to any one person—not even the final product. What emerges is not pre-determined by the artist or director who steers everyone toward a singular goal. Instead, it is a collaborative act that unfolds under the guidance of a process facilitator. Thus, creating time and space for community members to explore and contribute their own raw materials to the artistic process is vital. This is how community theatre should operate in order to produce work with its own distinct aesthetic. In community theatre, the process of co-creation is valued more than the end result. Respecting diverse voices, and creating space for both verbal and physical expression, are essential for ensuring equality. (Petra Kuppers, 2007: 4)

From this perspective, the researcher viewed this theatre production as an opportunity to create a developmental space for the youth of Phanat Nikhom and for local community members through the tools of theatre. This community already has young performers trained in Eng Kor dance with strong physical expression, as well as a new generation interested in learning theatre arts. The researcher hoped that this creative process would serve as a foundation for equipping local people with theatrical tools and skills—ultimately inspiring them to sustain and further develop their cultural assets into the future

3.) Resource Management with a Focus on Community Development

One of the key challenges in managing human resources during this project was the issue of casting. Initially, the local community wanted all the performers to be Eng Kor dancers, with the aim of grooming them into a kind of local boy band. However, once rehearsals began, many withdrew due to their inability to commit time to rehearsals. This was likely because they didn't yet understand the collaborative nature of contemporary theatre, which requires co-creation rather than simply repeating dance routines like athletes. As a result, only a portion of the Eng Kor dancers remained—those who were genuinely interested in theatre arts and willing to dedicate their personal time to rehearsals.

Consequently, the script, rehearsal methods, and working structure had to be constantly adjusted to align with the shifting capabilities of the cast. The solution was to weave together what was available—matching one child's skill with another's, like a collage composed of diverse elements that together create their own meaning and beauty. These children, though not all traditional dancers, were still members of the Phanat Nikhom community who willingly cooperated, and they represent the future movers of the community.

Another human resource challenge stemmed from the lack of available working personnel. Phanat Nikhom is a small town without a university or Rajabhat Institute. After completing high school (Mathayom 6), most young people leave to pursue higher education elsewhere. Yet, this age group is particularly well-suited to theatre creation. As a result, the community's available workforce consists mostly of a small group of local entrepreneurs, all of whom also have full-time jobs. Community work is not their primary occupation; rather, they gather out of a shared desire to help drive the town forward. Additionally, with numerous other community activities taking place, the same core group ends up taking on multiple responsibilities at once. Mounting a theatre production can therefore place an even greater burden on already overcommitted individuals.

The solution was to manage the available human resources in the most efficient and effective way possible. With no university students to assist backstage, high school students were brought in and trained to take on backstage roles. In the absence of experienced theatre staff, individuals with transferable skills were recruited—for example, a delivery company worker helped as a ticket usher. Meanwhile, theatre professionals from Bangkok acted as trainers and facilitators, guiding local residents through both front- and back-stage theatre

processes and helping them develop the skills necessary to produce a professional-level show.

Most importantly, the community members were encouraged to see the value and benefit of participating in this creative endeavor. They were made to realize that they themselves are the key driving force behind their community's development. This theatre production was the first of its kind in Phanat Nikhom—blending daily life, culture, and local wisdom. If individuals can develop their skills through this shared creative process, it could serve as the beginning of an ongoing inspiration for community-based theatre work. This, in turn, might ignite interest among all sectors to see the value of such work and invest in the continued development of the town through theatre arts.

4.) Communication for Unified Direction in Community Collaboration

A key element in creating community theatre is unity of vision—ensuring all parties share a common understanding of the aesthetic of the production, the message to be conveyed to the audience, the working process, as well as the overarching vision and goals of the project. Therefore, the researcher, who oversees communication, coordination, and production across all sectors, must ensure that everyone involved is aligned—so they can collaboratively create a theatrical production that reflects the identity of the people of Phanat Nikhom and fosters a sense of pride in their community.

Some performers and audience members in Phanat Nikhom had prior experience with theatre—for example, watching productions from Rachadalai Theatre—while others were familiar with likay (a traditional Thai performance) or local concerts. When they were invited to co-create The Red Ship Warrior, their initial vision was of a grand, Rachadalai-style production. Even the community leaders envisioned something akin to a Broadway-style show that would showcase the grandeur of Eng Kor. But producing such a large-scale performance requires a substantial budget and massive community support—resources that simply weren't available.

It was difficult at first to communicate that this would be a community theatre project, developed through a devised theatre process in which members of the community work together to create the production. The emphasis would not be on external grandeur, but on the internal significance—on pride in one's community. This concept was hard to illustrate in the early stages. The researcher constantly questioned whether the community was truly ready to participate in a process that required telling their own stories, sharing their thoughts, feelings, and lived experiences, in order to craft a narrative that authentically represented their identity.

Throughout the process, there were several instances of conceptual conflict. On one side, the community preferred a centralized approach, wanting to unify everything into a single grand expression of local identity. On the other side, the director emphasized diversity and inclusivity, advocating for space where everyone in the community could share their voice and speak about their own experience. These differing views sparked regular debates—starting with script development and throughout the working process. The researcher's role was to mediate and show that both perspectives could coexist through mutual respect: honoring the shared cultural core while also valuing the small, diverse voices that form the fabric of the community.

The play expresses the fighting spirit of Phanat Nikhom's people—from past to present—not just of the Eng Kor or Teochew Chinese communities, but of all the groups that have lived together and shaped the town's identity. Everyone is "fighting for tomorrow—for a better life." This core message resonates emotionally with the audience.

The expectations for this production were extremely high, as it was part of the Eng Kor Festival—a cultural symbol of the community. Additionally, the town had recently signed an MOU with China to develop Eng Kor further. Therefore, the community

envisioned a grand-scale production to enhance its image. However, this vision clashed with the reality of limited budget, time, and human resources, including a general lack of understanding and experience with theatre production.

While the researcher admired the community's forward-looking vision, they emphasized that vision must be grounded in practical implementation. In truth, the community lacked both financial and human resources to achieve its grand ambitions. The researcher believed that bringing in outside professionals to support the community was appropriate, but professional experience and time come at a cost. The researcher supported the community's goals as much as possible, but also felt it was essential to clarify the realistic outcomes—determined by available resources and genuine community collaboration. This helped ensure that everyone could set expectations based on reality.

The researcher had to manage community expectations, continually explaining the nature of the theatre format and working process. Over time, as rehearsals progressed and the community began experiencing a different kind of creative workflow, they started to witness the transformation in the young performers. Gradually, they began to understand the artistic process, enjoying the experimentation and collaborative design of the work. Their sense of value shifted—from desiring a grand final product to appreciating the meaningful process that brought it to life.

Managing limited human, material, spatial, time, and financial resources to produce the most effective result—aligned with the shared vision of both the artists and the community—is the core responsibility of the production manager. However, the researcher would not be able to fulfill this role if all stakeholders lacked a proper understanding of contemporary collaborative theatre—a process requiring everyone to set aside time from their primary jobs to join in collective creation. It is a meticulous, time-consuming, and costly artistic process. Therefore, in addition to resource management, the researcher must also manage expectations, aligning them with the realities of the available resources.

5.) Budget Management for Generating Income and Building Community Pride through Theatre

The main objective of the festival includes economic stimulation and generating income for the local community. This year, Phanat Nikhom chose to invest its allocated funding into the creation of a community theatre production—rather than organizing a local market like other towns that received similar research grants. As a result, The Red Ship Warrior production needed to generate financial circulation within the community.

One key question for theatre makers was: How can theatre stimulate the local economy? This was especially challenging given that the creative process demands time, attention to intricate detail, and careful artistic craftsmanship—all while operating under a limited budget. Additionally, the target audience for theatre is relatively small. Using theatre instead of a marketplace as an economic driver thus became a great challenge for this contemporary local production, which now had the responsibility not only to reflect the community's identity, but also to generate tangible economic impact.

The first step the researcher took was to ensure financial balance—aligning the project's artistic goals with the objectives of the research funding. The budget had to be kept as lean as possible without compromising the artistic value of the work. By involving local people, especially youth and children, as actors and crew members, the production allowed community members to earn income from theatre while also developing skills that could help them earn a livelihood in the future. Another essential step was securing additional funding—treating it like investment capital needed to create a production compelling enough to attract ticket-buying audiences. Lastly, the team needed to find effective promotional strategies to meet their financial targets through ticket sales.

From the researcher's perspective, the value of a theatre production should not be measured solely in monetary terms, or by the scale of the final performance. Instead, it can be found in the creative process that generates meaningful benefits for the community. For instance, when young people become community representatives through storytelling, or when they develop and showcase their talents, these outcomes also reflect the project's value and instill a sense of pride among residents. However, it cannot be denied that this sense of pride and self-worth often grows stronger when people are also able to use theatre as a space for employment and income generation.

The key challenge is how to ensure that the community recognizes the value of this work and is willing to support it. This would make it easier to secure sponsorships from local businesses and increase ticket sales—even in a town where most people have never experienced theatre before. Most importantly, the goal is for local residents to see the true worth of theatre, to the point that they want to build a collaborative network that can carry the project forward. This would enable the integration of Phanat Nikhom's deep-rooted local wisdom with contemporary performing arts, eventually developing a form of "City Theatre" that promotes tourism and provides a sustainable source of income for the community.

6.) Creating an Artistic Identity That Connects with the Entire Community

As an outsider tasked with managing and directing a theatrical performance that tells the story of a community, it is essential to create a work that truly embodies the identity of the local people. This involves drawing upon the community's cultural heritage with deep respect—honoring traditional values while also embracing new cultural expressions. Listening to every voice in the community helps ensure that this co-created theatre production communicates meaningfully and emotionally with the local audience, because it is a story that genuinely belongs to everyone.

The contemporary folk theatre The Red Ship Warrior is the result of a collaborative process involving local basketry artisans, school art teachers, Eng Kor artists, community Eng Kor troupes, young people interested in contemporary performance, and villagers engaged in various traditional arts. This collaboration gave rise to creative methods that expanded cultural value while remaining rooted in local wisdom. The process blended the deep-rooted traditions of Phanat Nikhom with the concepts of contemporary performing arts—shaping everything from script development to gestures, styles, and stage movement. Traditional Eng Kor theatre was reimagined using modern theatre techniques, extending its expression beyond forms that had existed for centuries.

The project incorporated knowledge from Phanat Nikhom's renowned basketry crafts into the composition of a unique musical score. The distinctive basket-weaving pattern "Dok Pikoon", a symbol of the town's identity, was developed into a contemporary folk dance. The music itself combined live percussion with Chinese Teochew string instruments, Laotian-inspired instruments, and natural materials like local weaving tools, all of which were used to tell the story and convey the rhythm of the characters' lives. These elements celebrated the diversity within the community while creating a harmonious unity. The percussion also echoed the rhythmic movements and stick-drumming of Eng Kor, physically energizing both performers and audiences—channeling the spirit of the warrior. This creative approach exemplifies how cultural capital can be transformed into meaningful theatrical expression.

Moreover, for a community theatre production to succeed, the story must reflect experiences and emotions that people across all ages, genders, and ethnicities can relate to. It should not be limited to any one group's narrative. The researcher believes that theatre does not need to follow familiar structures or storytelling styles seen in television dramas. If the content holds true significance to people's lives—if it reflects their rhythm of life and breathing patterns—then audiences will be open to new forms of theatre, even those they've never seen before. This includes performances with delicate artistic elements such as refined

music, dance, and experimental storytelling. What matters most is the message being communicated, the core idea, and the ability of the entire performance to connect deeply with the audience's own sense of self.

Conclusion

The contemporary folk theatre production The Red Ship Warrior was a highly challenging endeavor that tested the capabilities of both the researcher and every participant involved in the creative process. The performance received positive feedback—not only from audience members but also from the youth actors and local team members of Phanat Nikhom. For them, the theatre space became a platform for sharing knowledge and gaining real-world experience in collaborative creation.

This co-created production between insiders and outsiders of the community successfully sparked inspiration among the younger generation, instilling in them a newfound love for the theatrical arts. It encouraged community-based artistic collaboration and laid the foundation for sustainable creative efforts. The ultimate goal is for theatre to become a tool for community development, fostering a strong and enduring sense of local identity and resilience.

The researcher believes that creating a single theatre production is not just about performance—it is a means to develop creativity, life skills, and personal perspective, helping individuals see purpose and meaning in their lives. It becomes a magical memory that stays with them. Most importantly, this project helped identify a rightful "place" for theatre in a community where such performances had never existed before. And from that place, it generated genuine pride among the people—proving that theatre can truly belong to, and be celebrated by, the community it represents.



The Warriors of the Red Ship
(Images of The Red Ship Warriors)

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Fusion of Tradition and Modernity: A case study of"Only Dream of Red Mansions"

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Abstract:

This study investigates the innovative integration of traditional culture and modern art from Dream of Red Mansions,Focusing on the modern art project Only Dream of Red Mansions, the research examines how traditional cultural elements can be creatively transformed and developed in contemporary artistic practices. This paper takes "There Is and There Is Not", "The Impermanence" and "Reader's Theater" as examples,as a case study, The multi-dimensional approach of the project is analyzed, including thematic interpretation, spatial design, technology application and immersive experience. The findings reveal that the fusion of traditional culture and modern art not only generates significant artistic vitality but also provides a model for fostering creative communities. By bridging historical heritage and modern expression, this research highlights the potential of artistic research to enrich community life, promote cultural sustainability, and inspire social innovation. The study contributes to the broader discourse on the role of artistic research in (re)generating thriving and sustainable communities, particularly within the Asia Pacific context.

Keywords: Fusion of Tradition and Modernity, Creative Communities,Dream of Red Mansions

Introduction

The integration of classical literature with contemporary immersive technology has become a significant trend in the dynamic inheritance of cultural heritage.As a typical case, Only Dream of the Red Chamber, which was opened in 2023, uses multimodal narrative strategies to reconstruct the famous Chinese literature of the 18th century, Dream of the Red Chamber. It is the first immersive drama theme park in China based on the literary classic Dream of the Red Chamber as IP, which embodies this trend. This study is dedicated to exploring how to construct a dynamic dialogue between the symbolic system of classical literary texts and the sensory experience of modern audiences. Although the current academic circles have made some achievements in the field of digital heritage protection (such as "Digital Dun huang" project) and immersive drama aesthetics (represented by "See Pingyao again" drama fantasy city cultural tourism project), there is no systematic theoretical framework for the interpretation and reconstruction of classical literary texts through modern means.Through the case analysis in this paper, three innovation paths are explained(1) The spatial translation of traditional cultural symbols or literary poems to dynamic architecture; (2) The dissolution and reconstruction of the interpretation of classic character relations by digital empowerment; (3) Taking the "reader" who reads Red Mansion as the starting point of creation, the vision is reversed to the "reader" level.These findings provide new insights into performance studies, showing how immersive technology can inspire new models of literary engagement that go beyond passive reception.

"Only a Dream of Red Mansions", located in Langfang City, Hebei Province, was officially opened to the public on July 23,2023, invested and constructed by Xin yi Holding, covering an area of 228 mu. It is a new "only" series of works launched by Wang Chao ge

after the "Impression" and "See again" series. The project is a set of drama, garden, art, science and technology in the integration of cultural tourism, with Chinese classical literature classics "a dream of red mansions", through immersive drama, landscape, art exhibition, and other forms, built a dreamlike drama city, bring the audience an immersive cultural feast of a dream of red mansions.The representative performances in Only Dream of the Red Chamber are "There Is and There Is Not" and "Reader's Theater".Inspired by the Illusory Realm, The Theater of "There is and There is not" combines light and shadow, dance and drama to show the fate of the Twelve Flowers of Jinling, creating a dreamlike atmosphere and highlighting the philosophical theme of "When the false is true, the true is also false".Reader Theater is the largest indoor theater in Drama Fantasy City, featuring seven venues of varying sizes where different plays are staged. These plays are told from a reader's perspective, breaking the traditional audience-performer dynamic and offering an immersive experience of the characters' emotions. The concept of 'everyone has a *Dream of the Red Chamber* in their heart' is emphasized throughout,Tell their life stories with "Dream of the Red Chamber". The audience watches as they move along, and finally gather together to enjoy the classic scenes of "Dream of the Red Chamber".

This paper takes"There Is and There Is Not", "The Impermanence" and "Reader's Theater" from "Only Dream of the Red Chamber" as examples,from the traditional and modern dimensions analysis, help to promote immersion, the artist's ideas and works, make it in a wider range of known, is conducive to more clearly grasp the project art innovation value, to improve the artistic creation of new ideas, provide inspiration and reference for literary and artistic creation practice.

Research Objective

This study examines the"There Is and There Is Not", "The Impermanence" and " Reader's Theater " case study from the Only a Dream of Red Mansions production through dual traditional-modern analytical lenses to:

1.Systematically evaluate its artistic innovation merits

2.Identify best practices for traditional cultural heritage preservation and contemporary reinterpretation

3.Establish a framework for cross-era artistic dialogue and creative transformation

Personnel Scope： the creators, the actors

Contents Scope： On the one hand, the artistic presentation of traditional culture is mainly analyzed from three aspects: the inheritance of its literary genes, the reproduction of garden aesthetics and the use of symbols in poetry.

On the one hand: the innovation and breakthrough of modern art dimension are mainly analyzed from the application of scientific and technological means and immersive design experience.

Time Scope： February 19- -May 30,2025

Arear Scope： In Langfang, Hebei province, there is only a Dream of Red Mansions drama Fantasy City。

Research Methodology

This study adopts qualitative research to investigate the modern expression mechanism of traditional cultural elements in the project "Only Dream of Red Mansions".

Literature research: By sorting out the literary value, cultural connotation and contemporary dissemination status of "Dream of the Red Chamber", this paper defines the research status of modern expression of traditional culture in "Only Dream of the Red Chamber"

Field research: Through field investigation of "Only Dream of Red Mansions", I personally watched and felt it, communicated with the creative team, and learned about its

creative background, space design, the concept and practical application of the combination with modern technology, and the artistic expression form.

Case analysis: Representative scenes and buildings in the selected projects, such as "There Is and There Is Not" "The Impermanence", "Reader's Theater" , Based on the viewing experience, the case analysis is carried out on the modern display of characters, plots, buildings and poems, and the combination of traditional cultural elements and modern art forms is deeply discussed.

Semiotic analysis: The "Only Dream of Red Mansions" Theater Illusion City creates an intertextual system bridging literary classics with contemporary cultural tourism through symbolic interpretation. By transforming abstract concepts from the original work (such as "the Illusory Realm of Supreme Void") into immersive experiences, it seamlessly integrates literary IPs with tourism consumption. This symbolic translation is further manifested in the narrative space design of architectural gardens, where garden architecture enables visitors to perceive traditional Chinese aesthetic symbols. This approach not only expands the content boundaries of the cultural tourism industry but also provides participatory modern rituals that foster cultural identity.

Research Result

1. The artistic presentation of the traditional cultural dimension

Inheritance of literary genes: The work is based on the original novel "Dream of the Red Chamber" and retains the core plot and character relationship of the original novel. For example, the name of the theater "There Is and There Is Not" is directly taken from the couplet of the Illusory Realm in "Dream of the Red Chamber" —— "When the false is true, the true is also false; when the nonexistent is real, the real is also nonexistent." It is based on the "Illusory Realm" in the original novel "Dream of the Red Chamber" and the twelve most important female characters in the book "The Twelve Beauties of Jinling",On the one hand, on the stage and the poems and judgments of the twelve sisters projected by light and shadow are not only the concrete presentation of the text of "Dream of the Red Chamber", but also the presentation of the classic elements of "Dream of the Red Chamber", so that the audience can feel the literary charm of the original work.On the other hand, in the portrayal of the Twelve Beauties, the male gaze in the original novel is weakened, so that the Twelve Beauties of Jinling can conduct a cross-temporal dialogue with Cao Xueqin, discussing fate, destiny and the freedom of literary creation, so as to re-activate the classic proposition of "Dream of the Red Chamber" in the context of contemporary drama.(The prototype characters are shown in Table 1).

Reproduction of garden architectural aesthetics: In the cross-temporal dialogue between Chinese classical garden architecture aesthetics and contemporary stage design, "Only Dream of Red Mansions" drama fantasy city has completed a creative cultural translation.This stage design is like bringing the Grand View Garden from 'Dream of the Red Chamber' to life. It draws on the Chinese garden design philosophy of 'natural and spontaneous,' using a clever spatial layout that allows the audience to walk and observe, as if they were truly stepping into the Grand View Garden described in the book. It retains the elegance of artificial design while giving the impression of being naturally formed, making visitors feel as if they are in a real classical garden.For example, in the theater of "True and False", the audience area is designed as a grand View Garden building. The actors in the audience area and the audience on the stage are mutual spectators, and the audience area is also a stage in the building, transforming the aesthetic beauty of the Grand View Garden into a perceptible stage space.For instance, in terms of cultural connotation transmission, the stage design of "The Impermanence" draws inspiration from the art of Chinese classical garden design. It transcends the limitations of traditional scenery by integrating garden elements with literary ambiance. Through a technique that blends reality and imagination, it constructs a multi-layered meaning. This

design not only sets the stage for the story but also serves as a vital medium for conveying cultural connotations.(See Figure 1 and Figure 2).

The use of the symbol of poetry: In the "Only Dream of Red Mansions" drama fantasy city in Langfang, the poems and verses penned by Cao Xueqin are no longer just words on paper; they have transformed into a tangible, immersive narrative space that visitors can explore and experience firsthand. The designers, with a meticulous approach akin to "symbolic archaeology," have transformed classic texts such as the inscriptions of the Grand View Garden, the judgment poems of the Twelve Beauties of Jin ling, and Dai yu's Flower Burial Lament into an immersive environment through contemporary architectural techniques,For instance, "Fu rong lei" originally a memorial essay by Jia Bao yu in mourning Qing wen, not only conveys his deep affection for her but also foreshadows the tragic fate of the other daughters in the Grand View Garden. In the Dramatic Illusion City, this memorial essay could be designed as an immersive scene —— perhaps a hall draped in white gauze and swayed by candlelight, or a courtyard where petals fall gently, allowing visitors to vividly experience the sorrow of Qing wen's death and the melancholic atmosphere described in the book as' a thousand reds weeping.'This design is not a direct copy of the description in the book, but a reinterpretation of the meaning of Dream of the Red Chamber in modern architectural language. Visitors do not need to read the original book in advance, as long as they walk into these Spaces, they can naturally experience the emotions and philosophy behind the poems through vision, hearing and even touch.In "Only Dream of the Red Mansion," the drama fantasy city transforms the classic poetry and prose from the original work into various themed venues, making classical literature and poetry more accessible and tangible. This spatial narrative not only preserves the spiritual essence of traditional cultural elements such as classic poetry but also transforms the laments of the feudal era into universal humanistic reflections. In summary, poetry is not only the text in books but also the emotional symbols of the entire Red Mansion world. These poems carry the characters' destinies, emotions, and philosophies in the original work. In the fantasy city, they are ingeniously transformed into perceptible architectural language, presenting traditional culture to the audience in the most direct way.(see Figure 3、 Figure 4).

figure	character features	Original character image
Lin Dai yu	The talented and sensitive Crimson Pearl fairy grass reincarnated.	
Xue Bao chai	A "cold beauty" who is dignified, steady and well versed in the world.	

Jia Yuan chun	The eldest daughter of the Jia family, the imperial consort, symbolizes the glory of the family	
Jia Tan chun	Shrewd and capable, but of low birth and lofty ambitions.	
Shi Xiang yun	A generous and open-minded daughter of a wealthy family with quick wit.	
Miao yu	A noble nun who was born into an official family and practiced her faith with her hair unshorn.	
Jia Ying chun	Weak and gentle, he was eventually abused to death ("Two Woodpeckers")	
Jia Xi chun	Lonely and isolated, she eventually became a nun.	

Wang Xi feng	Shrewd and fierce, she managed the household affairs of the Jia family.	
Jie Qiao	The daughter of Wang Xi feng was saved by Grand ma Liu	
Li Wan	A chaste widow, the wife of Jia Zhu.	
Qin Ke qing	His mysterious early death implies the ethical tragedy of the Jia family.	

Table 1 List of the Twelve Beauties of Jinling

The original novel Dream of the Red Chamber reveals the devastation of feudal rites and customs on women through their individual fate.The Twelve Beauties of Jinling are twelve tragic female characters in Dream of the Red Chamber, recorded in the "The Department of Mortal Fortune" within the Illusory Realm of Great Void. Born into noble families of Jinling (Nanjing), They were born into the aristocracy of Jinling, talented and beautiful, but they could not escape the tragic fate of feudal society. They are the epitome of "a thousand reds weep and ten thousand beauties mourn" in Cao Xueqin's writing., serving as a microcosm of the oppression faced by women under feudal ethics. Through their individual destinies.The Theater of "There Is and There Is Not" in the Theater of Drama City is a modern presentation and reinterpretation of the fate of these twelve women.

Table maker: Zhang Hui Gai Date: May 20,2025



Figure 1 "It's true and false" Theater

The design of the audience area is the architecture of the Grand View Garden,The actors and the audience on the stage are spectators of each other, and the audience area is also a stage in the building, transforming the aesthetic beauty of the Grand View Garden into a perceptible stage space.

Photographer: Zhang Hui gai Date: April 15,2025

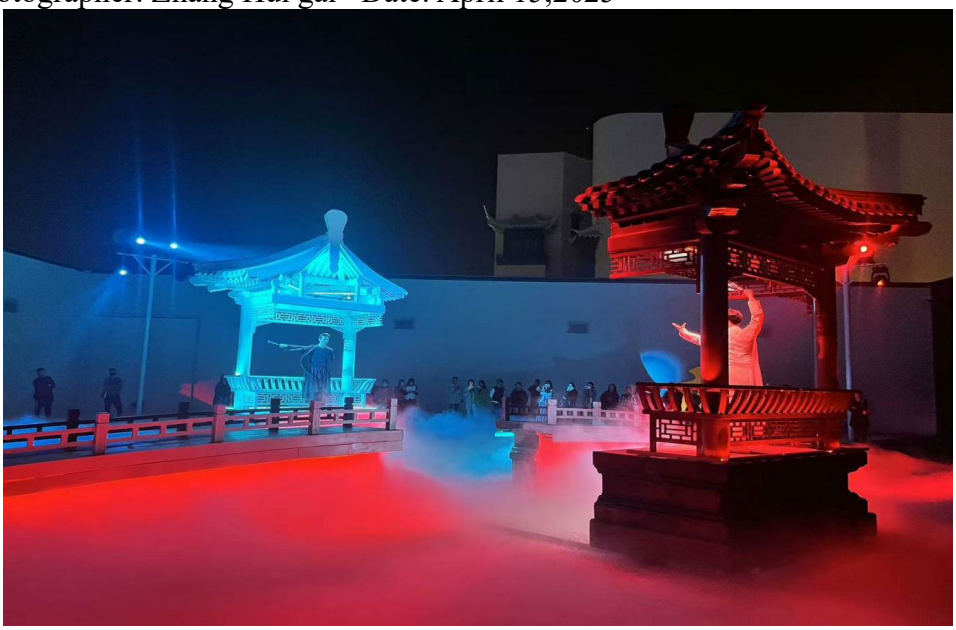


Figure 2 Impermanent (It is both a building and a stage）

The traditional Chinese classical pavilion is not only an appreciable building, but also has the function of a stage. The pavilion is half black and half white, and it becomes a separable and combined stage from the middle. The black and white pavilion and the dancers' costumes complement each other.

Photographer: Zhang Hui gai Date: April 15,2025



Figure 3 Only a Dream of Red Mansions- - "Fu rong lei"

In the only Dream of the Red Chamber Drama Fantasy City, the classic poetry and text in the original work are arranged in the buildings, presenting the traditional poetry culture to the audience in an intuitive way, realizing that poetry is not only the words in the book, but also the perceptible and touchable emotional symbols."Fu rong lei" transcends being merely Bao Yu's poignant tribute to Qing Wen ,it crystallizes the novel's tragic essence, embodying the fate, emotions, and philosophical undertones of ordinary people. Through the symbolic death of this minor character, it mirrors the inevitable withering of all blossoms in Grand View Garden. This unique design in "Dream of the Red Chamber" represents Cao Xueqin's artistic reinterpretation of traditional sacrificial rituals through the lens of poetic culture, achieving a spatial transformation of literary imagery.

Photographer: Zhang Hui gai Date: April 15,2025



Figure 4 Only a Dream of Red Mansions- - "Fu rong lei" night scene

The night environment design of the "Fu rong lei" themed space is rich in dramatic tension, creating an immersive literary ambiance through a variety of artistic techniques. The night mode particularly enhances the original work's "Cold Moon Burial of the Soul," complemented by lighting in a light and white tone, forming a tragic aesthetic space with a strong sensory impact.

2.The innovation and breakthrough of the modern art dimension

The use of science and technology：Using modern technologies such as sound, light，water and electricity linkage and virtual reality, the original poetic aesthetics are reconstructed in contemporary times through cross-media stage technology. The classic scenes of "Dream of the Red Chamber" (such as the Illusory Realm, the rise and fall of the Grand View Garden, and the fate of characters) are presented in dynamic images to strengthen the dramatic tension.In the Theater of "There is and There is not", the tragic fate of the Twelve Beauties of Jinling is presented concretely through exquisite stage technology.On the one hand, the whole stage is built into a full water theater, and the fluid mirror effect is used to construct an immersive field of reality and illusion. The shimmering water surface acts as a dynamic projection medium to reflect the figures of the twelve sisters, forming a double narrative layer with the performance space of actors, and creating an illusory and mysterious atmosphere((see Figure5).On one hand, the stage features a modular mobile platform system and CNC track movement devices, allowing twelve actors to swiftly move across the specially designed platforms. They stand or lie down, using their body language to portray their individual life trajectories. As the stage equipment continues to operate, the figures of the Twelve Beauties draw graceful arcs on the water, depicting the joys and sorrows of their lives, symbolizing their unpredictable fates in the tumultuous currents of destiny. Each actor delivers inner monologues of their characters as they move, their questions and sighs about fate breaking

down the traditional boundaries between characters and the author, allowing the audience to see the characters' reflections and explorations of their own destinies.On the other hand, in this theater, the judgment lines of 'The Twelve Beauties of Jinling' are transformed into dynamic calligraphy floating in the air. Through digital means, these lines are reinterpreted and reconstructed to enhance the audience's perception of the poetry, turning literary imagery into a dynamic art installation that engages the audience, thus creating visual effects that transcend traditional stage settings. These technological methods not only enhance the dramatic performance but also break the time and space constraints of traditional theater, allowing for the free expression of artistic imagination.All technological means are strictly devoted to the literature itself, which not only retains the classical flavor, but also unlocks hidden clues through collective interaction, so that the audience can change from the observer of the text to the co-conspirator of fate.This innovative practice of deeply integrating science and technology with literature not only breaks through the boundary between watching and performing traditional drama, but also reconstructs the modern dimension of literary interpretation, providing a new paradigm for the contemporary translation of classic texts (see Figure 6).

Immersive experience design:"Reader Theater", one of the four theaters, mainly introduces the classic scenes in the original novel "Dream of the Red Chamber", such as "Bao and Dai's love", "searching the Grand View Garden", and "Wang Xifeng's poisoning of You Er jie", from the perspective of readers, and gathers the grand scenes of readers' reading over the past two hundred years in the form of musical drama.In the "Only Dream of Red Mansions: Theater of Illusion" media "reader" theater performance, a 360-degree surround stage design is adopted, and the audience will watch the performance from different directions in the form of walking + sitting as the plot progresses.For instance, when portraying the scene of "Jia Baoyu's life," readers can follow Jia Baoyu's story through dialogues in chapters from “Dream of the Red Chamber”. The story unfolds on a circular stage, with scenes such as Baoyu's wedding and his departure from home, presented at different angles along the timeline. This innovative design breaks the limitations of the traditional theater's 'fixed viewpoint,' placing the audience at the heart of the events and providing a 'panoramic' sense of involvement.The "walking" view allows the audience to get up and move around in the scene, rather than standing or sitting in the usual mode.For example, following the guidance of recitation, the audience moves from 'Baoyu's Life 'to' The Search of the Grand View Garden 'and then to' Wang Xifeng's Poisoning of You Er jie.' This approach breaks the limitations of the traditional proscenium stage, transforming the audience from passive spectators into active participants in the dramatic space. This interactive experience significantly enhances the drama's appeal and the audience's immersive experience.In "Reader Theater", the traditional theater is transformed into an "illusion" that can be explored. The audience can freely travel in the narrative space, creating a differentiated experience that can give play to the subjective initiative of the audience, so that the audience can experience the text content and different artistic beauty in different scenes and positions and in different forms of viewing.(see figure 7, figure 8).



Figure5 Whole water theater

The entire stage is designed as a completely water-covered theater, creating a novel and captivating atmosphere that sparks curiosity. The shimmering water surface reflects the images of the Twelve Beauties of Jinling, evoking an ethereal and dreamlike ambiance. This design does not rely on traditional textual representations of "water," but instead visually presents the imagery of "water" from the original work. It demonstrates how modern language can reawaken the literary philosophy embedded in classic texts.

Photographer: Zhang Hui gai Date: April 15, 2025



Figure 6 Dynamic calligraphy floating in the air

The floating dynamic calligraphy installation in the "Only Dream of Red Mansions" Theater Fantasy City reimagines traditional Chinese calligraphy through groundbreaking technology, transforming its sensory dimensions and visual presentation. The twelve panels of "Judgment Verses of the Twelve Jin ling Beauties" transcend mere holographic projections

by innovatively presenting "living ink traces". The digital system dynamically generates calligraphic pages that synchronize with actors' performances, significantly enhancing audience comprehension of the characters.

Photographer: Zhang Hui gai Date: April 15,2025

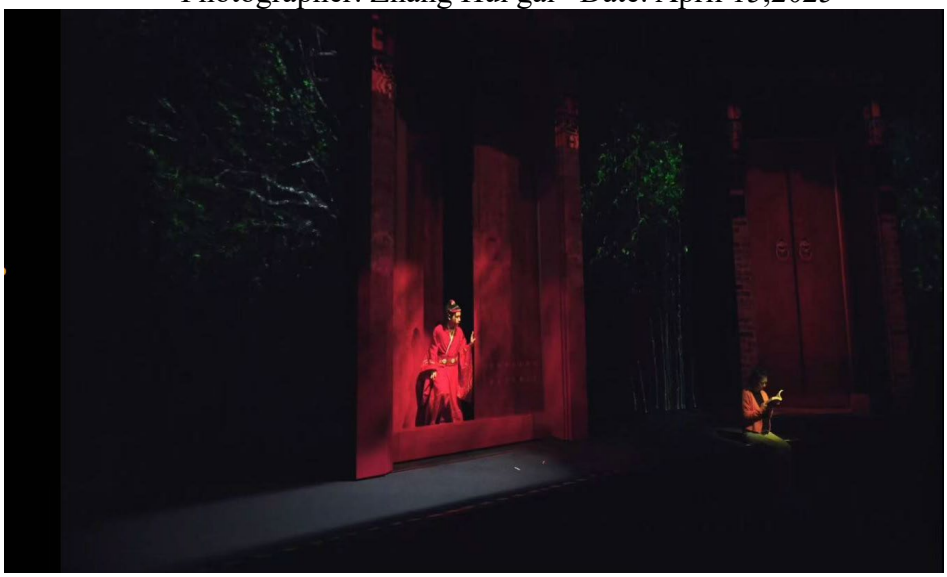


Figure 7 The Reader's Theater

The circular design of "Reader Theater" is not a simple innovation in stage design, but a story about Jia Baoyu through his reading of chapters in Dream of the Red Chamber and his inner dialogue with him.Through the circular stage, Jia Baoyu's evolving stories unfold across different angles along the timeline, revealing his psychological transformations. Audiences become immersed in the narrative progression and emotional shifts of the characters, experiencing a "panoramic" sense of participation that breaks free from traditional theater's "fixed perspective" limitations. This innovative approach seamlessly blends immersive performance design with classical aesthetics, creating a groundbreaking "immersive storytelling paradigm".

Photographer: Zhang Hui gai Date: April 15,2025



Figure 8 The Reader's Theater

Photographer: Zhang Hui gai Date: April 15,2025

This work from "Reader Theater" disassembles the classic play "Wang Xifeng Poisoning Her Second Sister Yu" into an immersive experience of ethical dilemma, and through the dialogue between readers and Wang Xifeng, it seems that the audience is a character in the

book, and the audience seems to be a witness around Wang Xifeng.It stimulates the subjective consciousness of the audience, causes the audience to have a new understanding and new thinking about the character of Wang Xifeng in the original literature, and realizes the modern interpretation of the traditional story.

Conclusion

The drama fantasy city "Only Dream of the Red Chamber" has pioneered a new paradigm for reinterpreting literary classics. By integrating innovative artistic language with cutting-edge technology, it has transformed traditional culture from static texts into dynamic experiences. The project's production, through the innovative integration of immersive space design, digital media interaction, and multi-sensory narrative techniques, has transcended the boundaries of traditional theater, reshaping the new paradigm of cultural engagement.Using technology as their brush and the human body as their medium, creators have reinterpreted the aesthetic essence of "truth and illusion" in “Dream of the Red Chamber”—— transforming passive audiences into active co-creators of meaning while revitalizing classical literature's vitality for modern viewers. This artistic practice sets a new benchmark for modernizing traditional cultural IPs, demonstrating how to reconstruct classic narratives while preserving historical essence.This innovative model shows the transformative power of art research through three dimensions: first, by reinvigorating classic texts with immersive technology, transforming traditional culture from static heritage into dynamic participatory experiences;Secondly, through multi-sensory interaction design, the process of literary reception is transformed into a field for generating collective memory of the community; finally, with the help of the extensibility of digital media, it provides a replicable technical path for the sustainable development of culture. This transformation practice demonstrates that true cultural sustainability does not lie in mechanically preserving historical forms or blindly following modern technology, but in the creative tension between the two —— Just as the philosophical depth of 'the false is also true' in 'Dream of the Red Chamber' is preserved through 'reader theater,' this case offers key insights for the living inheritance of cultural heritage in the Asia-Pacific region: First, digital media can transcend time and space limitations, reconstructing the physical carriers of cultural identity in urban public spaces; Second, participatory creation can foster a sense of cultural ownership among community members, transforming tradition from 'someone else's heritage 'into' our story'; Third, technology empowers classic IPs to continuously generate new meanings, forming a virtuous cycle of cultural innovation. These findings redefine the role of art research in social development —— not only as an exploration of aesthetic expression, but also as a creative engine for sustainable community building.

This article explores the creative transformation of the classic IP 'Dream of the Red Chamber' through artistic innovation from both traditional and modern perspectives. This transformation is not a departure from tradition but a modern interpretation grounded in a deep understanding of traditional culture. This modern transformation and innovative expression not only infuse dance art with a contemporary feel but also breathe new life into traditional culture in today's society (*Liu Hang.2023(12) Research on the Integration and Innovation of Traditional Culture and Dance Art [J]. Dance, 153-155.*).

Future research can further explore: how to apply this 'technology-humanity' dual-wheel drive model to a broader range of cultural contexts? How can quantitative assessments verify the impact of artistic innovation on community cohesion? These explorations will help us understand how, in the digital economy era, traditional culture can be creatively transformed into a catalyst for social innovation, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, where cultural diversity is especially rich.

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Becomebecome, a Transdisciplinary Methodology for Art Education/Incubation and Community Building based on Somatic Awareness, Somatic Intuition, and Somatic Psychology.

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Abstract

This article outlines a transdisciplinary framework and methodology for integrating somatic, intuitive, and psychological techniques into the creative process. It introduces a transpersonal and transcultural approach to art education and incubation that can be used to expand the agency of all the actors involved in the creation of artwork including the participants designated as authors/artists, the people who help the artists, the public, and other social entities. Furthermore, the Becomebecome method is presented as an example of how to combine cognitive science with embodied practices to unlock subconscious layers of the creative mind and generate new ideas. The techniques used to access this enhanced space for creativity also nurture wellbeing and empathy, foster collaboration and group-dynamics, and lower social and cultural barriers.
Keywords: Transdisciplinary, Art, Education, Somatics, Cybernetics, Subconscious

Purpose

Teachers, educators, curators, and participants in the artistic process at every stage can benefit from learning practical techniques that liberate their creativity, enhance their vision, and augment the resources available to their mission. Moments of inspiration that radically transform a project can emerge at any time and propel the artwork in a completely new direction that could not have been known beforehand. The Becomebecome framework is a transdisciplinary approach that aims to expand the possibilities available for art conception and production by tapping into the collective subconscious and the unique histories and intuition of the actors involved. The Becomebecome framework is always accompanied by a methodology that is adaptable and shaped around the real-life constraints and objectives of each event. The core set of Somatic strategies are complemented by additional laboratories and activities proposed by local partners and guest facilitators.

Approach

In this article, we will present the Becomebecome Art Residencies as a case study for the Becomebecome method. During the Becomebecome Art Residencies, qualitative research is used to gauge the effectiveness of the approach including written and oral reports from the participants.

Key themes explored include:

- Transforming the creative process through Somatic Awareness and Somatic Psychology
- Understanding and modulating inner rhythms through Anatomy-based practice
- Expanding the logic of the rational mind with intuitive and sensorial insight
- Connecting the physical, emotional, mental, and transpersonal selves
- Moving beyond repetitive behavior and automatic responses
- Fostering collaboration, empathy, group-dynamics, and synchronicity

Data collection from individuals includes:

- Direct questions to the artist-participants about their feelings of agency such as:
    - Did they feel new resources became available as a direct consequence of the Becomebecome activities?
    - Did they observe the emergence of new ideas or significant shifts in their art creation process?
- Feedback from facilitator-participants tasked with unobtrusive observation of the artist-participants to chart the evolution of their behavior in parallel to the evolution of their artwork.
- Direct questions to the facilitator-participants such as:
    - What strategies based on group-dynamics sparked their interest?
    - Which exercises/laboratories do they feel they can easily replicate and use in their projects as teachers, educators, etc.?
    - How did their own Somatic Awareness change or influence their experience as facilitators?
- Direct questions to the public-participants during the collaborative events with local communities (see examples of Becomebecome Critique Labs, Becomebecome Symposium on Transdisciplinary Narratives, and the Becomebecome Process-Exhibit).

Data collection from social actors includes:

- Direct questions to the representatives of social entities such as:
    - Which aspects of the event/methodology caught their attention?
    - Which elements of the project did they feel are of value for their specific context, community, and mission?
- Observation of projects and collaborations between social actors that were born as a direct consequence of taking part in Becomebecome in the weeks and months after the event.

Introduction

The Becomebecome framework postulates that no matter who the artist is, and no matter what skillset they utilize for a specific artwork, access to the collective subconscious and their own individual intuition are always included in the dynamics that influence their decisions. These might be hidden aspects of their creative process, but they are always present. If we define the logical sequence of their thoughts and the voluntary choices that they make during art conception and development as the "visible" part of their process, then we can also define the hidden, subliminal, and instinctual part of their process as "invisible". The Becomebecome approach offers practical strategies to cultivate and reveal the subconscious "invisible" aspects at any stage of the creative process. Becomebecome protocols are not about drawing, sculpting, coding, or other techniques related to a specific discipline, and yet, they can be included in each of these activities as Transdisciplinary strategies that expand the artist's available toolkit. To understand how this is accomplished, we shall begin by explaining what we mean when we use the words "Transdisciplinary" and "Subconscious".

1. Transdisciplinary is not Multidisciplinary, is not Interdisciplinary

Professor Basarab Nicolescu in his "Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity" (1996) offers an easy way to understand the difference between Multidisciplinarity (Pluridisciplinarity), Interdisciplinarity, and Transdisciplinarity. "Pluridisciplinarity is concerned with the study of an object which is the interest of a particular discipline, recruiting the expertise of researchers from another field of knowledge". For example, a painting by Caravaggio can be studied by art historians, but also by chemists, experts in geometry, psychologists, and so on.

Interdisciplinarity is characterized by the transfer of methods from one discipline to another, for instance, the methods of nuclear physics transferred to Medicine originate new treatments for cancer, transferring the methods used in Particle Physics to Astrophysics originates Quantum Cosmology, and so on. “Transdisciplinarity is concerned with something else. It is made with access to knowledge at a completely different scale. The prefix ‘trans’ in Transdisciplinarity refers to information that can be found looking between Disciplines, beyond Disciplines and ‘through’ Disciplines”. It assumes that there will always be information left outside any disciplinary lens of inquiry. The map is not the territory, and while they both help us create Reality Models that are useful to build coherence, it is precisely the act of “pendulating” between these different levels of understanding/experiencing that allows access to a unique quality of process-based information made with a sequence of one analysis after another. No matter what kind of Disciplinary knowledge or analysis one considers, Transdisciplinary information exists as a halo of additional insight that is possible to harness on top of all Disciplinary knowledge. Under this new perspective, all Disciplinary knowledge becomes a gateway to access all Transdisciplinary knowledge. It is also important to understand that we do not consider Transdisciplinary knowledge as “superior” to Disciplinary knowledge. In fact, Transdisciplinary insight has no object unless it is defined by a process-based relationship with Disciplinary knowledge. Without Disciplinary knowledge, Transdisciplinary knowledge does not exist.

There are two main reasons why a transdisciplinary approach to art education and incubation can expand the artistic process. First, art education and incubation are by definition a class of disciplinary knowledge, and like all other forms of disciplinary knowledge, they can benefit from strategies that allow access to the invisible and subliminal information uniquely connected to their specific field of inquiry. Second, the artistic experience goes beyond the creation of new knowledge and it is uniquely associated with connecting with hidden, uncanny, mysterious, invisible, and subconscious aspects of the way we relate to Nature, our existence, and the world around us. It naturally touches the realm of experience beyond the boundaries of the rational mind and explanations limited to cartesian logic. Artwork that is meaningful to humans inspires new visions, new sensorial awareness, new ideas… it brings participants to a place where new insight that was never possible before becomes available. As we have seen in the previous paragraph, this is precisely the field of inquiry of Transdisciplinarity.

2. Information About the Observer: the Process-Based Subconscious of the Artist

Nowadays, the word “Cybernetics” is synonymous with computers, but the true goal of Cyberneticians was always to include human and animal communication in the scope of their investigation. In 1948, Norbert Wiener published the book: "Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine". This was the first public usage of the term "Cybernetics". It referred to a newly born field of study created with the purpose of bringing together a most diverse group of organized studies from different disciplines. The Cybernetics Conferences (part of the Macy Conferences) originated breakthroughs in several fields of knowledge which include Systems Theory and what later became known as Cognitive Science.

Between approximately 1968 and 1975, Margaret Mead, Heinz von Foerster, and others developed Second-Order Cybernetics, also called the Cybernetics of the "observing systems", which incorporated the observer through an iterative process. This new process-based Cybernetics included information about the observer within information about the object observed and dealt with a quality of experience that exists in a temporal dimension and can only be accessed because of at least two experiences, ideas, examples, languages, and so on. A more substantial part of the research developed in Cybernetics was now devoted to the study of the human observer. Biologists, Anthropologists, Psychologists, and experts in social

sciences took on the main role in leading this endeavor. With the Becomebecome approach, we put the artistic process at the center of this picture; the study of "information about the observer" becomes the study of "information about the artist" and the key question becomes: how can the artwork be transformed by accessing more information about the artist and their process?

Researchers in Second-Order Cybernetics point to movement techniques, Somatics, and the intelligence of the body as tools to reach beyond the limits of the rational mind when expanding one's own awareness. To mention a few of the numerous contributions that emerged from these studies, Heinz von Foerster was exchanging notes and observations with Moshé Feldenkrais on each other's research, and Gregory Bateson would study the relationship between the process-based quality of the human psyche in relation to animal communication and the cycles of Nature.

In parallel to Cyberneticians, Psychologists, in particular Psychoanalysts, were directing their efforts on creating techniques to study the subconscious including dreams, involuntary behavior, and more. In contemporary Western culture, hidden or secret information from dreams is most closely associated with the terms "unconscious mind" and "subconscious mind". These two notions were introduced by Sigmund Freud at the beginning of the twentieth century when he developed Psychoanalysis, a set of strategies to investigate information about dreams, visions, and slips of tongue in connection to changes in the physical body and behavior. As for the term "subconscious", Freud used it interchangeably with "unconscious" at first. The words are similarly close but not identical in German (subconscious: das Unterbewusste; unconscious: das Unbewusste). The general notion of a psychic dimension of which a person is not conscious predates Freud by thousands of years, but in 1900, with the publication of "The Interpretation of Dreams", he rescued dreams from nineteenth century psychiatrists who denied them meaning. Freud was a modern-day equivalent of the shaman, the medicine man to whom a Western person could tell the story that came in a dream and hope to receive guidance. But while Freud focused mainly on dream interpretation as a consequence of personal psychohistory, Carl Gustav Jung expanded the study of the psyche connecting individual consciousness to Nature across different scales and times. For Jung, each individual psyche contains elements of a transpersonal dimension which he called "the Collective Unconscious". In this article, I refer to a stratified representation of the psyche which includes the "Conscious", "Subconscious", and "Unconscious" layers as separate but connected just as the floors of a building are stacked on top of each other. The conscious layer is obvious to the rational mind, the subconscious layer is just under the liminal threshold of awareness, and the unconscious is a deeper layer of hidden information. Psychoanalysts and psychotherapists of varied traditions focus on one or more of these three layers to explain and facilitate transformation in the body and the mind of their clients. They work with strategies that bring awareness to intuitions, feelings, sensations of the skin, reaction of contractile tissue in the muscles, as well as changes that occurs at a deeper level in the body, in the digestive system, the heart rate, and so on.

Would it be possible to create a transdisciplinary framework that organizes research conducted in the field of Somatics and the subconscious into a set of practical tools that anyone involved in art creation can use to move beyond repetitive ideas and hidden bias? How would one combine these protocols with already available techniques and curricula in the world of Art Education and Incubation? These became the main research questions of the team that developed the Becomebecome framework and methodology.

3. Transdisciplinary Research in Art & Science, Pendulating from Theory to Practice

In 2012, after a couple of decades spent exploring various techniques to access subconscious knowledge in Psychology, Art, Alternative Medicine, and Somatics, I started developing the Becomebecome Transdisciplinary approach to Art & Science as the focus for

my doctorate degree at Plymouth University, U.K. under the direction of Professor Roy Ascott and his team at the Centre for Advanced Inquiry in the Interactive Arts (CAiiA). The Transdisciplinary need for pendulation and the Cyberneticians reference to process-based knowledge combined with the study of "Information about the Observer" in Somatics and Psychology provided solid theoretical boundaries that I could rely upon while creating a set of instructions for protocols comprising movement exercises, meditation techniques, and conversation strategies that seemed particularly effective at revealing hidden information from the subconscious.

Since 2010, I have had the fortune of being responsible for three roles in my professional capacity as President of the Becomebecome non-profit, Founder and Lead Teacher of the Institute of Applied Somatics, and Director of the Wellco Wellbeing research hub in Barcelona. These three positions allowed me to participate in numerous projects aimed at self-development, wellbeing, and social impact, but also education and cultural events. Working in collaboration with an ever-expanding team of eclectic personalities including experts in movement techniques, anatomy and fascia, psychology, cognitive science, and education… but also artists, entrepreneurs, and other social actors, I had the privilege to design and run one-on-one sessions, year-long curricula, workshops, artist residency programs, and many community events. In parallel to my course of studies and my personal artistic production, this was an ideal context to explore and select the most simple and effective exercises to access the subconscious through Somatics and intuitive journeys. Developing the Becomebecome protocols in collaboration with the team at the Institute of Applied Somatics allowed me to ground the theoretical framework of the Ph.D. investigation with exercises based on clinical practice and scientific research.

4. A Modular Framework for an Open-Ended Transcultural Approach to Collaboration

While developing the Becomebecome framework, a short list of guiding principles inherently connected to each other became obvious. To deliver a truly transdisciplinary approach to art research, education, and incubation we would need to abide by the following postulates:

1 - The techniques offered in our repertoire of strategies to enhance intuition and access the subconscious should be safe and respect the sensibility of each participant and practitioner.

Each project and even each session brings its own unique process-based and emergent qualities which must be included at each step of the creative process. The framework must be designed to easily adapt to the skillset and personal background of the teachers/facilitators and it must generate a container where participants feel safe to let emerge hidden sensations, feelings, images, thoughts…

2 - Our open-ended modular approach should be adaptable to the maximum number of situations in academia or other public/private events.

The exercises and protocols should provide a coherent repository of techniques that can be used interchangeably to fit actual needs in real-life situations whether they are applied in year-long training programs, intensive residency retreats, thematic workshops, and other curated events. The method should provide indications on how to mix and match different techniques in a modular fashion so that the artist/practitioner/facilitator can design experiences that extend or shrink in time while remaining coherent and effective in accessing subconscious information.

3 – The Becomebecome method should be transcultural

It should work anywhere, independent of the Country where it is deployed or the cultural background of the participants. In addition, it creates a connection between participants and social actors that break beyond cultural bias and limiting beliefs, generating

access to a shared experience and connecting participants across cultures and geographic and historical boundaries.

4 – The Becomebecome method should be transpersonal

Working with Somatic and intuitive/subconscious techniques is truly a transdisciplinary choice because it is transpersonal in its essence. All human participants have a body, and all human participants have dreams. Our movement sequences and psychology-based protocols should be applicable independent of the age, body type, personal background, experience, or skillset of the participants.

5 – Our strategies should transcend the individual mind through collaboration, group-dynamics, and synchronicity

Becomebecome events are layered with multiple opportunities for transpersonal exchange in the form of conscious and unconscious collaborations. Our Somatic Psychology protocols include references to Jung's concept of synchronicity and practical strategies to harness intuitive information in everyday life. Understanding how the collective subconscious is naturally combined with our individual storylines generates access to a semantic and cognitive space that scales transpersonal mechanisms beyond collaboration and group-dynamics into the territory of animism, traditional medicine, and ancient philosophies worldwide. Paying tribute to our ancestors' wisdom by integrating their vision and some of their techniques into our modern approach introduces the possibility for a truly open-ended access to intuitive knowledge free from the censorship, judgement, and boundaries of the rational mind.

6 – Becomebecome events should enhance social impact and community building through empathy and wellbeing

Becomebecome events break down social and cultural barriers to create opportunities for collaboration and integration through empathy. Techniques originally developed with the goal of accessing the individual subconscious of the artist naturally bridge into the transpersonal space of the community to which the artist belongs revealing hidden dynamics that influence their wellbeing and inspiration. As it has long been known in clinical research and psychology studies, the observer is modified by the relationship with their environment. Likewise, exercises that build empathy, foster social interaction, and augment emotional intelligence are central to understanding how Becomebecome protocols advance hidden mechanisms of the artistic process.

5. Case Study - The Becomebecome Art Residency Programs

All Becomebecome events feature three key components that use Somatics and Psychology protocols to access subconscious insight:

Somatic Awareness Exercises: Anatomy-based movement sequences to unlock subconscious information only available in the body.

Somatic Intuition Journeys (Dream Journeys): Relaxation and meditation protocols to reveal subconscious information only available in the mind.

Somatic Psychology Techniques: Language templates to repattern the cognitive and semantic space of the participants to foster empathy, creativity, and wellbeing.

To better visualize how these three components are implemented in the ideation and creation of art projects, I will present the core aspects of a few art residency programs that the Becomebecome Team ran from 2014 to 2019. Each one had its own characteristics and unique features but also a common sequence of seven stages that build upon each other:

Stage 1: Becomebecome Call For Participation

Information about the hidden starts with discovery. A call for participation (CFP) for Becomebecome Art Residencies is already a first taste of the methodology. The Becomebecome team responsible for each residency takes great care in carving a narrative

which prompts the reader into a process of self-exploration. This is generated because of the interplay between the theme of the residencies (which changed every year) and the use of language in the description of the CFP. It is paramount to the positive outcome of each Becomebecome residency that the selection of candidates includes participants who are ready for a program which places experience before knowledge. The CFP is the first step in creating a separation between the moments in which participants *think about* experiences from the moments in which participants *live* experiences.

Stage 2: Becomebecome Kinetic Routines

One of the first trajectories of practical research to study hidden and process-based information about the observer focuses on a repertoire of physical movement routines called Becomebecome Kinetic Routines (BKR). These routines are based on the Institute of Applied Somatics repertoire and are influenced by a set of parameters which are available only at the location of each residency program (characteristics of the space, props, weather conditions, temperature, and so on). BKR are practical sessions designed to transform hidden patterns of information in the physical body of the observer, thus making participants aware of hidden processes that exist within themselves but are not visible to the rational mind. They include strategies to explore consciousness below the threshold of awareness that is established by lifestyle habits, speed and load receptors in the body, movements to compensate for gravity, exercises for breathing, and more. They are safe, anatomy-based exercises designed for Nervous System Regulation and Neuro-Myo-Fascia Repatterning that are used in rehabilitation clinics and therapeutic centers worldwide. BKR sessions are proposed as activities that are complete on their own but are also part of a larger process of transformation with other Becomebecome sessions.

Stage 3: Becomebecome Intuitive Journeys

Becomebecome Intuitive Journeys (BIJ) are designed to help participants become aware of subconscious information through intuition, synchronicity, and group dynamics. BIJ have deep roots in historical and anthropological reports of shamanic practices as well as psychotherapy and cognitive science. This research is distilled into a set of simple protocols made accessible in complete safety to all participants independent of their personal or professional backgrounds. Just as it was for BKR, BIJ reveal an elementary set of steps which can be easily learned and used by each participant to reshape their art project because of the transformation in their patterns of awareness. Examples of BIJ include meditation, sound journeys, intuitive journeys into the subconscious, and guided group activities. Crucially, the participants must have a way to record their experiences through various journaling techniques. Participants learn to associate the awareness of hidden patterns of information in the physical body to inner patterns of information in their emotional, mental, intuitive, and transpersonal bodies. Finally, a session for BIJ Analysis usually takes place once or twice during the typical ten-day Residency program. BIJ Analysis expands the practical research started with BKR and BIJ sessions introducing the theoretical background that explains the notions of Dreamtime, the Transpersonal Self, and more. BIJ Analysis provides answers, bibliographic references, and practical options to continue the exploration of both BKR and BIJ based on the unique questions that emerge in each specific group of participants and their personal/professional trajectories.

Stage 4: Becomebecome Critique Labs

Becomebecome Critique Labs (BCL) are an extension of BKR and BIJ, while in BKR the action is created through transformation of patterns in the body and in BIJ the action always includes intuitive journeys into dreamtime, in BCL the action is made with clear instructions that communicate to the rational mind. Here are two examples of BCL:

BCL – The Words/Sketch Lab is designed to transform hidden information about the action of taking notes. The basic idea is that writing and/or sketching can always be analyzed as processes which connect two moments in time inside of which information about the observer has changed. The Words/Sketch Lab is an exercise to practice what Von Foerster's Hermeneutic Principle: "The hearer (who is the observer at the end of the sentence), not the speaker, determines the meaning of an utterance". In the case of taking notes, one is both the speaker and hearer. At the beginning of each text/sketch, we are in the position of the speaker and at the end we are in the position of the hearer. What happens when you take the words you wrote at the end of a sentence and put them at the beginning of the sentence? What happens when you draw a vertical line that separates your drawing in two parts and invert their position? Separate them, adding emptiness? Move one part forward in time but not the other? The Words/Sketch Lab should run two or three days after the Presentations Lab to give the participants time to familiarize themselves with each other's projects and with the practice of other Becomebecome exercises. This produces a more comfortable and immediate sharing of intuition.

BCL – The Shrine is typically an exercise which takes place in the last days of the residency. Participants convene in an indoor location where they are invited to bring records or traces of things which inspired them in the weeks or months previous to the Becomebecome event. This includes personal mementos, references to people who inspired them (maybe even years before the project started), fragments of conversations, quotes, and any clue from the subconscious about where the project was going before and where it is going now, including things that became of significance during the residency. Each participant builds a shrine made of their own subconscious fragments of memories, thoughts, expectations, and things that happened to them because of synchronicity during the process of creation. Visitors are invited to explore the artists' shrines and leave a message based on spontaneous reactions and guided questions. Since the artwork is hidden and sometimes not even mentioned, The Shrine offers the possibility to receive feedback about the artist's internal process.

During the ordinary ten-day Residency period, BCL are offered two or three times. On some occasions, they are combined with an activity that includes local actors (cultural associations and/or University students), local artists, and non-profits organizations.

Stage 5: Becomebecome Symposium on Transdisciplinary Narratives

Becomebecome participants are, for the most part, artists. Nonetheless, there is always a percentage of curators and university teachers. The Becomebecome Symposium on Transdisciplinary Narratives (BSTN) was born with the idea that artists seldom have the opportunity to speak for themselves because they usually speak through their art. What is the relationship between a piece of art and the person who made it? Why has an artist chosen that specific media or method to express themselves? What is possible to channel because of that unique language that allows them to explore new ideas? These are a few of the critical questions around which artists are invited to offer a presentation at the Symposium. During the BSTN the artists talk about their craft in connection to their sensibility. The BSTN is often an opportunity for teachers and educators to participate in Becomebecome Residencies through grants from their alma mater. While art students or professional artists usually receive funding for art projects, artists whose main profession is teaching usually have easier access to funds for research. This balances out the possibility to include a truly diverse field of expertise which makes the experience of each participant more valuable. The BSTN is held in collaboration with a university or art institute that can provide a large venue for presentations. Parallel to the CFP for the Becomebecome Residency Program, a separate call for the BSTN itself is launched two to four months before the date of the Symposium. Dissemination to recruit researchers and artists who operate in the geographic area of the Becomebecome event is executed in collaboration with local partners.

Stage 6: Becomebecome Process-Exhibit

The Becomebecome Process-Exhibit (BPE) usually takes place on a Saturday evening and a Sunday morning, the two official last days of the Becomebecome Residency. In the previous ten to twelve days, participants have gone through several experiences which have influenced their idea of the project they brought to the residency. The BPE is not conceived as a typical show; rather, it is a moment when the process of the artist is open to the public. Participants are not expected to finish their project for the BPE because it might continue for several weeks or months after the residency is complete. From the outside, the BPE looks like a visit to the atelier of the artist. The public is invited to participate in the process of the artist and give feedback on the work in progress. A presentation sheet is also part of the installation and made available to the public.

The sheet includes the title of the work (which is also displayed on a tag on the wall in traditional museum fashion) and a short story that the artist wants to tell the visitors to create the context inside of which the visitors will originate their feedback. Saturday evening is the opening of the Process-Exhibit. Sunday morning is the time for the artists to meet local professional actors, present their work, and gauge the opportunity for future collaborations. Sunday afternoon is takedown time. All participants are in charge of dismantling their artwork with an official policy of leaving 'zero trace' unless different arrangements have been made with the exhibit space.

Stage 7: Becomebecome Continuity, Individual Participants, and Social Actors

Late afternoon on Sunday, Becomebecome participants are invited to the official closing ceremony. The journey will continue in the following days, weeks, and months ahead. Some of the participants pick up the Becomebecome Kinetic Routines and continue to exercise to transform their artwork or just for personal enjoyment. Others adopt the Becomebecome Intuitive Journeys and Critique Labs as a source of inspiration for their projects as teachers and facilitators. However, the goal of Becomebecome residencies is not only to influence process at the scale of the individual participants, but also to advance process at the scale of social actors and create new opportunities for the organizations and institutions who are involved in each event.

Results

In relation to the key themes presented in the "Approach" section, we observed that most participants (over 80%) felt a direct connection between their personal transformation during the Becomebecome Art Residency program and their creative process. They enjoyed practicing techniques to access their subconscious and explore their dreams and intuition. They also appreciated learning about their anatomy, the connection between their emotional and mental systems, and how to regulate them through simple and fun exercises.

Value elements observed in each Becomebecome event include:

- Thinking outside of the box through fun and engaging activities
- Increasing the agency of the participants over their physical, mental, and emotional behavior
- Experiencing Somatic Awareness as an internal faculty, a source of energy, self-reliance, vision, and wellbeing for oneself and the community
- Integrating practical strategies for the exploration of subconscious processes which influence decisions and behavior in everyday life including practical strategies for art production/incubation
- Discovering a framework and methodology that participants and local communities can transform and make their own with their unique sensibilities and experiences
- Fostering new collaborations between social actors

Conclusion

This article presents a concrete example of how the Becomebecome principles can be implemented in the case of art residencies. Our Somatic approach combined with strategies to reveal intuitive insight expands the agency of all participants. Together, they allow access to new transdisciplinary resources for art education curricula and art incubation events. They reduce cultural barriers and class differences, and foster empathy and collaboration. This generates ideal conditions for subsequent collaborative projects between local and international actors long after the events are over. As President of the Becomebecome non-profit and lead researcher of our methodology, I look forward to developing initiatives with new partners interested in Transdisciplinary programs for Art Research, Education, and Incubation. On a more personal note, I feel privileged to join hands with new friends, artists, and educators from all over the world to learn more about ourselves and our different approaches to creativity, Somatics, intuition, and more.

Figure A1 – Call for Participation

Figure A2 – Becomebecome Kinetic Routines

Figure A3 – Becomebecome Intuitive Journeys

Figure A4 – Becomebecome Critique Labs

Figure A5 – Becomebecome Symposium on Transdisciplinary Narratives

Figure A6 – Becomebecome Process-Exhibit

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Waves of movement through suspension Then Release

Ameena Aljerman Alali

Abstract:

Since the documented history was and still is viewed mainly as autonomous, this essay attempts to challenge history's formal, disciplined approach with a narrative from the history of enslaved people rather than viewing slavery as an isolated event. The Indian Ocean slavery has not been documented as much as Atlantic slavery history, which led to a gap within the history of the Persian/Arabian Gulf countries. Moreover, the essay examines explicitly my family history as an artist, and the interest in documenting such history was to find ways to relate to and understand the afterlife of slavery. I raise questions regarding the reflection on the remembrance and presentation of enslaved people's history as part of the amendment process and as an attempt to fill the gaps in understanding history and the socio-political positioning of Afro-Emiratis. The essay unfolds with its suspension then release, in three main narratives titled: Fairuz, Dalma, and Zar, which took place in the last century. The methodology is mainly focused on weaving narratives, events, and heritage of Afro-Emiratis into a stepping stone to document further and present an unspoken history.

Introduction:

In this essay, I present myself as a narrator and researcher. I have positioned myself between the possibility of fiction in amending generational trauma and restoring the positioning of Afro-Emiratis . There is little documented history of the slavery period in the United Arab Emirates, and what there is focuses on the pre-oil years leading up to the discovery of oil in the 1930s . I am keen to find sources that describe how Africans experienced slavery in the Arabian/Persian Gulf region, particularly from the perspective of the enslaved.

In my research into my family's history, I found my grandfather Ismaeel's script in one of the archival books, which gave me a voice to start. I then realized that, in addition to rituals and material culture, potential sources existed in oral tradition, as well as in traditional African dances and songs.

My interest in enslaved history in the United Arab Emirates and the region of the Arabian/Persian Gulf was sparked by years of not being able to articulate the sense of inferiority within myself and my family. For so long, I couldn't pinpoint the reason why my parents had to step aside from being who they wanted to be or why it was acceptable for my niece's teacher to remove her from the U.A.E National Day dance because of her afro hair.

There is a reason why Liwa – the traditional circle dancing adopted by Afro-Emiratis imitates the circulation dynamics of waves; it is the suspension and release motion of continuations. It is a continuation of unspoken history and traditions.

Hiding behind the archives

I started as a historian, not as an artist. I hid behind the archives, the numbers, and academic articles to prove a point of existence. I questioned whether bringing the history to Sweden and introducing such an experience would be acknowledged. Would travelling to Sweden change it, or change my position as an artist and researcher? I have been documenting the oral history of family members for years, whether they intended to direct me on this journey or not. The slavery element was strongly present yet denied with its taboo attachment. The denial comes from underlying self-shame and accepting the afterlife of slavery and its effects.

In this essay, I have approached the known history, archives, and oral history of my family members, utilizing theories that offer a space for interplay between fiction and non-fiction. I have pointed out the gap in the known history and attempted to create a movement of "in-betweenness". I aim to represent an alternative historical method as a network of integration and fragmentation over time. I will also look at the anxiety of slavery memory, which presents the memory of slavery as it was, not as the memory of an event.

The latter is an attempt to challenge the norms of narrating history as an informative text and presenting the oral history of individuals instead of events. In three short chapters, I will refer to four individuals who were my family members: Isameel Aljarman, my paternal grandfather; Tuffah Bilal, my great-grandmother; Ameena Fairuz, my maternal grandmother; and my maternal great-grandmother, Shaikha Bu Halga, all of whom have become their own legends.

Historical background & theory

The Indian Ocean slave trade was a multi-directional slave trade that evolved and expanded along trade routes, such as the Silk Road in the 8th century The history of Indian Ocean slavery has not received equal attention as Atlantic slavery. The lack of interest and attention in documenting numbers, profit, and the afterlife of slavery has caused a severe gap in understanding the existence of Afro-Arab identity in the region .

Several populations in present-day Arabian/Persian Gulf countries, Pakistan, India, and others are believed to be descended from enslaved people, but the history itself remains largely undefined. It is important to note that upon the discovery of oil in the Arabian/Persian Gulf, British officials had already established relations with the political powers in the region and created agencies to distribute manumission certificates to slaves who sought their freedom. However, the process and agenda for abolishing slavery in the Trucial States at that time were not documented . Much of what I found at the archives in the Emirate of Sharjah were letters written by enslaved people that had been translated into English. The documentation employed a different systematic approach, focusing merely on enslaved people as commodities rather than on history itself .

Furthermore, there were strong elements of the African presence in the U.A.E., but details of that voice vanished in the void of nationalism , and the establishment of a sovereign state along with the teachings of Islam . Thus, by setting aside the political and socio-economic aspects of that part of history, we are left with the most essential aspects of all: the slaves themselves and the intentional gaps in history. I ask the question: what happens if we reflect on the remembrance of enslaved people's history, not as an act of mesmerizing events, but as an act to amend and present history anew?

The urgency of this matter can be approached by looking at the narrative theory of history. Learning from other representational forms and broadening the range of expression to incorporate 'alternative' or 'experimental' methods was essential to unfold such an untold history. The goal is to articulate history as a moving and evolving target, thereby improving our understanding of it by positioning myself between representations of time travel, archival findings, and oral history. This approach allows us to shed further light on the boundary between a ‘proper history’ and various kinds of fabulation. Critical fabulation, for Saidiya Hartman , is the intersection between fiction, critical theory, and archival research. Hartman also points out that it is impossible to "write" what has been resisted from being said, as slaves were not able to speak. Since it is an unrecoverable history, "it is a narrative of what might have been or could have been; it is a history written with and against the archive." By this approach, archives not only present some histories of the past but also direct how the present time exists, and how the positioning of time shifts our outlook towards reading and reflecting on histories. With that in mind, I approach oral history through the term '*parahistory*', which was introduced by Roy Sorensen in 1987 to represent "the study of

genuinely anachronistic artifacts delivered by time travel. "This presentation of history reflects on what may be understood as the desire to find both the personal and the universal through the merging of time, history, and the process of finding the archives. Although the essay only examines a limited number of representations, it also serves as a step toward further speculations and the fabulation of hidden history. There is always the dilemma that undermines the value and the impact of pointing out the gaps and narratives. Still, an attempt to project historical rehabilitation means artists like me can subtly critique—rather than pursue—historical accuracy.

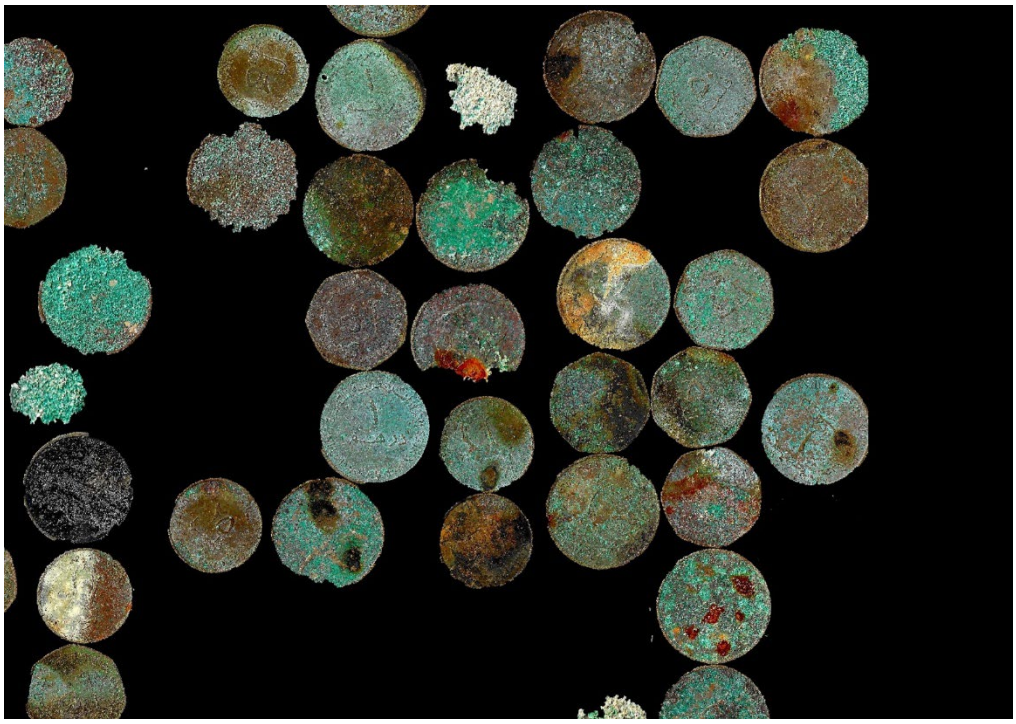


Figure 2: Sidreoh Series II, Scannography on metal plate. 2019. Ameena Aljerman Alali.

Chapter One: ***Fairuz***

Ismaeel.

Known as Aljarman, the son of the pearls, the one with the pants like the Germans.
Born by the shores of Ras Al Khaimah, holding onto his mother.
Tuffaha was her name.
Which translates to "Apple" in Arabic.
The Apple of **Ismaeel's** eyes, as he always referred to her.
Ismaeel had a wish to be one with the sea, transforming his arms and lungs into fins and gills,and finding his currents and tides through life.
Tuffaha, the calm, defeated soul from Zanzibar - a Tanzanian island off the coast of East Africa.
Tuffaha was bought by Fatima Bint Sharif from Ras Al Khaimah in the Early 1910s
Tuffaha also wanted to be held softly by the sea.
She had a long scar on her neck, crawling to her shoulder as a reminder.
She heard about the horrors of the other side, but she didn't know there were two sides at the end of that tunnel - East and West.
The tunnels looked similar but the journey on the waters wasn't.

Tuffaha sang along with others about Fairuz, the boy.
Fairuz translates to the color "turquoise" in Arabic - which is a male's name or family name popular among East African and Swahili cultures .
As for female naming, it is Fairuza.
Fairuz was a boy who heard his mother's callings through the waves while he jumped off the ship, freeing himself and others too. The tale of Fairuz lived as he died.
It continued to echo through the journeys of Indian Ocean waters and became a word of solidarity.
"Oh Yal Habib Fairuz – Yabon yebe'onek - **Dear Fairuz, they went to sell him.**
Oh Yal Habib Fairuz, rabatouk ta'hat - **Dear Fairuz, they chained him down.**
Ya Allah, Khal el gharbi teshelah wa tred athamah ma'a almurjan - **Oh Allah, let the western winds blow so his bones become coral**".

Maybe **Tuffaha** believed that Ismaeel was her Fairuz, everyone wanted to have a Fairuz! She hoped he would also be freed.

In **1958**
With the discovery of the black gold.
Different types of boats sailed towards the Persian/Arabian Gulf.
The slave owners became slaves themselves.
The sand, pearls, and dates dissolved into oil tankers and machinery.

In **1959**
Isameel handed his mother the Manumission certificate, with a blue-inked stamp that was smudged.
This celebratory moment took a space in one of the archival books
And in my memory
And generations after.
Tuffaha knew the rules.
Manumission doesn't erase Aldain payback, economy, dried fish, pearls, back to the sea.

In 1965
Back to the sea
Last attempt to touch the pearl and the last air bubble.
Ismaeel returned to the sea .
As the sea did not fear Allah.
The women conversed and requested.
"Toub Toub ya Bahar -, **redeem, redeem yourself O'sea.**
Ma takhaf men Allah, Ya bahar? - **Aren't you afraid of Allah, O'sea?**
Arba'ah, khames dekhal, yebhom - **Four months has passed, and the fifth is upon us, bring them back**

Yebhom, ma tkhaf men Allah - **I beg you, Aren't you afraid of Allah?**
Yal lumi – hat bin rumi - **Oh Lime, bring Rumi back with the precious jewel**"
Tuffah knew while holding **Islameel's** cloth
The debt
With Fish, rice, jars, and the sun.
Back to the sea, **Tuffaha** surrenders.



Figure 3: Still from Toub, Toub, 2023, video, 3:42 min. Ameena Alfermah Alali

Chapter Two: ***Delma***

Shaikha

The royal lady, the one with the wide eyes, and gentle hands
Shaikha was kidnapped as a girl from her home in what is now the Stone Town in Zanzibar.
After several changes of ownership
Shaikha was sold to an Arab slaver in the Mecca slave market and was brought to Abu Dhabi in 1925 **Shaikha** learnt the crafts of Arab bridal preparations.
She served and served.
From Nelah body mask, henna on hair, red ink on lips, and sewing the wedding garments.
Shaikha was famous for her mark.
She applied a mixture of rice water with the Nelah across the face
While it is drying, apply her warm, gentle hands and rub it in until it shrinks up and cleans the skin.
Shaikha also learned how to weave cotton, dye it, and make it into a beautiful fairuz thoub.

In **1939**
On Shaheen's Henna night , the women wore the golden ornaments which they displayed with some profusion on their arms and legs.
They sang to the bride:
Ameena fe Amani-ha – **Ameena**, **faithful in her wishes**
Maleha fe ma'aneha - **Beautiful in her meanings**
Tajlat wa injelat hata - **It became clear and even clearer**
Sa'alet Allah yehaneha - **I asked God to bless her**
Jabeenha kal Bader badhi - **Her forehead is like the full moon**
Wa reegha yeshfy amradhi -**Her saliva heals my illness**
Laha rab elsama radhi -**The Lord of Heaven is satisfied with her Wa ahsen fe ma'aneha - And better in its meanings.**
Shaikha was carrying her own **Ameena**.
Shaikha knew, **Shaikha** refused.
To adhere, to serve, and to continue.
"May you rot, or may you swell, or may a beast take you to Delma" Sliced tents and robes
Shaikha found herself in Delma, with Onaizah Tied to a palm tree, and flogged.
Flogged and whipped with Sa'af that was still green.

Their thorns and spikes were still on them
Until their flesh was raw and bleeding
The boiling strained rice water was poured on the bleeding women.
Cutting through their previous scars to new ones, deeper than the waves that lead them there.
Shaikha and Onaizah couldn't take it
Onizah rested at the age of 14
And **Shaikha** was released after the birth of Ameena.

In **1945**
Shaikha had Saleh
Um Alwalad is free, they said, not the boy.
Saleh went west to serve
Ameena went East to trade Henna and spices, and wooden elephants and bangles
Debts were paid and **Shaikha** finally rested her gentle hands on her chest



Figure 4: Still from Fiaroza. The passage, 2021, video 1:20 min. Ameena Aljerman Alali.

Chapter Three: ***Zar***
Ameena, the trustworthy, the faithful one, the truth
Ameena was taken to sail through the Indian Ocean with her mother's Fairuz thoub .
Worked, sold, and carried through several places.
She acquired three tongues: Arabic, Hindi, and Persian
Ameena, unlike her mother Shaikha, was strong, tall, and stubborn.
She was her own Fairuzah .
Ameena was sold for one hundred and seventy-two Rupees in a town called Rajasthan .
She was gifted to Siva, a wealthy widow priest
Ameena was amazed by women priests.
They were held in great reverence by the captured ones.
Women priests could calculate time, foretold events, and hosted Zar.

Ameena desired, but she was kept afar.
"Childless you become, Alshaikha has only herself and her shaitan"
Ameena only prepared the pipes, hashish , and the animal offerings, she was trusted to perform, to dedicate, to serve.
Sacrifice for protection. Sacrifice for a return.
Sacrifice for a payment.
Then the Zar finally chose
Ameena She accepted.
Sat sang and sorrowed between the Shadows.
Daf , Bukhoor , Verses and blood
Ameena knew there was no return
Knives under the pillows, goat blood on the feet
Ameena became a priest herself .

In **1971**
While slavery was officially abolished, greedy hands were looking for the Aa'beed
Ameena was a Khadamah at neighbourhood.
A nanny at James's house And a Zar priest in Rashidiyah
Ameena always believed in good omens
Goat blood, Ameenas , a knife under the pillow, and sugar on the graves of loved ones.

In **1998**
At **Ameena's** feet
I was filled with stories of her sorrows and triumphs.
Many of which I have documented and others forgotten.

Ameena thought I would accept my fate, and the omens.
I didn't, for they were quite harmless. Yet I could see the troubling eyes.
I couldn't find myself while she carried me to her house entrance.
Where she just slaughtered the goat
Dipped my feet and hands into the running blood
An imperfect sketch
My memory has furnished me with the manners and customs of a people among whom I first drew my breath.
But I carried on.
Stories.

Everything was a story to me then, though I couldn't think beyond myself.
I have always pictured her at the docks, about to get on a ship to India, to Iran, to Doha, to Dubai.
It took me years to understand, to observe, and to admit.
Circulating till I hit the point of breaking point.
And to the point of her departure, **Ameena** is my Fairuza.



Figure 5: Still from Grandma Ameena's Wishes ,2021 video, 2:00 min. Ameena Aljerman Alali.

Conclusion:

I have tried in this experimental format of an essay to consider how critical fabulation is used in the narrative creation process of my family members' history and that it functions as a critique of slavery as an event rather than about the enslaved people themselves. The collective movement of memories, narratives, historical events, and archives reveals how interdependency and vulnerability are maintained, and time travel occurs through suspension, then release. It is how the past conditions and also future reactions are remembered. In a way, reimagining my family members' riotous lives is an act of intervention that allows me to access the past through certain layers of fiction. As an artist and a researcher, I approach the memory-making and memory-keeping process as a disturbance to the political existence of Afro-Emiratis.

The chapters Fairuz, Delma, and Zar voice a revolution that ties the ruptured and the remaining slave memories, a resistance that moves through vulnerability and interdependency. I believe that oral history offers messages from past generations, which are not always remembered and conveyed because of their historical content; it is the moral aspect of it, as the critical fabulation concepts rely on storytelling to understand and imagine not only what was then, but also what could be.

In addition, it is essential to mention that the memories of enslavement and life in slavery disturb the social alignments in Emirati society by reopening the wounds of past violence and suffering. Therefore, it made Afro-Emiratis extremely selective about what they deemed worthy of narration.

Besides reopening the wounds, the guilt and shame associated with the time-traveling aspect are not yet acceptable due to political and security reasons. Hence, I decided to write about it while residing in Sweden.

However, this essay has far from exhausted all the means of memories and narratives on a linear timeline. I conclude instead with the proposal to continue inquiring into the narratives of enslaved people in resistance: an ongoing artistic and visual research project that challenges the selectivity of historical narration.

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Getting there ↔ Getting Lost: Sharing Stories Where Traveler Myths Meet Tourist Realities

Jesse Todd

Abstract

This artistic research project, conducted in Phuket, Thailand, investigates the potential of magical realist storytelling to disrupt conventional tourism practices, encouraging tourists to practice intimate and self-actualizing encounters. In a region dominated by mass tourism and commercialism, the project questions traditional touring approaches by inviting tourists to reflect on their travel choices and reconsider their relationships with public spaces. Through active touring, creative writing, and speculative storytelling, the project encourages tourists to engage in playful, imaginative encounters with their surroundings, using magical realism as a tool for personal and collective transformation. The project employs storytelling postcards as a writing tool to facilitate these encounters. Postcards become vessels for fragmented, magical realist narratives that blend the familiar with the unexpected, encouraging participants to connect deeply with their environment and creatively explore the spaces they inhabit. These postcards serve as both physical objects and narrative devices, blurring the lines between personal mementos, storytelling tools, and magical realities. Through writing experiments in public spaces, participants are prompted to "get lost" and craft stories that challenge conventional tourist experiences and foster a deeper connection to both the place and self. Drawing inspiration from Michel de Certeau's notion of a 'critical tourist', this research aims to transform touristic locations into spaces for active engagement and sharing, through the creative practices of touring, writing and storytelling. By blending art and tourism, the project fosters new ways of thinking about travel, cultural exchange, and the role of storytelling in shaping sustainable, engaging, and reflective travel practices.

Purpose

This artistic research project investigates the role of magical realism in rethinking tourism and its impact on both visitors and local communities in Phuket, Thailand. By blending creative writing and speculative storytelling with critical tourism theory, the project explores alternative ways of engaging tourists through narrative that emphasizes subversion, suspension, and summation—frameworks drawn from the work of Kim Sasser. Through the development of magical realist stories, the project challenges the conventional expectations of tourism, encouraging more introspective, self-actualizing, and culturally connected experiences.

The research further engages with speculative tourism, a concept introduced by Mushon Zer-Aziz and Shalev Moran, to offer a transformative approach to travel experiences. The inclusion of interactive storytelling postcards as a tool for engagement bridges artistic practices and tourism, encouraging non-artists to participate in narrative creation. This hybrid method seeks to subvert current tourist trends and critique the commercialization of travel, fostering a critical awareness among both tourists and locals.

The project also examines the development of a consistent writing practice and its implications for self-actualization through artistic practice. With future plans for wider community engagement, including collaborations with local stakeholders, the project aims to establish a more sustainable, art-driven tourism model. Through ongoing experiments and collaborations, the research aspires to cultivate a broader cultural dialogue about tourism, art, and their intersection in the digital age.

Research Question:

What strategies of writing and sharing stories of magical realism, can educate tourists to critically reflect on their traveling choices and encourage them to transform touristic places into more public spaces to practice intimate and self-actualizing encounters?

Through the course of research, into critical tourism, arts in public space in Thailand or magical realism there is a common articulation to create ripples of small dialogues around our local and global realities and how those interventions, which are specific in locality or scope, can have much larger reach and implications. In turn adding to the generation of common knowledge and artistic connections.

Approach

Magical Realism

This research inquiry began traveling into studies of magical realism to identify essential elements of what defines this mode of writing. This inquiry was guided by the works of Wendy B. Faris, Lois Parkison Zamora, Rodanthi Tzanelli, as well as, Reinaldo Arenas and Wu Ming-Yi (both authors of work that can be considered magical realism) in understanding identifiable traits of this mode of writing, with an awareness "*not to homogenize its different manifestations and the cultural differences they often represent but to more fully explicate its role in postcolonial literary history"* (Faris 108) Definitions or origins of magical realism are still up for debate, but its reproducibility and reception as a mode of storytelling, has had universal recognition and repurposing. This inability to craft a universal definition is inherent to the nature of magical realism, because of its close relation to culture and socio-political contexts and this plethora of global perspectives impossible to define or connect entirely.

Magical realism felt necessary as a style that would be engaging, exciting and appropriate for Phuket Thailand. Thailand has a rich history of magic in folklore, festivals, religious rituals and spiritual practices. Magical realism as a style might be able to share critical thoughts and opinions of real societal issues, safely and respectfully in Thailand. Wendy Faris is most cited when discussing a working definition for magical realism that takes into account its various global iterations. She provides a widely accepted and referenced set of "irreducible elements" that characterize magical realism.

First, the text contains an "irreducible element" of magic; second, the descriptions in magical realism detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world; third, the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events; fourth, the narrative merges different realms; and, finally, magical realism disturbs received ideas about time, space, and identity.(Faris 108)

Magical realism for this study is framed as a mode of art making, not only as a genre or writing mode, because of it existing through multiple conventions and geographical/historical contexts. The utilization of this literary mode is not without critique as it can be "*both an effect and a vehicle for globalization"* (Valdez Moses) and often times can be misappropriated or lead to over-interpretation and generalizations. This analysis of magical realism is similar to the work of Stephano Cagnato, (The Ghost of Magical Realism in World Literature) and his attempt to analyze correlations between frequent word usage, topic modeling and principle component analysis, in providing unseen connections in canonical magical realist texts through authors' linguistic choices as reproducible elements that can be used when writing and sharing stories. By taking a formalist approach to analyzing magical realism as a mode of writing the "*aim is not to strip texts of their inherent cultural qualities; rather, the aim is to analyze how magical realism operates as a technique in fiction independent of cultural context"* (Cagnato)

This research attempts to identify commonly implemented literary techniques of magical realism because of its ability as a mode of storytelling to transcend social, cultural or

temporal realities. The recurrence of magical realism throughout different times and cultures demonstrates a collective need for sensorial, connective contact with forces or phenomena outside of our material reality. Magical realism is a narrative form, like a shamanic performance, creating discourse that suggests the existence of other realities with in or outside of our ordinary one. (Faris)

Although Faris provides a widely accepted version of a definition for magical realism, it does not entirely identify literary attributes or stylistic characteristics. In her text, *The Question of the Other: Cultural Critiques of Magical Realism,* Faris aims to establish criteria for inclusion into the magical realist genre and discusses common thematic attributes. We can look to thematic and stylistic connections to determine practical literary techniques or elements to test for application by a wider, unexpected group, possibly not familiar with the magical realist genre/mode.

Myth/Hybridity

The use myth and hybridity are often directly referenced as common elements within canonical magical realist stories. Hybridity creates a new "*way of seeing in which there is space for the invisible forces that move the world: dreams, legends, myths, emotion, passion, history. All these forces find a place in the absurd, unexplainable aspects of magic realism.... It is the capacity to see and to write about all the dimensions of reality"* (Allende, 54). This ability to write about other dimensions and blend unexpected aspects of reality generates a unique critical multi-logicality (Tzanelli, 39) in the story that challenges or subverts the readers expectations. In *The Man with the Compound Eyes,* Ming- Yi weaves indigenous mythologies of Taiwan with their own hybridized magical rite of passage of an imagined uncontacted Pacific island to highlight the global effects of climate change, historical inequalities in Taiwan and the inevitable merging of past and present day. Nature, 'unknown' cultures and the memories of the past are no longer seen as disconnected phenomena but are adopted to form their own cosmology and critical understanding of the world. Hybridity and myth are devices that can be utilized as entry points into developing stories that disrupts perceived receptions of space, time and history.

Anthropomorphism/ Zoomorphism

The literary technique of anthropomorphism and it's counter part zoomorphism are common characteristics of magical realist storytelling, from Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Murakami's *Shinagawa Monkey* to *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman, its feature in this mode of writing attests to it's captivating ability to affect readers. The use of these techniques is often linked to extended metaphors or symbols around identity or subverting the expectations of reality. In *The Color of Summer* by Reinaldo Arenas the extremity of the repression of sexuality and queer identities literally explodes when two lesbian public buses engage in hot and heavy intercourse. The only survivors of the destruction being the queer fairies, likened to indestructible insects that are able to float away on the winds of change. The juxtaposed use of both of these techniques creates an extended metaphor that attempts to subvert beliefs and perceptions around sexuality and identity. The buses sexual lust precedes its prescribed mechanical reality and servitude and it becomes a *driving* character in the narrative and social critique through human like description, history and actions. The human characters of the group of queers is dehumanized, both to confirm their inhumanity under Castro's repressive regime but also to demonstrate their resilience as outsiders through the magical abilities of non-humans. As devices for practicing magical realist writing they have the potential to highlight questions of agency, representation, and unvoiced or intangible concepts and present them in ways that are accessible to our anthropocentric world views.

To assist other writers that desire a better understanding of the definable aspects of magical realism and continue to explore and play with/in the undefinable, it was necessary to

identify teachable literary techniques that could, more directly, disseminate these common traits through practical writing exercises.

The irreducible elements in the hybrid mode of magical realism estrange the basis of the authority of realism, making way for new forms of discourse that reflect alternative ways of being to emerge. It is that destabilizing of realism, which has a longstanding power of representation in the west, that has made magical realism an enabling discourse for the postcolonial world. (Faris 113)

Maybe a country like Thailand, that strives, through its own magical hybridity, to adapt and keep pace with the realities of this postmodern world, while maintaining and respecting tradition and culture, can represent another form of magical realism's critical multilogicality in addressing factors that exacerbate exploitative global trends.

Critical Tourism

In order to better understand socio-political context of the research and how public arts could function in relation to a predominantly touristic place, a number of scholarly treks into the study of Critical Tourism were needed. Before setting off into texts specifically discussing critical tourism as a topic, *The Crisis of the Social Imaginary* by Cvejic and Vujanovic played a critical role in motivating who this project would engage with and why. While considering the social imaginary significances of Phuket Thailand, the image of the tourist, dominates this landscape.

The identity of Phuket today is synonymous with tourism and attracts travelers from all across the globe and from all walks of life. *Tourist Cultures* by Wearing, Stevenson and Young provides a thorough historical analysis of the forces and trends of tourism and instead of critiquing tourism seeks to contribute to understanding the intersectionality between these forces and trends that are experienced and engaged by both locals and travelers to provide potential models for community based cultural tourism. The author's propose that Soja's concept of third-space can creates a "*fruitful framework for moving beyond the dichotomies of host/guest, traveller/tourist, self/Other and, significantly, flaneur/choraster, to an approach to understanding tourism and the travel experience that is interconnected and holistic."* (Wearing, Stevenson and Young, 127)

In his *Spectral Glossary of Critical Tourism*, Dobriakov separates terms or common themes discussed in cultural critiques of tourism as opposite pairs that represent the extreme ends of the spectra that define the theoretical practices of critical tourism. Because tourism takes on so many forms through different motivations for touring destinations it is very difficult to define the person or the practice in any single way. His work, like that of Wearing, Stevenson, Young, follows a '[*belief] that when we think about the figure of the critical tourist, we must necessarily place it in a spectrum with numerous possible intermediate positions, rather than at any single determined point. But this figure is also spectre-like and hard to pin down or define clearly."* (Dobriakov 52) This study's aim is not to identify the correct type of tourist or ways to travel, but instead looking at how certain actions and relationships of tourism can be further analyzed and lead to more critical and self-conscious agency.

Paula Bialski through her concept of intimate tourism provides a workable method for engaging in a self-actualizing practice of travel through brief but intense encounters and interactions with other travelers or locals. She describes potential strategies for realizing more intimate tourist practices through the example of Couchsurfing and it's users motivations to engage in self-reflexive experiences and personal development through meeting new people and partaking in dialogues around shared needs and interests. She defines her work to understand this motivation further as a dyadic process of familiarization through conversations. Where intimacy can be attained and shared when both individuals engage in a trusting dialogue that calls for "opening up" which can have a fair amount of risk involved.

Whether we want to gain someones trust or we find someone to be trustworthy, it is a magical experience – because it is spontaneous, memorable, personal and informative - to engage in a momentary but intimate interaction.

Through intimate interactions and greater critical awareness as tourist, public space, with all of its nuances, can become more receptive and transformative to open up other routes. That interaction can even begin as a solo trip, on your own, when public space becomes your dialogue partner.

Public Space

Certain narratives (circulated commercially, socio-politically or culturally) dominate and generate predetermined expectations around public spaces in Phuket. Following in the end of the pandemic and return of tourism to the island, many commercial spaces were transformed and new businesses or concepts formed to re-attract visitors. Public spaces for community, arts or recreation were mostly reopened but without updates or engagement. It would be worthwhile to investigate the effects of encouraging and introducing alternative engagements and narratives to these public spaces and to a wider audience.

For my research, I needed to understand the types of uses for public space that were acceptable and appropriate for the context of creating public art engagements in Thailand. In the article, *The Transition of Roles of Public Space in Thailand,* Kongphunphin and Iamtrakul, describe the evolution of public space conceptualization and usage throughout universal and Thai history to uncover factors that influenced the role and functioning of public space in Thai society. The study illustrates transitions in the utilization of public space through the types of social motivations and activities promoted for best serving the public, during each era in Thai history. Public space is viewed as physical spaces, users and social conditions. This study catalogues the past and current trends and motivations of the Thai government to manage or develop public spaces. The most current mandate calls for the further architectural development of public spaces.

The authors point to the importance of understanding space through its formation (physical attributes), lived experiences of users and its conceived representations of its role and function in society. This understanding is related to Lefebvre's trialectic theory of spatiality and is used to understand the various components of what goes into making a space and their intersectional relationships. The authors conclude the article with suggestions:

Suggestions for the next study of public space should be an in-depth study of each dimension of public space, for example, the person dimension is the behavior of using public space. The spatial dimension is the context of the space in which the public take space. And the urban dimension is urban design and planning. Including the study of the relationship of public space in each dimension in order to broadly diversify the concept of being a public space. (Kongphunphin and Iamtrakul, 39)

For this project, public space is viewed in terms of being lived or practiced and how that production of space rejects the notion that it is neutral, powerless or only to be formed or shaped by borders or limits. My research would focus on the behaviors and practices of tourists as a dimension of public space in Phuket and how these lived tourist public spaces can be influenced by the study of critical tourism.

To better understand what alternatives for tourist public practice were possible, it was necessary to understand the current social and political implications of working in public space as an outsider. As described by Caya Greenspan Layman in "*Still Accelerating and Evolving": Southeast Asian Performance Art as a Means of Community Development,* South East Asian nations are invested in nation-building projects that often are restricted "*in the preservation and promotion of traditional artforms [...] Meanwhile, Southeast Asian states have frequently limited their support of contemporary artforms, particularly those developed abroad or bearing strong global influence, on the grounds that these artforms are threats to state*

interests." (Greenspan-Layman, 8) In the particular context of Thailand, there is also the Lese Majeste Law that can legally incriminate someone for speech or action perceived as against the monarchy or government. And especially as a foreigner, there are more restrictions as to what type of engagement I can legally participate in while living in Thailand. Immigration Act (1979) or Tourism and Tourist Guide Business Act (2008)).

For Phuket, tourist public space's identifiable and coherent interpretations, do not need to generate a communal sameness, but can allow and encourage diversity, contradictions, confrontations and dissensus through tactical maneuvers. Public space as lived practice goes beyond simply confronting or criticizing established hierarchies but generates strategies and dialogues to suggest or construct new platforms or paradigms. *Art, against the everyday life becoming commonplace, can be understood as small tactics that demobilize the instituted social practices, creating tiny structures that branch into technocratic structures by changing its operation, hinging on the poetic details of everyday life"- (Art for a Sensitive City by Brigida Campbell)* Artists must constantly (re)claim public space as an autonomous zone and through their art reimagine the social public sphere. I am looking to the art tourist, a 'public as practice', as becoming a model through which people can learn to be more aware of what we might do or not do when we are outside of the normal constraints of *everyday life.*

The choice of viewpoints as a public space for my project is inspired by Foucault's in-between, other space or heterotopia (similar to Soja's third-space). These locations are counter-sites that reveal our processes or ordering of the world because they represent places without distinct orders or standards of order. Discourse around them can become problematic but utilizing them as a public space for discourse around tourist practice could lead to creative tactics or opens up new ways of discourse. Viewpoints, because of their in-between nature, could be physical spaces with the potential to disrupt the search for familiarity and lead to practice that adjusts to the environment and is in dialogue with the space. Our public practices become combinations of chance and choice and public spaces reflect and represent those present or absent practices. What types of spaces there are, also allow us to consider what practices exist. These spaces become destinations of importance to us. And how they are in turn shaped by our expectations in order to attract others or re-invite us.

What then are our motivations towards these spaces when we are open and in-between and on our own? Not to disregard the every day experience, but to focus on the experience of traveling and how it already opens other doors - to help us rethink how we can open our own doors. When we are tourists, we are more aware of our ability to engage or disengage with public practices because we are free of other obligations and excuses that confine us to practice public in a certain way. We might be more open to try out something new or different – as a necessary experience of traveling and exploring – to disrupt our sense of comfort. Or we might decide to seek seclusion and relax at the resort all day because we do not want any disruption to our precious free time. We become more aware of our agency, in the role of a tourist, and it has the potential to make us re-evaluate our responsibilities and roles. It is necessary to further investigate this interplay through observation and analysis of public practices in tourist spaces in Phuket.

A Personal Recipe for Writing Stories of Magical Realism in Public Space

-Begin with a question or concern about an issue or interaction you observe within yourself or the world.

-Go to a public location related to your question and practice an exercises that opens awareness and focuses attention. Practice this exercises (10-20 minutes). My personal favorite exercise is touring the location and gathering observations that relate to my question or concern and/or encountering stories already existing there through reading, listening and unintended encounters.

-Record any and all observations and notes taken at the location in a notebook. -Find

a spot that feels comfortable and conducive for writing for an extended duration.

- Set a timer for 30 – 60 minutes. During the time, try to practice automatic writing and continuously use that time to write. When one idea or story no longer keeps the pen moving, look back to observations or your question to start again or begin a new writing fragment. When writing with magical realism, if making magic does not come intuitively, working with literary techniques often found in magical realist stories can help initiate magical writing. I have found anthropomorphism, exaggeration and hybridity to be very useful techniques for infusing reality with magic.

-Ask questions about the fragments written during the timeframe. (5 minutes)

-Questions to ask: How does the magic function in relation to its realist counterpart, and vice versa? How do the two codes correspond with the text's other narrative elements – aspects such as characterization, narration, and thematics – as well as in relation to the entire narrative web? How are the narrative and its author and critics responding to their historical milieu?

-Evaluate how these fragments are operating. Is the text focused more on subversion (magic as a subversive agent), suspension (magic and realism as incompatible – producing textual voids) or summation (materializing and constructing what is missing)? How is that mode of operation related or informed to the space? (5-10minutes)

-Rewrite and/or story-map these fragments into a magical realism story that is informed by one or more ways of operating and tells a story related to your question or concern. Or not and that is okay too! (10-20 minutes)

-Take a break from the writing. Let it ruminate for some time. At least half a day or over night. Don't let it rest for too long or it might expire. Let yourself daydream or dream about the story and how your imagination attempts to fill gaps in the story. Write down any notes for story that come up while ruminating.

-Return to your notebook. Reread your story writing and notes. Ask yourself the following questions about the writing.

-Is the magical component obvious or developed enough? -Is the realistic component obvious or developed enough? -What are your thoughts or perceptions about this space after encountering this story?

-What parts of the story are recognizable aspects of the place? -What themes are emerging from writing about this place?

-Continue the writing. Rewriting aspects after the questions or adding to the existing story. This can be done in the space or at home but returning to the space and repeating this process is advised.

-Repeat this process until the writing feels ready to share.

Storytelling Postcards

Storytelling postcards were developed as an interactive writing tool to help others engage with different literary techniques as a way to develop magical realist stories. This form was inspired by creative practices explored by Galvan and Spasojevic for Mapping Nottingham and a suggestion from my coach Heleen de Hoon. The postcards would be used to guide and encourage others to practice a form of craftsmomentum through touring, writing and sharing stories. The front side of the postcard is used to record the participants experience (reality) of the place through observation (of tourist practices in later versions). Participants are instructed to map, draw or write their observations to allow for their own multilogical reception and documentation of the place. These observations are then used to inspire, inform or initiate writing practice with a literary technique commonly used in magical realist writing. A description of the technique is provided to help explain its meaning or usage. Participants can practice activating their own magic and transform their observations into story through the framing or usage of the literary technique.

I worked with Dobriakov's *Spectral Glossary of Critical Tourism* to see how it could be used to generate questions/prompts or adapted as thematic framings for the series of postcards. Instead of recording observations of their experience (a vague direction), participants would focus attention towards the tourist practices between the different spectra, a way to actively relate the study of critical tourism into the story writing process. I initially worked with prompts around memories of travel, using sensory exercises and questions to access and record memories and place them within a given spectra of critical tourism. I designed questions and ideas for possible "litmus" styled tests, scales and visual representations of the spectra to write memories or observations. The different postcard designs I played around with to visually represent the spectra were too complicated (requiring explanation) or too difficult for me to create digitally.

The simplicity of the original postcard design worked better as an easily accessible and interactive space. I went back to the original design and how I could describe the spectral extremes clearly enough on the front side for participants to understand and frame their observations. Meeting with the writers group, formed as another experiment with collective writing here in Phuket, helped me to narrow down the choices of spectra to use for the project. We practiced describing the different spectra with personal travel examples and where they might fall on the spectrum and why. The group was then asked for feedback about which spectra seemed most understandable and fruitful for writing. The group gravitated towards; wish ↔ desire, getting there ↔ getting lost and gaze ↔ bodily involvement. I settled on the spectrum of getting there ↔ getting lost to use as the spectral theme for observations. It was a bit easier to describe to others and it had become a running theme throughout my work and the work I encountered through research. The postcards were redesigned to include a description of the spectral extremes and instructions for participants to record their experiences and observations of the choices, they and others make, as tourists.

From these story fragments we can use post-textual analysis to understand and define the purpose of the magical reality that was created and how it's own unique logics can help us better understand the publics/public spaces we are observing or questioning.

Results

-The postcard form as an interactive storytelling tool has potential to engage non-artist in artistic practice and can be further developed as an educational writing tool. I am continuing to test them out further with wider audiences and in other locations and contexts. I am also analyzing storytelling postcard examples from the experiments to determine their success in crafting magical realist stories that are informed/connected to the public space.

-Magical realist story compilation of different public spaces in Phuket to present feedback and possible tactics for the Tourist Authority of Thailand, tour guides, and local organizers to engage tourist and local culture more connectively. At present this story compilation is represented by stories of my own and I hope to include stories from other authors in the future.

-Blending tourist practices with artistic practice has proven an interesting method to engage and intersect different communities. A consistent practice of hybridity was explored in writing, creating exercises and engagements to blend the expected with the unexpected as a way to subversively critique current tourist trends and allow others to view their own practices from a more critical vantage point. Blended activities have the potential to generate alternative understandings or expectations around possibilities when traveling. Although the hiking and storytelling tours that were first attempted lacked a direct critical questioning or framing, there is potential in hybrid forms of engagement for generating greater awareness, criticality and expectations for travelers. Guiding or leading tours may be out of the legal

practices I am allowed living here, but other ways to continue this practice or developing other blended engagements is a future endeavor of mine.

Possible future routes to explore from this research:

-Based around the work of Kim Sasser, writing stories of magical realism could help to identify alternative narratives, actions or engagements tourists could choose to make while visiting Phuket, or traveling in general. When looking at magical realist stories we can identify these alternatives by analyzing if the text is focused more on subversion (magic as a subversive agent), suspension (magic and realism as incompatible – producing textual voids) or summation (materializing and constructing what is missing) and how that mode of operation is related or informed by the tourist space. Sasser's proposed way to analyze magical realist stories through subversion, suspension and summation, has possibilities to explore identifying aspects of reality and practice, that could use some rethinking and imaginative and magical transformation. This will be further investigated into applicable exercises or questions when writing, sharing and analyzing stories of magical realism written in different communities.

-Further developing a multi-logical methodological approach to magical realist art making through process of trial and error.

-Contribution to further approaches of Speculative Tourism through story writing and sharing across multi-cultural communities in South East Asia.

Conclusion

At this time the work is still continuing and the only conclusion I can make is that there is potential in a magical realist approach to art making. The act of writing in public space connects you further with environments, cultures, others, stories and the multi-logical and phenomenal approach magical realism can generate stories that subvert personal, communal or societal expectations. Highlighting a void, connection, difference, similarity – spectrum of perspectives – and generating awareness, questions or confrontations with aspects of our world that need some magical attention.

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Stage of Self: Empowering First-Year Students through Theatre-Based Self-Discovery

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Abstract

This study examines the "Performing Arts for Self-Discovery" (PFA 108) course at Bangkok University, investigating how a seven-week intensive program uses theatre practice to help first-year students discover their identity, build empathy, and clarify their goals. The course combines acting techniques with contemporary digital media creation, reflecting the hybrid nature of modern performance and communication. Through action research methodology across multiple cohorts (2018-present), this study documents the transformative effects of experiential theatre pedagogy on student development. Data collection included facilitator field notes, student reflective journals, and focus group discussions. Results indicate three consistent outcomes: heightened self-awareness, strengthened empathy and trust, and enhanced sense of direction, with over 80% of participants reporting greater clarity about academic and career goals. The findings suggest that integrating creative, reflective theatre processes into early university curricula can accelerate students' psychosocial development and enhance their readiness for both artistic and non-artistic pursuits.

Keywords: theatre pedagogy, self-discovery, experiential learning, first-year students, identity formation, empathy development

Purpose

The transition to university represents a critical period in young adults' psychological and social development, characterized by identity exploration, relationship formation, and goal clarification (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). For first-year students, this transition often involves navigating newfound independence while confronting fundamental questions about personal identity, values, and future direction. Traditional academic approaches, while valuable for intellectual development, may not adequately address the holistic developmental needs of emerging adults.

Theatre, as both an artistic medium and pedagogical tool, offers unique opportunities for personal growth and self-discovery. The embodied nature of theatrical practice engages multiple dimensions of human experience—cognitive, emotional, physical, and social—creating conditions conducive to deep personal reflection and transformation (Nicholson, 2011). Unlike purely cognitive learning approaches, theatre-based pedagogy involves the whole person, integrating mind, body, and emotion in ways that can facilitate profound insights about identity and purpose.

Since 2018, Bangkok University has implemented the "Performing Arts for Self-Discovery" (PFA 108) course, a seven-week intensive program designed specifically to harness theatre's transformative potential for first-year student development. The course emerged from recognition that contemporary students face unprecedented challenges in identity formation, including social media pressures, economic uncertainty, and rapidly changing career landscapes. Additionally, the modern performance industry increasingly demands multi-platform creators capable of producing content independently, necessitating both technical skills and strong personal identity foundations.

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of theatre-based experiential pedagogy in fostering first-year student development across three key areas: self-awareness, empathy development, and goal clarification. Specifically, the research investigates how structured theatre practices can serve as catalysts for identity exploration and personal growth during the critical first year of university study. The study also explores the integration of traditional theatre techniques with contemporary digital media creation, reflecting the hybrid nature of modern performance and communication.

The significance of this research extends beyond performing arts education. As universities increasingly recognize the importance of supporting students' holistic development, understanding effective approaches to identity formation and personal growth becomes essential for all academic disciplines. The findings may inform broader discussions about experiential learning, student engagement, and the role of creative practices in higher education.

Approach

This research employed an action research methodology, chosen for its emphasis on practical problem-solving and continuous improvement of educational practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Action research allows educators to systematically study their own teaching while simultaneously working to improve it, making it particularly appropriate for investigating innovative pedagogical approaches. The cyclical nature of action research—involving planning, action, observation, and reflection—aligned well with the iterative development of the PFA 108 course over multiple years.

Research Design

The study followed a longitudinal action research design conducted over seven consecutive years (2018-2025), encompassing multiple cohorts of first-year performing arts students. Each annual cohort constituted one cycle of the action research process, with findings from one year informing modifications and improvements for subsequent iterations. This approach enabled the researcher to refine the course structure and content based on accumulated evidence while maintaining fidelity to core pedagogical principles.

Participants

Participants included all students enrolled in the PFA 108 course across the seven-year period, totaling approximately 210 students (averaging 30 students per cohort). All participants were first-year students in the Performing Arts program at Bangkok University, aged 18-20 years. The sample included both Thai and international students, with roughly equal gender representation. Participation in the research component was voluntary, with informed consent obtained according to university ethical guidelines.

Course Structure and Implementation

The PFA 108 course was structured as a seven-week intensive program divided into two complementary modules:

Module 1: Bedroom Studio focused on technical skills and digital platform adaptation, teaching students to create professional-quality content using accessible home technology. This module addressed the reality of modern performance careers, where artists must function as multi-platform creators capable of producing content independently. Activities included video production techniques, audio recording, lighting design, and social media content creation.

Module 2: BE YOU centered on identity exploration through acting exercises, storytelling workshops, and self-scrutiny techniques. Using side-coaching methods and structured reflection, students examined their personal narratives, developed self-acceptance, and established future goals. This module drew upon established theatre pedagogy traditions while incorporating contemporary approaches to identity work.

The weekly progression followed a carefully scaffolded structure:

• **Week 1:** Audition process establishing baseline skills and self-assessment
• **Week 2:** Identity-focused acting exercises and self-awareness activities
• **Week 3:** Narrative development through storytelling workshops
• **Week 4:** Project proposal presentations integrating self-discovery with technical skills
• **Weeks 5-6:** Intensive rehearsal and refinement with continuous feedback
• **Week 7:** Final "This Is Me" presentations demonstrating integrated learning

Theoretical Framework

The course design integrated three primary theoretical frameworks:

Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) provided the foundational structure, emphasizing the cyclical process of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Each class session incorporated all four stages, ensuring students could both experience new practices and reflect on their personal significance. truthful, moment-to-moment response and authentic emotional connection. Meisner's approach to "living truthfully under imaginary circumstances" proved particularly relevant for identity exploration work.

Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1979) techniques, particularly Image Theatre and Forum Theatre, provided tools for exploring personal obstacles and envisioning alternative futures. These approaches enabled students to embody their challenges and experiment with different responses.

Data Collection Methods

Multiple data collection methods ensured comprehensive documentation of student experiences and outcomes:

Facilitator Field Notes: The instructor maintained detailed observational records of each session, noting student engagement, breakthrough moments, resistance patterns, and emerging themes. These notes captured both individual student development and group dynamics.

Student Reflective Journals: All participants maintained weekly reflective journals, responding to structured prompts about their experiences, insights, and evolving self-understanding. Journal prompts included questions such as "What did you discover about yourself today?" and "How has your understanding of your goals changed?"

Focus Group Discussions: End-of-course focus groups provided opportunities for students to articulate their experiences collectively and reflect on the course's impact. These sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Pre- and Post-Course Surveys: Standardized questionnaires assessed student self-perception across multiple domains, including self-awareness, empathy, goal clarity, and confidence levels. These instruments provided quantitative data to complement qualitative observations.

Performance Documentation: Video recordings of final presentations captured students' creative expressions of their self-discovery journeys, providing additional evidence of learning outcomes.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis followed an iterative thematic coding approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All textual data—including field notes, journal entries, and focus group transcripts—were coded using both deductive codes derived from the theoretical framework and inductive codes emerging from the data itself. The coding process involved multiple rounds of analysis, with themes refined and consolidated through constant comparison across data sources and cohorts.

Quantitative survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and paired-samples t-tests to assess changes in self-reported measures from pre- to post-course. Effect sizes were calculated to determine practical significance of observed changes.

Cross-cohort analysis examined consistency of findings across the seven-year period, identifying stable patterns while noting variations that might inform future course development.

Results

Analysis of data across seven annual cohorts revealed three consistent and significant themes in student development: heightened self-awareness, strengthened empathy and trust, and enhanced sense of direction. These themes emerged consistently across all data sources and remained stable across different cohorts and years.

Heightened Self-Awareness

Students demonstrated marked improvements in self-understanding and articulation of personal values, emotions, and motivations. Journal entries from early weeks typically contained surface-level observations and generic statements about goals and interests. By course completion, entries showed significantly greater depth, specificity, and emotional vocabulary.

Representative early journal entry: "I want to be an actor because I like performing and being on stage. It's fun and I'm good at it."

Representative final journal entry: "Through the balloon of ambition exercise, I realized my drive to perform comes from a deep need to connect with others and share stories that matter. When I couldn't reach that balloon, I felt the same desperation I experienced as a child when adults wouldn't listen to me. Acting isn't just about being on stage—it's about being heard and helping others feel less alone."

Focus group discussions revealed students' surprise at their capacity for self-reflection. One participant noted, "I never thought I was someone who could look inside myself like this. I always thought I knew who I was, but this course showed me I barely scratched the surface."

The self-scrutiny exercises proved particularly powerful in facilitating self-awareness. Students reported that the guided questions about childhood, dreams, and regrets opened doors to previously unexamined aspects of their identities. The fetal womb regression exercise, while initially challenging for many students, consistently produced breakthrough moments in self-understanding.

Quantitative data supported these qualitative observations. Pre-course self-awareness ratings averaged 3.2 on a 7-point scale, while post-course ratings averaged 5.8 ($t = 12.4$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.8$), indicating a large effect size.

Strengthened Empathy and Trust

The course's emphasis on collaborative creation and vulnerable sharing fostered significant improvements in students' capacity for empathy and interpersonal trust. Early group work often revealed typical challenges of first-year students: competitiveness, surface-level engagement, and reluctance to be vulnerable. By mid-course, group dynamics shifted dramatically toward mutual support, deep listening, and genuine care for peers' growth.

connection. Students learned to attend carefully to others' nonverbal communication and respond authentically to subtle cues. These skills transferred into all subsequent group activities, creating an atmosphere of psychological safety that enabled deeper exploration.

Theatre games specifically designed for trust-building proved essential in this development. The progression from simple name games to complex emotional improvisation required students to gradually increase their vulnerability while learning to hold space for

others' authentic expression. Students consistently reported these exercises as among the most challenging yet transformative aspects of the course.

Focus group data revealed the relational impact: "Before this class, I was always worried about what people thought of me. Now I realize everyone is dealing with their own stuff, and when I really listen to someone, it helps both of us feel less alone."

The collaborative final projects demonstrated students' enhanced capacity for empathetic creation. Groups consistently developed performances that honored each member's individual journey while creating cohesive artistic statements. The quality of peer feedback improved dramatically throughout the course, evolving from generic praise to specific, constructive, and emotionally intelligent observations.

Survey data confirmed significant improvements in empathy measures, with mean scores increasing from 3.7 to 5.9 on a 7-point scale ($t = 11.8$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.7$).

Enhanced Sense of Direction

Perhaps the most practically significant outcome involved students' increased clarity about academic and career goals. Over 80% of participants reported greater certainty about their future direction by course completion, with many describing fundamental shifts in their understanding of their aspirations.

This clarity emerged through the integration of self-awareness work with practical skill development. Students who initially pursued performing arts for external validation often discovered deeper motivations through the identity exploration exercises. Conversely, students who began with vague artistic interests developed specific goals through the technical skill-building components.

The "This Is Me" final presentations served as culminating integration experiences, requiring students to synthesize their self-discoveries into coherent artistic statements. These presentations consistently revealed students' evolved understanding of their purposes and directions.

Journal entries documented this evolution: "I came to university thinking I wanted to be famous. Now I realize I want to create work that helps people understand each other better. Fame might come or not, but the work itself is what matters."

The balloon of ambition exercise proved particularly effective in clarifying authentic goals. By embodying their desires physically and experiencing obstacles viscerally, students gained clearer understanding of what they truly wanted versus what they thought they should want.

Faculty advisors reported noticeable improvements in students' academic planning conversations following course completion. Students articulated more specific goals, demonstrated better understanding of their learning needs, and showed increased motivation for subsequent coursework.

Quantitative data revealed significant improvements in goal clarity, with pre-course ratings of 2.9 increasing to post-course ratings of 5.6 ($t = 14.2$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 2.1$).

Additional Findings

Several secondary themes emerged across cohorts that, while not universal, appeared frequently enough to warrant attention:

Reduced Performance Anxiety: Many students reported decreased fear of judgment and increased willingness to take creative risks. The safe space created through trust-building exercises appeared to generalize beyond the classroom.

Improved Communication Skills: Students demonstrated enhanced ability to articulate complex emotions and ideas, both in artistic contexts and everyday interactions.

Cultural Bridge-Building: For international students, the course provided valuable opportunities to share their cultural perspectives while learning about Thai culture through local classmates' stories.

Career Flexibility: Students developed broader understanding of creative career possibilities, moving beyond narrow conceptions of "success" in the arts.

Challenges and Limitations

The research revealed several consistent challenges that informed ongoing course development:

Initial Resistance: Approximately 20% of students initially resisted the vulnerability required for deep self-exploration. These students typically required additional support and modified exercises to engage fully.

Cultural Considerations: Some cultural backgrounds emphasized individual privacy over public sharing, requiring culturally sensitive modifications to sharing exercises.

Time Constraints: Seven weeks, while intensive, sometimes felt insufficient for students who needed more time to process their discoveries.

Sustainability: Some students struggled to maintain their insights and motivation after course completion, suggesting need for follow-up support.

Conclusion

Theatre-based experiential pedagogy, when delivered in an intensive, intentionally scaffolded format, functions as a powerful catalyst for first-year students' personal growth and development. The consistent emergence of heightened self-awareness, strengthened empathy, and enhanced direction across seven cohorts demonstrates the replicability and reliability of these outcomes.

The study's findings contribute to several important conversations in higher education. First, they provide empirical support for the value of creative, embodied approaches to student development. While universities increasingly recognize the importance of supporting students' holistic growth, concrete evidence for effective approaches remains limited. This research demonstrates that carefully structured theatre experiences can produce measurable improvements in key developmental areas.

Second, the integration of traditional theatre techniques with contemporary digital media skills offers a model for bridging classical artistic training with modern professional demands. Students developed both timeless capacities for self-reflection and empathy alongside practical skills for digital content creation, preparing them for careers that require both artistic depth and technological fluency.

Third, the research highlights the particular value of intensive, immersive educational experiences for identity formation. The seven-week format created conditions for rapid development that might not emerge in traditional semester-long courses with less frequent meetings. The compressed timeframe appeared to intensify students' commitment and accelerate their growth processes.

The study's methodology—longitudinal action research—proved valuable for continuous course improvement while maintaining research rigor. This approach enabled the researcher to refine pedagogical practices based on accumulated evidence while preserving fidelity to core principles. Future research might benefit from similar methodological approaches that honor both educational innovation and scholarly investigation.

Implications for Practice

The findings suggest several practical implications for higher education:

First-Year Programming: Universities seeking to support student transition and development might consider incorporating similar theatre-based experiences into first-year programming, either as standalone courses or integrated components of orientation programs.

Faculty Development: The success of the approach depends heavily on instructor capacity to create psychological safety while maintaining appropriate challenge. Faculty development programs could help educators across disciplines incorporate elements of experiential, reflective pedagogy.

Cross-Disciplinary Application: While this study focused on performing arts students, the core principles of embodied self-reflection and collaborative creation could potentially benefit students in other fields.

Assessment Innovation: The multiple assessment approaches used in this study—combining traditional measures with creative expression and reflective writing—offer models for evaluating holistic student development.

Future Research Directions

This study opens several avenues for future investigation:

Longitudinal Follow-Up: Tracking students' continued development beyond course completion would provide valuable data about the sustainability of observed changes.

Comparative Studies: Comparing theatre-based approaches with other experiential learning methods could help identify the unique contributions of theatrical pedagogy.

Cross-Cultural Research: Investigating how these approaches translate across different cultural contexts could inform international applications.

Disciplinary Extensions: Exploring applications of similar approaches in non-arts fields could broaden the impact of these findings.

Final Reflections

The transformation consistently observed in students participating in the "Performing Arts for Self-Discovery" course reflects theatre's fundamental capacity to serve as a mirror for human experience. By creating safe spaces for vulnerable exploration and providing structured frameworks for reflection, theatre-based pedagogy enables students to encounter themselves more fully and relate to others more authentically.

The course's success suggests that universities have opportunities to support student development in profound ways by integrating creative, embodied approaches into their curricula. As students face increasingly complex challenges in identity formation and career preparation, educational approaches that address the whole person become not just valuable but essential.

The research demonstrates that when theatre is used with intention and care, it becomes far more than entertainment or even artistic training—it becomes a pathway to self-discovery, empathy, and purposeful direction. For first-year students navigating the critical transition to adulthood, such pathways may prove invaluable in establishing foundations for lifelong learning and growth.

Through continued research and application, theatre-based pedagogies can contribute meaningfully to higher education's evolving understanding of how to prepare students not just for careers, but for lives of authenticity, empathy, and purpose.

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Embodied and Visual Narratives: Kinaesthetic and Photographic Practices for Reimagining Community

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ABSTRACT

This joint presentation explores how kinaesthetic and photographic practices operate as non-hierarchical, community-driven methodologies that challenge conventional pedagogical and artistic structures. Through movement and visual storytelling, we consider how embodied and photographic practices foster agency, collective creation, and alternative epistemologies across cultural contexts.The first part, *The Art of Non-Directive Facilitation*, investigates how kinaesthetic suggestion supports inclusive movement practices. Using a practice-as-research approach, it explores how individuals – particularly those without formal dance experience – develop self-knowledge through non-instructive movement. Drawing parallels with Pichet Klunchun's blend of Thai classical and contemporary dance, this study frames movement as a tool for community resilience and creative reimagination beyond didactic norms. The second part, *Reimagining Community through Photography: Yuki Kihara's Collective Artistic Practices*, examines photography in the Asia-Pacific as both aesthetic and political resistance. Focused on Yuki Kihara's *Paradise Camp* (2021), it explores how recontextualizing colonial imagery centers Fa'afafine identity and queer Indigenous agency. Informed by theories of Indigenous Methodologies, Shared Creation and cosmotechnics, the work challenges dominant visual regimes and power structures. Together, these case studies highlight how embodied and visual methodologies can catalyze social innovation and cultural sustainability. They demonstrate how artistic research can build resilient communities, elevate lived experience, and offer transdisciplinary tools for imagining equitable and fairer futures. Through this lens, art becomes a powerful space for alternative ways of knowing, being, and creating in community.

Keywords: Pedagogical-Artistic, Methodologies; Collectiveness; Kinaesthetic Experience; Indigenous Methodologies; Shared Creation.

INTRODUCTION

This joint presentation examines how kinaesthetic and photographic practices function as non-hierarchical, community-driven methodologies, challenging traditional pedagogical and artistic structures. By engaging movement and visual storytelling as modes of artistic research, we examine how embodied and photographic practices foster agency, collective creation, and epistemological imagination in different cultural contexts.

Firstly, *The Art of Non-Directive Facilitation* investigates kinaesthetic suggestion as a tool for inclusive movement practices. Through a practice-as-research framework, it explores how 'people who do not usually dance' develop kinaesthetic self-knowledge when freed from instructive structures. This research finds parallels in Pichet Klunchun's choreographic methodologies, which blend Thai classical and contemporary dance through non-hierarchical, community-based knowledge transmission. By positioning movement as a generative practice, this study examines how dance builds resilient communities, reimagines collective life, fostering creative alternatives to conventional didactic approaches.

Secondly, *Reimagining Community through Photography: Yuki Kihara's Collective Artistic Practices*, inquires how photography in the Asia-Pacific region functions as an aesthetic and political act that challenges colonial logic and visual regimes of power. Grounded in methodological theories, cosmotechnics, and distribution of the sensible, this

research focuses on Yuki Kihara's Paradise Camp (2021) – a project that reclaims/recontextualizes colonial imagery of Sāmoa, centering the Fa'afafine community. By prioritizing collective authorship and Indigenous queer agency, Kihara's work exemplifies how artistic research can transform knowledge production, identity politics, and social representation.

This presentation reflects on how embodied/visual methodologies serve as catalysts for social innovation and cultural sustainability, contributing to reimagining collective life through movement and image-making; building resilient communities by prioritizing lived experience; creating sustainable futures through transdisciplinary artistic research practices. With artistic methodologies, this joint exploration seeks to illuminate how artistic research fosters alternative ways of connecting people through kinaesthetic and photographic works, to create a dialogue between artists and communities.

1. T*he Art of Non-Directive Facilitation*

1.1. Framework and Intentions – *Kinaesthetic Self-knowledge*

This investigation emerged from an interest in refining both pedagogical and artistic practices in dance, with the aim of developing proposals for movement exploration that avoid being overly directive, prescriptive, or rigid. In other words, the project is guided by a dual intention: to enhance the quality of pedagogical and artistic intervention, and to generate a heuristic contribution through reflective, practice-based research.

The research also aimed to deepen understanding of the connections between these orientations, explored through work with people who do not usually dance, focusing on experiences and reflections involving bodily, verbal, and sensorial communication. Additionally, it examines how engaging with this group contributes to pedagogical development within dance training contexts. In other words, the proposal seeks to optimize the suggestion and exploration of movement with people who do not usually dance, which in turn informs and enhances practice with individuals who are already familiar with dance.

At its core, *kinaesthetic self-knowledge*, as developed throughout this study, draws on phenomenological thought and understanding – that is, thinking *with* the body rather than merely *about* the body. This concept encompasses a fluid sense of self-awareness that integrates bodily knowledge, movement, and the creative possibilities that may arise from them, particularly through the exploration of improvisation, composition, and choreographic creation. This understanding aligns with and finds theoretical grounding in Merleau-Ponty's statement: "The phenomenological world is not the explicitness of a prior being, but the foundation of being; philosophy is not the reflection of a prior truth, but, like art, the realization of a truth" (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 18). *Kinaesthetic self-knowledge*, in this context, emerges as a mode of seeking truth and self-discovery through the practice of dance.

The complexity of self-knowledge – from Socrates to contemporary thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty, including figures like Nietzsche and Heidegger (Shusterman, 2012) – grants *somatic practices* an oblique access to interiority. The influence of Eastern philosophies on Western thought has also shaped the development of somatic practices, fostering connections between philosophy and mind-body experiences, such as martial arts and yoga (see Eddy, 2009, p. 7). Similarly, it is useful to recall that the Stoics conceived philosophy as an *exercise*, thus not confined to abstract theory, but as a way of life (Hadot, 2019).

With this analysis in mind, another body of academic work inspired the development of kinaesthetic suggestion as a tool for inclusive movement practices. Among these contributions, studies on *somatic practices* and *inclusive dance* (e.g., Andersson & Almqvist, 2017 and 2020) stand out, as they challenge conventional conceptions by valuing *bodily memory* without associating ageing with physical decline (Hanna, 1988; Schwaiger, 2012). Although somatic practices have existed in the West since the late 19th century, it was only in the 1970s that they were formally named as such by Thomas Hanna (cf. Eddy, 2009, p. 7).

Through intersections with existential and phenomenological philosophy, dance has both shaped and propelled the field of somatics (Eddy, 2009), becoming what Ginot (2013, p. 22) describes as "the discipline of the erudition of feeling." In this context, somatics relies on the trustworthiness of embodiment – that is, its degree of awareness – emerging from its stripping down, with an emphasis on physical sensation rather than performance or external display (Spatz, 2015), thereby constituting an exploration and development of perceptual capacities (Fortin, 2021).

The notion of *inclusive modes of movement*, as developed through research on somatic practices and inclusive dance, resonates strongly with Pichet Klunchun's choreographic methodologies, which blend Thai classical and contemporary dance through non-hierarchical, community-based knowledge transmission. Klunchun's work challenges rigid structures of traditional pedagogy by fostering a horizontal exchange of embodied knowledge that honors both cultural specificity and personal experience. This approach mirrors the somatic emphasis on perception, bodily memory, and interior sensation over aesthetic display, as well as the philosophical grounding of movement as a form of lived inquiry. His methodology underscores the value of alternative ways of knowing through the body, enabling dance to become a space of mutual learning and inclusive engagement – principles central to both somatic inquiry and the development of *inclusive modes of movement*.

Building on the studies previously discussed, this investigation examined how individuals without conventional dance training reflect upon and articulate their experiences while dancing. This research aims to contribute to scholarly discourse on the diverse strategies through which kinaesthetic self-knowledge can be cultivated among people who do not have a systematic dance practice, by means of both *embodied practices* and the *practice-as-research* methodology (Spatz, 2015). These approaches are intended to support the development of *inclusive modalities of movement*.

To further refine this argument, we can turn to the foundational understanding of dance techniques as systematic methods of bodily training (cf. Foster, 1997). These techniques structure the way the body is perceived, analyzing its expressive information and framing it within demonstrative and idealized physical forms. Each dance method cultivates physical attributes – strength, flexibility, alignment, dynamic shaping, rhythmic precision, and controlled tension – while also constructing an embodied spatial awareness. This consciousness is typically activated through choreographed sequences, often modeled by an instructor's demonstrative physicality.

In this framework, dance techniques operate as epistemic practices – ways of knowing, inhabiting, and shaping the body. More broadly, kinesthetic techniques consist of codified, reproducible movement systems that encode not only physical actions, but also embodied experiences, mental imagery, and culturally situated notions of selfhood. Their transmission carries significant social and cultural meaning, reflecting deeper values about discipline, aesthetics, and identity.

1.2. Methodological Approach – phenomenological and hermeneutic orientations in artistic research

The methodological paradigm underpinning this investigation positions practice as a mode of inquiry. In this context, phenomenological and hermeneutic orientations inform the artistic nature of the study, guiding it through qualitatively interpretive methods of observation (Patton, 2015).The desire to work with a group of people who do not usually dance, as a way to refine teaching and choreographic practice, arised from several interconnected reasons. One of them stems from an effort to reduce the space between non-dancers, as well as choreographic works and processes in general. This was achieved by working from human diversity and opening up the possibility for these participants to experience these dimensions holistically – both physically and mentally – thus contributing to the creative process of the

project. This ambition to foster a different kind of relationship between audience and creator parallels the idea, discussed by Jorge Ramos do Ó (2019), of narrowing the gap between reader and writer and challenging the commonly imposed hierarchy between reading and writing. In this context, the study considers the relationship between watching and creating choreographic works.

To avoid the risk of bias in the data collected, a triangulation approach was employed to ensure the rigor and reliability of the research. This involved cross-referencing information gathered from observations with narratives obtained through interviews, voice recordings/messages, and group discussions.To guide the identification of key objectives, the research drew on 'sensitizing concepts' (Patton, 2015), which provided a flexible framework for interpreting participants' experiences. Specifically, notions such as 'well-being', 'freedom', 'self-fulfillment', 'sociability', 'awareness', and 'self-knowledge' informed the analytical process. These concepts facilitated the adoption of a nuanced and contextually grounded perspective in observing the immediacy of laboratory settings, supported by systematic tools for analyzing the collected data.

In a structured manner, field notes were taken throughout the 'movement sessions', documenting how participants responded to proposed activities, as well as questions that emerged from observing their movements and were intended to be posed subsequently. In parallel, reflective texts were written based on these field notes and, more broadly, on the experiences accumulated during the sessions. These reflections were composed shortly after each session, aiming to capture and integrate sensations and thoughts arising from a close and engaged observation of the 'movement sessions'.

1.3. Insights – *inclusive modes of movement*

Through the implementation of the 'movement sessions' – with continuous awareness of the various connections this activity held with other aspects of professional life, both artistic and academic – and in conjunction with conversations and interviews conducted with participants, it became possible to discern the core of the intervention, namely: how it was carried out, rather than what was initially proposed.

It is clear that the selected movement exploration prompts played an important role in shaping that space, and other components of the sessions. However, with temporal distance and following an extended post-session research process, greater emphasis is gradually placed on how each proposal was facilitated. This refers specifically to the manner of presentation, the suggestions introduced during execution, and the comments made in conjunction with opening dialogue among all participants. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that not only the spoken words, but also tone of voice, body language, and the sensitivity developed through theoretical-methodological considerations contributed to this process. Particular attention is given to the role of tact in the "artistic-instinctive induction [and the] recognition of authority" (Gadamer, 1996, p. 21), which required careful negotiation throughout the 'movement sessions'.

Another insight that emerged from this investigation arose particularly through reflection on the events that unfolded during the sessions, revealing commonalities across the various groups involved in different instances of facilitated movement exploration. One such recurring aspect is a tendency – and perhaps even a need – to add something extra, often unnecessary, to the simple premises underlying these kinesthetic explorations.It was observed that initially working with people who do not usually dance as a way to inform broader artistic and pedagogical practices also made it possible to identify certain aspects that are often overlooked in other contexts. Over the course of the investigation, it became evident that these aspects stood out precisely because the participants were people unfamiliar to a consistent dance practice. Had the project been developed with individuals already embedded in the world of dance, the themes that emerged as key tendencies throughout the study would likely

not have gained the same prominence, nor would their relevance across other areas of practice have become as apparent.

Throughout this exploration of *inclusive modes of movement*, it became evident that dance is, at its core, fundamentally an act of embodiment. It can be understood as a practice so deeply lived, so frequently repeated and mapped, and so intimately tied to memory and anticipation that it transforms into a visceral feeling (cf. Burrows, 2022). Similarly, the process of defining this concept's scope revealed a critical tension: the need to investigate movement exploration methods that do not rely on any single body as an 'ideal' kinetic reference point.

2. Reimagining Community through Photography: Yuki Kihara's Collective Artistic Practices

2.1 From the Colonial Gaze to Imagetic Autonomy

Photography in the Asia-Pacific region emerges as an aesthetic and political practice that challenges colonial logic, promoting collective authorship and resignifying the modes of imagetic production. Initially, photography was frequently used as a documentation tool by colonial powers to record landscapes, peoples, cultures, and natural resources of the colonies. These images often reflected a Eurocentric perspective and served colonial interests. However, with democratization and access to means of communication, indigenous peoples began the process of self-determination and autonomy of their own images. Grounded in the sharing of the sensible (Rancière, 2010) – the idea that art redefines what is visible and sayable in a society – photography displaces traditional regimes of visibility to realize a space of shared creation, through an artistic research oriented by the community.

The installation *Paradise Camp* by Yuki Kihara, a Japanese and Samoan fa'afafine artist — a traditional gender identity from the Samoa Islands that describes people assigned male at birth but who adopt female roles in society – is a series of twelve saturated tableaux photographs that reenact the paintings of the French post-impressionist artist Paul Gauguin, believed to have been inspired by his stays in Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands. Drawing from her intimate and affectionate relationship with the Indigenous Samoan people, Yuki Kihara investigates the profound marks left by colonial invasion on their culture and identity, influencing how the nation and its diaspora perceive gender, territory, and belonging. The artist, embedded in her own community, emerges with a work that re-incides this visual experience from historical and pictorial archives, reconfiguring landscapes and silhouettes to question colonial narratives and propose new readings. Her practice rescues these images in order to reconstruct the history of her own people, given that she works collectively with artists and queer individuals.

The photograph *Two Fa'afafine (after Gauguin)* (2020) is a critical reinterpretation of the painting *Two Tahitian Women* (1899) by Paul Gauguin. In this work, Kihara presents two Fa'afafine. Adorned with patterned fabrics, distinct from the Pacific region, they pose before a tropical garden, holding a bowl of a fruit called rambutan. The vibrant image, with saturated colors and carefully elaborated composition, evokes a staging that unfolds in the expressions of the faces, conveying a sense of composure, perhaps a touch of defiance, and a claim to their own narrative, where the Fa'afafine are active subjects within their own constructed image. By replacing the original models with members of the Fa'afafine community, the artist questions the exoticized and heteronormative representations of the Pacific present in Gauguin's work, highlighting how the idea of "paradise" frequently perpetuated by Western artists ignores the cultural and social complexities of local communities, in addition to repositioning contemporary issues such as climate change and the marginalization of diverse gender identities.

From this image and the others that make up *Paradise Camp*, Kihara deconstructs gender ambiguity– a notion frequently projected by the Western gaze, which does not correspond to the visual and social fluidity of identities in Samoa. In contrast, the artist

reimagines these works with a predominantly Samoan cast and crew, giving protagonism to the Fa'afafine and Fa'atama communities. In doing so, she returns agency and visibility to the peoples of the Pacific, offering an indigenous queer perspective on autonomy and self-representation, which, in turn, challenges the heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality perpetuated in Western representations of the Pacific.

2.2 Indigenous Methodologies and Shared Creation

The perspective that challenges colonial logic and the visual regimes of power finds a theoretical foundation in the Indigenous Methodologies of the Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou iwi intellectual, Linda Tuhiwai Smith. These methodologies promote collaborative discourses and the collective construction of knowledge, grounded in affective and spiritual connections with ancestral knowledge. For Smith, and within this decolonial perspective, artistic practice assumes a relational role and a commitment to the continuity of indigenous peoples, acting in the restoration of interrupted narratives and the strengthening of identities. This practice, therefore, should be guided by the rescue of ancestry, the maintenance of collective memory, and the promotion of changes in indigenous political narratives.

The directions outlined by Indigenous Methodologies – decolonization, healing, transformation, and mobilization – serve as principles for *Paradise Camp*, as the artist activates a collaboration with the Samoan community, demonstrating respect for their protocols and knowledge. It is precisely from this intrinsic relationship between artistic practice guided by Indigenous Methodologies that Kihara's work develops. Her artistic production proposes a rewriting of the historical and visual narratives imposed by the European colonial gaze, which is now subverted by the deconstruction of the idealization of the "Polynesian paradise" frequently present in Gauguin's work, which often romanticized and eroticized native women in a dehumanizing way. Kihara, in turn, photographs the fa'afafine community, transforming them into images with agency and historical context. By engaging the community, the artist proposes a space of resistance and reconstruction, where representations are reimagined.

Paradise Camp questions the way in which these idyllic images of perfect landscapes can confront the past marked by colonial histories of genocide and bring to light contradictions, such as the erasure of fa'afafine by missionaries and the exploitation of stereotypes in tourism. The work also directs the gaze towards contemporary challenges: migration, belonging, erasure, and cultural resistance. Ultimately, the creation does not aim to destroy the notion of "paradise", but to transform it, repurposing it as a tool for identity reconstruction, cultural affirmation, and collective empowerment. The artist's personal experience with floods and the accelerated alteration of the Samoan landscape also influenced her art, impelling her to confront the cliché vision of tropical paradise with the harsh reality of climate change, which unequally affects coastal and marginalized communities, such as the Fa'afafine. From this perspective, gender becomes a determining factor in engaging with the environmental crisis, as marginalized communities feel its impacts in unique ways. Recognizing the agency of the photographed people, who collaboratively create with the artist, the proposal of Shared Creation (Ferraz, 2018) emerges as a significant paradigm, especially in the context of indigenous imagetic production. This concept, prominent since the 1960s under the influence of Jean Rouch and the questioning of the *nouvelle vague*, proposes a reconfiguration of traditional power relations in film production, shifting the focus from the unilateral representation of the 'other' (Kilomba, 2019) to the inclusion of the experience and perspective of both the artist and the communities involved. By decentralizing the power of representation and recognizing the epistemologies and narratives of indigenous peoples about their lives and histories, Shared Creation is configured as an approach that aims at a joint making, respecting the cultural and ontological specificities of indigenous communities. In the specific context of indigenous photography in the Asia-Pacific region, the question of

authorship assumes a transformative centrality. In opposition to colonial and Eurocentric photography, which historically relegated indigenous people to the condition of objects of representation and study, indigenous photography seeks a radical epistemological rupture through authorship and shared creation among the agents involved in the process of creating the works.

2.3 Reimagining community through collective practices

Although Kihara individually signs her works, the portrayed communities possess the autonomy to express their creations and desires, so that their stories are finally told from their own worldviews and in consonance with their complex relationships with the world. In this context, Indigenous Methodologies and Shared Creation manifest as a collaborative creative process that involves the agency and active contribution of multiple subjects in the production of a collective memory and in the strengthening of ancestral ties. In this way, these methodological approaches challenge the conventional hierarchical structures in the processes of production and analysis of works, aiming to deauthorize vertical power and enable the collective construction of narratives. In short, this collaborative model allows both the photographer and the photographed to influence the narrative, challenging pre-established norms and expanding the understanding of the work beyond the initial intention of its creators, opening space for the unpredictable, the sensible, and the collective as creative potencies.

The potency of these images, as conceptualized by Yuk Hui's cosmotéchnics (2017) – the way different cultures integrate the cosmos through their techniques and technologies – finds a resonance in the work *Paradise Camp*. Cosmotéchnics can be understood as the integration of cosmos through artisanal and artistic techniques. This technical approach suggests that, through cosmotéchnics, we can resignify and adapt contemporary technologies to create our own narratives, establishing new connections between nature and technology. From this production, Kihara creates and recontextualizes images, establishing a connection between different spheres of experience: the colonial past, the present of the Fa'afafine community, and the urgent issues of gender and ecology.

Cosmotéchnics, as the integration of cosmos through artistic techniques, can be observed in the way Kihara uses photography to resignify pre-existing colonial narratives. By adopting an artistic practice that involves the participation of the entire community, new constellations of subjects emerge, expanding our perception and interaction with photographic approaches. In the case of the images presented, these possess agency – it is not just a reflection or representation, but a fiction of the imagination that manifests through the photographic device, venturing into new territories of the visible. Cosmotéchnics, in turn, traverses the record of the body and the territory, operating as a means of transmutation and distribution of the sensible.

As proposed by Rancière (2005), the distribution of the sensible manifests as a redistribution of time, rhythm, and space, affected by subjects who, in turn, reconfigure the sensible. In this way, these images promote a sharing between authorship and collectivity, enabling the creation of a regime of sensibility and visibility. In this sense, the images produced act as an emancipation within an iconographic structure, broadening perspectives through an ancestral and spiritual bond that radiates lived experience. This relationship of presence in the (in)visible is fundamental in the construction of imagination between the real and fiction for indigenous peoples, as the interpretation of the real (Didi-Huberman, 2021) intertwines with the potency of these images. This effect lies in their ability to "produce ruptures in the sensible fabric of perceptions and in the dynamics of affects" (Rancière, 2010, p. 97), challenging the conventional boundaries between reality and imagination and expanding the understanding of what can be seen and felt.

Photography here is configured as a collective creation, a fiction, and a shared practice of the sensible, integrating decolonization, the autonomy of indigenous peoples, and the active

participation of queer individuals. By engaging with these themes, *Paradise Camp* exemplifies how artistic research can transform creative communities, inform and rethink collective life, offering sustainable alternatives and contributing to the construction of a more just future. Through a transdisciplinary and hybrid artistic research, such as Yuki Kihara's proposal, it is possible to rethink forms of collective action that face critical social, economic, and environmental challenges.

3. Concluding thoughts

This joint investigation reflected on how embodied and visual methodologies served as catalysts for social innovation and cultural sustainability. It contributed to reimagining collective life through movement and image-making, fostering resilient communities by prioritizing lived experience, and proposing sustainable futures through transdisciplinary artistic research practices. By engaging kinaesthetic and photographic methods, this collaborative exploration illuminated how artistic research fostered alternative ways of being in community – adding to the ongoing conversation about art as a space for reimagining social and cultural structures.

Through the examination of embodied movement and visual storytelling, it highlighted their capacity to nurture agency, support collective creation, and expand epistemological boundaries across diverse cultural contexts. The two lines of research were articulated through a shared methodological framework that recognized artistic practices as non-hierarchical and community-oriented modes of knowledge production. Both strands examined how corporeal (kinaesthetic) and visual (photographic) methodologies operated as instruments of social transformation, collaborative practice, and critical engagement with established pedagogical and representational conventions. The investigation into non-directive facilitation in movement practices reveals how freeing individuals from prescriptive structures can cultivate kinaesthetic self-knowledge. This approach, mirrored in Pichet Klunchun's non-hierarchical choreographic methodologies, underscores the power of movement as a generative practice that reimagines collective life and offers alternatives to traditional didactic methods. The emphasis on embodied experience and the rejection of a singular 'ideal' reference point highlight the potential of dance to become a truly inclusive and empowering practice.

Similarly, the analysis of Yuki Kihara's photographic work in the Asia-Pacific region demonstrates how photography can transcend its colonial origins to become a powerful tool for aesthetic and political self-determination. Grounded in theories of Indigenous Methodologies, Shared Creation, cosmotéchnics, and the distribution of the sensible, Kihara's *Paradise Camp* exemplifies how centering indigenous queer agency and prioritizing collective authorship can challenge colonial narratives and transform knowledge production, identity politics, and social representation.

The link between the two studies lies in their shared commitment to art as an engaged mode of research, capable of generating alternative epistemologies and ontologies. Both challenge traditional hierarchies, and advocate for the creation of more sustainable, equitable, and experientially grounded futures. In this context, movement and image intertwine as complementary strategies for reimagining collective life and fostering community-oriented modes of being.

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Peripheral Flows: Creative film practice as a medium to reveal the intangible heritage of motion in Ho Chi Minh City.

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Abstract

This paper presents initial findings of a research project that documents peripheral flow from a mototrbike, revealing the relations between the pavement, event and movement within Ho Chi Minh City. This research argues that peripheral vision constitutes a form of ephemeral and intangible urban heritage that is often overlooked yet crucial to understanding the lived experience of the city. By using mobile recording technologies, a series of motorbike journeys have been documented, shifting the focus away from the direct path ahead and instead emphasizing the peripheral view. This approach captures the spatial interconnectedness between the passenger and the city, highlighting the layers of urban life that are typically unnoticed in the fast-paced, motorbike-dominated streetscape. The project challenges conventional ways of framing urban experience by embracing movement, transience, and the fragmented perspectives that define everyday mobility in Ho Chi Minh City. Through this method, the research not only offers new insights into how the city is navigated and perceived through the 'zoning' of the urban streescape, but also asserts the importance of recognizing and preserving ephemeral urban heritage. This investigation contributes to broader discussions on urban cultural memory and the role of creative moving-image practices in documenting and interpreting city life, as knowledge artefacts that can inform a more inclusive urban governance.

Keywords: Motorbike, Peripheral Vision, Digital Video, Streetscape

Purpose

The motorbike holds a special status in the hearts of the Vietnamese community and in the country's economy. Across social media, you can find images of families squeezed onto a motorbike, fridge-freezers being transported on two wheels, and the ubiquitous motorbike taxis found throughout Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). The motorbike has transformed the nation, liberating women from the home and facilitating the migration of workers across the country. Beyond these pragmatic uses, the motorbike also offers a distinct way of experiencing the city. Because of its everyday use, its experiential qualities are often taken for granted. This paper argues that the peripheral view experienced while moving through the city on a motorbike is an important aspect of its ephemeral and intangible heritage.

Despite the ubiquity of motorbikes and their central role in Vietnamese society, there is little representation of their experiential and sensorial dimensions in academic literature or creative outputs. By centering the peripheral view, an observational perspective unique to motorbike travel, this project proposes a way to generate knowledge about the relationship between movement through the city and the immediate built environment.

This project adopts a practice-led approach, aiming to produce a series of films that can be used to reveal the qualities of these journeys. To film the relational properties between motorbike movement and the built environment, I recorded a series of routine journeys. Using

familiar routes was essential, planning new routes might shift the focus toward the physical layout of the city, rather than the experience of the journey itself. I used a phone to record these trips, capturing both outbound and return journeys, during both day and night. The footage then underwent post-production processes designed to enhance the clarity of the journeys. Colour correction was employed to address the challenges of filming in both intense daylight and nighttime conditions.

To date, the project has explored four research questions that aim to understand the relationship between motorbike movement, the built environment, and how these dynamics challenge traditional understandings of heritage in Ho Chi Minh City and Vietnam more broadly:

- What do the relationships between peripheral vision and the filmed sequences reveal about the intangible heritage of motion in HCMC?
- What does this particular point-of-view filming reveal about the occupation of city spaces?
- In what ways can the film medium disrupt traditional notions of urban heritage through the recording of HCMC from the perspective of a motorbike passenger?
- How is this research critical to the governance of the city?

These questions identify a formal structure for the research. However, within this project, my approach to creative practice means that the questions are also shaped by the processes of making and reflecting. Drawing on the concept of epistemic or knowledge artefacts, the creative works themselves generate questions and contribute to knowledge, offering ways of knowing that are embedded within and emerge from the creative practice.

This paper outlines progress in the project so far. It begins with a detailed breakdown of the methods used to record from the motorbike, including a comparison of daytime and nighttime shots. It then describes the post-production approach, including a two-step process: refining single-shot films of each journey, and creating a montage version suitable for film festival submissions.

This is followed by a results section, which discusses specific outcomes and their visual impact. I reflect on the aesthetic qualities of the films—particularly the differences between day and night footage, and the effects of zooming into sequences. I also consider the visually abstract nature of the films, and their poetic engagement with movement.

Finally, the conclusion summarises the project's progress to date and suggests ways in which the work may continue to evolve, particularly through further experimentation in the editing process.

Approach

In this section, I outline the creative processes I have undertaken and how they generate creative artefacts that offer new urban imaginaries. I explain how moving image is used to record and edit sequences of footage, generating film-based outcomes that reveal the impact of movement on our experience of space. These methods highlight the performative nature of riding a motorbike through the city and how this develops into a sensory experience, offering an intimacy with the immediate built environment that is qualitatively different from being a pedestrian or using other modes of transport.

This research adopts a research-through-practice methodology, divided into two parts: first, the recording of journeys through the city, and second, the creative post-production processes. Both parts provide iterative opportunities to explore the footage’s content and to develop visual understandings of how movement impacts our sensory response to place.

Creative film practice provides an effective platform for investigating peripheral vision as an intangible heritage of the everyday urban experience. The time-based nature of

the medium centres its ability to capture ephemeral, embodied, and relational qualities of urban space. Film encourages a sensory response to movement and atmosphere as the motorbike navigates through space. It reveals both the flow through and within the city, as well as capturing the everyday textures and forms of the built environment. The resulting film artefacts, recordings and edited outputs, enable reflective processes that support the reconstitution of sensory experience, generating both epistemic and knowledge artefacts.

This project has developed as a way to record and explore the experience of riding through Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) as a pillion passenger on a motorbike. The specific aim is to record and experiment with the peripheral vision of the passenger. This abstracted and sensory-focused part of our visual perception balances the 'truth' of the environment with the brain's creative interpretation to render a spatial reality.

The recordings centre on the spaces being travelled through, shifting the focus from destination and direction to the relationship between the motorbike's motion and the built environment. To date (the project is ongoing), I have recorded six trips, four during the day and two at night. Two of these were one-way journeys.

I used an iPhone 16, recording with FiLMiC Pro software. The phone was placed on my thigh, capturing footage of the nearside of the street (rather than across the street). This positioning foregrounds the relationship between being on the motorbike and the events glimpsed on the pavement and in the traffic, such as passing motorbikes. I chose to record routine journeys rather than pre-selected routes. Planning a route would emphasise the built environment rather than the experiential quality of the journey, which is the focus of these recordings.

Sound was recorded alongside the footage. However, it was heavily affected by wind noise generated by the motorbike's movement, with environmental sounds only becoming clear when the bike came to a stop. Rather than treating the wind as interference, I used it as a key feature reflecting the motorbike experience. This sound was included in one of the NTROs (non-traditional research outputs) created from the footage.

My practice is influenced by a slow cinema approach, involving the recording of entire journeys in single takes. This method minimises editorial intervention, my only input during recording is pressing the record button. Each journey lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. The footage received an initial treatment to comply with RMIT's ethics approval, which requires that individuals in public spaces not be identifiable. This restriction supports my non-human-centred approach, as my practice focuses on relationships with the built environment. I used a focus blur to obscure people and to draw attention to the city's environment.

Instead of using built-in colour correction tools, I prefer working with layered techniques. Layering offers a tactile, intuitive method akin to my earlier painting practice, where layers of paint were scratched through or built up to form an image. In my digital work, this approach 'un-digitises' the medium by applying analogue-inspired methods that resonate with my artistic sensibility.

The high-definition quality of digital footage offers hyper-realistic detail, which I find aesthetically unsettling. The atmosphere gives way to what Werner Herzog terms "the accountant's truth" (Hegnsvad and Thomson, 2021). Digital film democratises visual attention, applying equal emphasis across the frame. To counteract this, I use a combination of focus blur and layering to evoke the atmospheric and embodied experience of the journey.

At this stage in the post-production process, the footage is treated as a whole and is not montaged or cut up. These uncut films serve as epistemic artefacts, generative works that present potential perceptions, references, and associations (Ballestrem & Gasperoni, 2022). NTROs are created from these whole-take films. These are further edited and montaged to develop narratives that evoke the initial embodied experience. Sound is either retained from

the original footage or developed in collaboration with sound artists to produce immersive film ‘experiences’ for public dissemination.

Reflection is central to my process, not only in the creation of the films but from the moment each journey ends. Unlike previous projects, this one involves a unique disconnect between what I film and what I experience. As a pillion passenger, my attention is focused on navigation and safety: traffic conditions, route decisions, and watching for potential hazards. Communication with the driver is limited due to noise, language barriers, and safety concerns, resulting in mute observations. This distance contributes to the abstracted quality of my peripheral vision, which receives far less conscious attention during the ride, hence the desire to film it.

Reflection also informs my creative sensitivity in portraying the atmospheric qualities of the journey. Having lived in HCMC for over nine years, I am familiar with many of the routes I filmed. This familiarity can distract from objective reflection. The initial editing step of adding a focus blur assists in de-identifying the location, allowing me to concentrate on qualities such as movement, form, and texture. Further treatments, such as desaturating daytime footage to black and white, and increasing saturation of night-time footage, abstract the sequences further.

The final part of the methodology involves producing the creative works or NTROs. These outputs serve a different function from the single-shot artefacts. Montage sequences, always constrained to footage from a specific journey, enable the emergence of new knowledge within the film. This knowledge is embedded in the design-based decisions made during the creation of visual narratives, which respond to visual prompts within the sequences and result in a reconstitution of the journey.

These outputs are not solely academic or epistemic in nature; they are also designed for a broader audience, whose expectations of film must be considered. My creative practice outputs are situated between gallery exhibitions and film festival screenings. This dual positioning presents challenges in reaching broader audiences, but both academic and non-academic avenues for dissemination remain open.

Results

The routes recorded in this research are those undertaken as part of my daily activities, originating from my residence in District 7, in the south of Ho Chi Minh City. Most journeys were to and from District 1, the city’s central area, with one journey extending to Thao Dien (now part of Thu Duc City, to the east of HCMC). These routes consistently involved crossings over the Tẻ and Bến Nghé canals. With only three crossing points on each canal, the outbound and return trips often shared similar paths. This repetition introduced challenges in terms of location recognition, reinforcing the need for post-production techniques to obscure identifiable landmarks and maintain the focus on spatial experience.

As seen in **Figure 1**, filming in daylight conditions proved difficult due to the city’s compact urban form. Narrow, tree-lined streets and tall buildings created frequent shifts in lighting conditions, which the camera responded to by adjusting aperture levels mid-shot, disrupting the viewer’s attention and drawing focus to the mechanics of the recording device. To mitigate this, I locked the aperture to a medium-light setting. This often resulted in overexposed skies and backgrounds in open areas. This phenomenon parallels my own experience of squinting in bright sun, creating a sensory distortion of space.



Figure 1. Daylight unedited film still. Digital Still, by author. 2025



Figure 2. Night time unedited film still. Digital Still, by author. 2025

As can be seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2, filming the nearside of the road establishes a sense of intimacy or closeness to the activities happening on the street. This is enhanced in the night time films where darkness focuses the image. Using layers in the sequences enhances color and tone and when allied with a focus blur, Figures 3 and 4, it adds even more depth to the films. This process really helps the impact of bleaching as can be seen in figure 3, where the emphasis on tone creates a different spatial organisation, and therefore a different sense of space. The night time sequences generate. A far more evocative sense of space. The artificial colours of the city, the mix of LED, Neon and fluorescent lighting generate moments in the streetscape, which are surrounded by areas of darkness as can be seen in Figure 4.



Figure 3. Daylight edited film still. Digital Still, by author. 2025

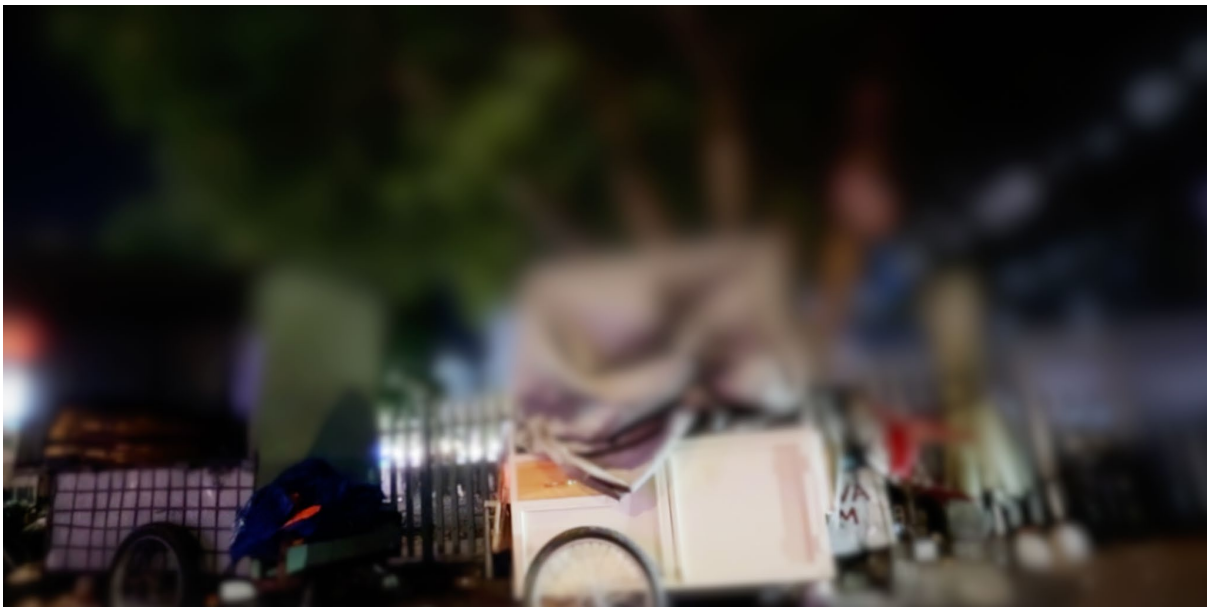


Figure 4. Night time edited film still. Digital Still, by author. 2025



Figure 5. Daylight edited zoomed film still. Digital Still, by author. 2025

The forms of the city take on a notable presence within the sequences, when a zoom is applied to the films. In figures 5 and 6 the road and pavement play a far less role in the composition and reading of the spaces. The process of zooming in is basically enlarging the frame. So there are options to move the frame to show the top half or lower half of the frame. In experiments so far I have left the frame centered as seen in figures 5 and 6. In these films the focus is on the middle to upper section of the street. This removes bystanders, except for glimpses of other motorbike readers and passengers. The streetscape morphs and changes as the motorbike moves through the city, offing another layer of abstraction, I particular where the buildings are not so tall or more open areas, where the city's services infrastructure takes prominence. This includes electricity pole wires and pylons, street lights and communications wiring. By zooming into the frame the motion from the motorbike gains an intensity. The city passes by at a seemingly faster speed.



Figure 6. Night time edited zoomed film still. Digital Still, by author. 2025



Figure 7. Driftlight. Frame sequence of film. Digital Still, by author. 2025

Driftlight, figure 7, is a film developed as a more poetic and condensed version of the full sequences. This film is montaged but using the same sequence so there remains a spatial integrity if not a temporal one. The film derived from a single journey. These edits require a narrative that is derived form the embodied experience, situated knowledge, and through multiple reflections through the trips footage conducted in the editing process. The shorter form edits act as poems, reflecting my experiences, but acting as repositories of a visually poetic knowledge for the wider audience.

This project is still ongoing and I am discovering more and more information within the sequences each time I review them. The films collected offer the longest single sequences I have captured. Duration has been developed as a critical part of my practice. It also provides a voice to the spaces and events that are captured in the films. Duration provides a means to reveal of the depth of knowledge held within the city spaces I film. The first edit of the sequences develops films which not only hold this knowledge but they provide a container to review and reflect, developing questions and provocations that lead to the development of more poetic and narrative focused films. It is important to note that the initial footage are poetic outcomes in their own right, and they hold all the potentials, which are revealed in the edited NTRO sequences.

Conclusion

This research project has grown from a personal passion for exploring Ho Chi Minh City on two wheels—by bicycle and motorbike. This mode of exploration resonates strongly with local culture. As documented in Esther Johnson's film *Dust & Metal* ("Dust and Metal – Dust and Metal," n.d.), motorbikes have long been associated with freedom in Vietnam. Johnson argues that two-wheeled vehicles provided liberation from village life—particularly

for women—offering the possibility of urban migration and new futures. Despite increasing car ownership, the motorbike remains a vital and beloved part of Vietnamese life. In the first quarter of 2025 alone, 7,500 new motorbikes were sold daily across the country ("Vietnam buys 7,500 new motorbikes daily in Q1 2025," n.d.), indicating its enduring significance.

In this project, I have experimented with filming from the position of a motorbike taxi passenger. This perspective is integral to the methodology. By engaging peripheral vision as a mode of seeing, I created a body of films that function as epistemic and knowledge artifacts. Matthias Ballestrem and Lidia Gasperoni (2022) describe such artifacts as central to research in design and architecture, providing insight through their form and experience. Similarly, Catherine Gough-Brady (2020) argues that film is a medium capable of generating explicit knowledge, emphasizing the audience's role in completing the meanings embedded within the work. The perspective of peripheral vision helps to construct what Gough-Brady terms an "internalised world in the footage," granting the films a creative freedom to reconstitute the street beyond traditional representation.

This research has been guided by four interrelated questions:

1. What do the relationships between peripheral vision and the filmed sequences reveal about the intangible heritage of motion in Ho Chi Minh City?

This question foregrounds the embodied experience of motorbike travel as a form of intangible cultural heritage. According to UNESCO, such heritage includes "the practices, knowledge, and expressions that communities recognize as part of their cultural identity, along with associated objects and spaces" (UNESCO, n.d.). The continuous journey sequences presented in the films offer a sustained view of this experience, departing from the brief, sped-up cuts often used in feature films to signify movement. Instead, these films invite viewers to consider how the act of riding—both as driver and passenger—embeds a sensory, ephemeral knowledge of place.

2. What does this particular point-of-view filming reveal about the occupation of city spaces?

The films offer insight into the ways in which space is inhabited, negotiated, and adapted by communities. In cities like HCMC, the street serves as a liminal "third space" that blends public and private life. Filming from the periphery, and enhancing that perspective through techniques such as zoom, blur, and layering, draws attention to how people augment their environments to support informal practices and economies. The camera captures the material adjustments—awnings, signs, seating—that show how residents shape the built environment to their needs. These choices reflect not just adaptation, but occupation as a dynamic cultural act.

3. In what ways can the film medium disrupt traditional notions of urban heritage through the recording of HCMC from the perspective of a passenger on a motorbike?

Recognizing the act of motorbike travel as a form of heritage presents a direct challenge to conventional heritage narratives in Vietnam. While cities like Hanoi, Hue, and Hoi An are widely acknowledged as cultural heritage sites, HCMC is primarily seen as an economic hub, with heritage limited to wartime remnants, colonial villas, or modernist architecture. The films produced in this research offer an alternative: a form of urban heritage rooted in movement, atmosphere, and everyday practice. Johnson's *Dust and Metal* contributes to this rethinking by positioning motorbikes as tools of emancipation and transformation. Likewise, these films propose a redefinition of heritage that includes the ephemeral, the mobile, and the lived.

4. How is this research critical to the governance of the city?

This question connects cultural production with urban policy. The films do not aim to document the city in a factual sense, but rather to reveal how it is experienced, particularly in relation to movement. What has emerged, for example, is the impact of moving and parked cars, through the division or re-enforcement of the zoning between pavement and the road. This disrupts the relationship between motorbike riders and passengers, and the events and atmospheres they are travelling through. By revealing these experiences, this research offers insights into understanding a heritage that should be essential to ensuring inclusive urban governance. As HCMC faces increasing car use and accompanying infrastructural pressures, these films highlight a more fluid, embedded mode of transportation. Motorbike travel fosters direct engagement with city spaces, and through exposure to sound, smell, temperature, and social proximity, creates a form of knowing that is inseparable from being in the city. Recognizing this form of engagement as heritage could inform more responsive and culturally aware development strategies.

This project is ongoing. Future journeys will be recorded and edited, with particular focus on developing poetic re-edits that emphasize the atmospheres and temporalities of the city. An important emerging element of the work is the creation of a portfolio of still images drawn from the films. These function as excerpts of peripheral experience—fleeting impressions made visible only through the act of filming. They serve both as documentation and as creative responses in their own right, capturing the traces of movement and perception that make up the city's intangible, lived heritage.

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Exploring the Impact of Michael Chekhov's Acting Methods on Character Development in The Proposal

Sahatsawat Chotkhan

Abstract

This autoethnographic study explores the application of Michael Chekhov's acting techniques in developing the actor's performance skills through the rehearsal process of the character "Lomov" from Anton Chekhov's *The Proposal*. As a farce requiring emotional complexity and intricate timing, the play challenged the actor to access deep inner states. Through systematic experimentation, three specific exercises were identified as most effective: Staccato-Legato, Qualities of Movement, and Psychological Gesture. These techniques appeared to facilitate a more profound connection to the character's inner world, enabling fuller expression of emotions and dramatic energy. The research process revealed that Michael Chekhov's techniques can serve as valuable tools for character development, particularly in creating and maintaining complex, emotionally nuanced characters.

Keywords: Belief in character, Concentration, Autoethnography, Actor training

Introduction

An actor must utilize physical, emotional, and imaginative skills to create believable characters, becoming the character rather than merely pretending to be one. Constantin Stanislavski emphasized that this process merges the actor's life experiences with the playwright's character, creating a new entity—the role (Benedetti, 2009).

As an actor, the researcher faced two major challenges: "belief in the character" and maintaining "concentration" during performance. At times, the performer found themselves disconnected from fictional circumstances, unable to stay fully immersed in the character. This lack of presence affected storytelling quality, revealing that relying solely on personal experience might be insufficient for true character embodiment.

Michael Chekhov believed that acting based only on personal experience was inadequate. Actors must transform experiences into performances carrying deep, universal meaning that resonates powerfully with audiences. To achieve this, actors must develop concentration and utilize techniques that unlock greater internal creative force (Petit, 2009).

This study explores how Michael Chekhov's acting theory might enhance performance, specifically by applying these principles to Lomov in *The Proposal*. The research examines whether Chekhov's techniques could increase character belief, identify effective rehearsal exercises, and deepen role understanding.

Methodology and Exercise Selection Process

Research Approach

This study employed autoethnographic methodology, involving systematic self-observation and reflective documentation throughout a three-month rehearsal process. Key constructs were defined as:

- **"Belief in character"**: The subjective sense of connection to and embodiment of the character's emotional and psychological state
- **"Concentration"**: The perceived ability to maintain focus on character circumstances and objectives without distraction

- **"Expressiveness"**: The self-assessed clarity and authenticity of emotional and physical communication onstage

Selection Criteria

The researcher experimented with various Michael Chekhov exercises during initial rehearsals, focusing on techniques that could address the two main challenges: belief in character and concentration. Selection criteria included:

1. Ability to stimulate physical energy, intention, and emotional readiness
2. Applicability in various rehearsal contexts and pre-performance preparation
3. Suitability for Lomov's characteristics: emotional fragility, anxiety, mood swings, and exaggerated behavior
4. Effectiveness in handling rapidly changing rhythms and maintaining expressive clarity

Experimental Process

Exercises were tested in both private settings (solo rehearsals, mirror work, video recordings) and group rehearsals. Evaluation used subjective criteria including perceived concentration maintenance, degree of character embodiment, and physical energy readiness.

After experimentation, three exercises proved most beneficial: **Staccato-Legato**, **Qualities of Movement**, and **Psychological Gesture**. These became the core structure of the rehearsal process.

Selected Exercises

Staccato-Legato (Rhythmic Contrasts)

Derived from musical rhythm and adapted by Chekhov for actor training, this exercise involves shifting between:

- **Staccato**: Sharp, detached movements expressing abruptness, urgency, or fragmentation
- **Legato**: Smooth, connected movements expressing flow, gentleness, or continuity

This technique became essential warm-up training, providing precise emotional and physical rhythm control crucial for Lomov's rapid mood swings. Practicing alternating rhythms helped control personal energy appropriately for scene situations, especially when emotions must change rapidly.

Qualities of Movement

This exercise uses four elemental forces to access different character energies:

- **Earth**: Heavy, grounded, slow (power, stubbornness)
- **Water**: Flowing, relaxed (sensitivity, vulnerability)
- **Wind**: Light, quick (instability, scattered thoughts)
- **Fire**: Fast, intense (explosive energy, urgency)

After experimentation, "flickering fire" was identified as most matching Lomov's state, expressing uncertainty, anxiety, and rapidly changing physical alertness. This quality became the character's main foundation during rehearsal and pre-performance preparation.

Psychological Gesture

This technique creates internal physical movements capturing the character's driving force in each scene. The researcher selected intentional verbs (push, pull, yield) to create prototype gestures reflecting specific driving forces. These gestures help quickly access character goals and enable immediate return to character when feeling disconnected.

Applied to each of Lomov's scenes—such as "I hold my ground" in assertion scenes and "I push" in argument scenes—this technique creates driving force for powerful physical expression matching emotional states.

Physical Preparation Discovery

During early rehearsals, the researcher discovered significant challenges in making the body cope with Lomov's emotional states—particularly violent behavior, rapid changes, and high energy demands. Physical limitations included lack of movement confidence, inability to reach the character's bodily requirements, insufficient power expression, and early fatigue.

To address these limitations, the director recommended 30-minute daily running before rehearsals to adjust breathing systems and train the body for continuous exertion matching performance duration. Running became a mechanism for generating consistent energy throughout stage time.

Additionally, movement exploration combined with Qualities of Movement exercise revealed that the body could move and expand beyond expectations, leading to freer, more unlimited movement possibilities.

Three-Month Rehearsal Process

The rehearsal process was divided into three phases:

Phase 1: Physical Preparation

Building stamina through cardio training to sustain Lomov's intense energy for 30 consecutive minutes, addressing exhaustion and breathing issues.

Phase 2: Technique Application

Qualities of Movement: Focused on finding character's inner energy through movement reflecting driving forces. "Flickering fire" quality was identified as most matching Lomov's unstable, anxious state.

Psychological Gesture: Applied to each scene with specific intentional verbs creating prototype gestures for the character's driving forces.

Staccato-Legato: Used before every rehearsal and performance to prepare inner energy, especially awareness of body and emotional rhythm.

Phase 3: Performance Integration

All exercises were systematically integrated for use in real performance situations, requiring flexible adjustments for theater environment, audience energy, and collaboration with other actors.

Performance and Results

The production was originally scheduled for March 28-30, 2025, but an earthquake forced venue closure. Fortunately, one performance occurred on March 31, 2025, at the Sodsai Pantoomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts.

Prior to performance, the researcher used all three exercises in sequence:

1. Staccato-Legato to awaken energy and physical awareness
2. Psychological Gesture to summon Lomov's inner state
3. Meditation for mental stability before going onstage

The researcher successfully maintained character state throughout the entire performance, experiencing continuous embodiment rather than merely "completing the role." The techniques enabled natural, organic character inhabitation from beginning to end.

Conclusions and Key Findings

Research Confirmations

- **Chekhov's techniques significantly help** when actors need to portray characters distant from themselves and lacking believability
- **The three selected exercises created a comprehensive system** covering physical, emotional, and psychological dimensions
- **Physical preparation proved crucial** - if the body isn't ready, training cannot begin effectively

- **Exercises are adaptable** - they can be modified and combined with other acting approaches

Specific Benefits Observed

- **Staccato-Legato**: Provided precise control over emotional rhythms and essential warm-up preparation
- **Qualities of Movement**: Enabled instant access to different character personality aspects
- **Psychological Gesture**: Offered quick return to character's internal driving forces in all situations

Limitations and Future Directions

This study's findings are based on one actor's subjective experience and cannot be generalized. Future research might benefit from:

- Multiple-case studies involving different actors and characters
- Independent performance quality assessment by trained observers
- Comparative studies examining different acting methodologies
- Longer-term follow-up studies assessing sustained technique integration

Recommendations for Actors

- Allocate sufficient time for exercises with observers or guides for effectiveness
- Prioritize physical readiness as foundation for all training
- Experiment with exercises to find personally suitable approaches
- Adapt techniques for use with other acting methods

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From Projecting to Radiating: Reimagine Energy in Solo Acting

Marian Poom-on

Abstract

This article reflects on a discovery that emerged during the rehearsal and live performance of *Grounded* by George Brant, approached through the author's own experience as a solo performer. The initial aim was to cultivate a state of psychophysical readiness by integrating Qigong with the psychophysical techniques of Michael Chekhov and Rudolf von Laban, seeking to harmonize body and mind so that neither would lead nor lag. During the performance process, an unexpected question arose: must a solo actor always project energy outward, or can energy also radiate naturally without force? The longstanding principle of "sending energy to the back row" was reconsidered when the author noticed that pushing energy outward sometimes felt less effective than staying present and allowing energy to expand from within. A turning point came during stage rehearsals when director Jarunun Phantachat introduced the distinction between projecting and radiating energy, prompting exploration of a quieter, more grounded mode of presence. In the author's experience, Qigong supported energy flow through breath and internal stillness, while Chekhov's and Laban's methods offered ways to explore force and spatial dynamics. This reflective account suggests that "still but alive" energy may, in certain contexts, resonate more than "pushed but dry" intensity. Rather than presenting generalizable conclusions, the article positions itself as an autoethnographic reflection, offering a perspective on how radiating rather than projecting might provide an integrated and sustainable way of engaging body, mind, space, and audience, inviting deeper connection and recognition across distance and silence.

Keywords: performance energy, solo performance, psychophysical acting, Qigong, radiating presence

Introduction

In solo performance, the actor stands alone on stage without a partner to exchange energy with, without a scene to rest within, and without another voice to interrupt or support. What remains is the actor's body, mind, and the open space ahead. For the author, who performed as the female fighter pilot in *Grounded*, a one hour and forty-five minute monologue play, solo acting was not simply a matter of "memorizing lines" or "feeling the emotion." It became, in her experience, a challenge of sustaining an energy that could inhabit the stage fully, scene after scene, without being consumed by the emptiness or shrinking until she disappeared from the audience's gaze.

The process began with a clear intention to cultivate a state of psychophysical readiness through a combination of Qigong and psychophysical acting techniques, drawing specifically on the methods of Michael Chekhov and Rudolf von Laban. The author anticipated that such training might allow her to unify body and mind, and to respond to stimuli in the present moment with vitality and coherence. The training was systematically planned: it began with Qigong to regulate internal energy and bring the actor's "instrument" into centered alignment. This was followed by Laban's Eight Efforts to explore the energetic dynamics of the character, Chekhov's Psychological Gesture to access complex emotional states, and image-based work to reach feelings beyond her own lived experience.

Yet, despite the structured preparation, something essential still seemed missing. In early rehearsals, the body could not fully "inhabit" the stage. It felt as if part of the energy

remained suspended, not grounded leaving the author with the sense that the stage had to be "conquered" rather than entered in mutual collaboration. This appeared less about technical skill and more about a deeper imbalance: a disconnect between body, mind, and presence within the space. Unexpected questions arose from lived moments on stage: "Why does the harder I try to project energy, the more I feel disconnected from myself?" "Why does a voice pushed outward feel weaker than one rooted in stillness?" "Why does energy that radiates unintentionally sometimes register more strongly with the audience than energy sent with effort?" These were not part of the original inquiry. They emerged organically from experience and from the physical and mental strain of "pushing" forward. They seeded a desire to turn inward to "listen" to energy rather than drive it and, surprisingly, in doing so, energy began to radiate outward more fully.

This shift led the author to reduce effort, release the need to control, and begin tuning into the rhythms of energy arising each day from the body, the breath, the surrounding space, and the evolving relationship between self and role. The effect, in her experience, was profound: not only did she feel more anchored and at ease onstage, but it also began to seem as though "the space itself was working with me" rather than something to be overcome.

This article does not begin with a fixed hypothesis or aim to produce generalizable findings. Instead, it is positioned as an autoethnographic reflection following a journey of embodied discovery, grounded in lived practice and informed by what unfolded along the way. It offers, from the author's perspective, one possible way of inhabiting the stage with presence and power: a shift from "projecting" to "radiating" that may allow a solo performer to engage with audience and space without forcing themselves beyond what is needed.

Part 1 : From Control to Flow

In preparing for the solo performance *Grounded*, the author chose to incorporate Qigong alongside psychophysical methods drawn from Rudolf von Laban and Michael Chekhov. The primary aim was to develop what she understood as *psychophysical readiness* a state in which the body and mind are not only aligned but responsive to internal and external stimuli without relying heavily on mental premeditation or top-down control. Qigong was not initially introduced as a method for projecting or radiating energy, nor for managing the performance space directly. Rather, it served as a foundational practice to integrate body and mind, to cultivate presence in the here and now, and to build the capacity to respond organically across a range of performance conditions.

Early stage training emphasized bodily awareness, breath, and inner centering. The author practiced the "18 Forms of Qigong" daily for about an hour per session. These sequences functioned, in her experience, as a recalibration of the body-as-instrument grounding it at its core, neither scattered nor overexerted. Post-practice, she often noticed that the body felt not only physically awakened but also energetically balanced. There was a distinct sense of energy flow: quiet yet vital. Stillness no longer felt static, and movement did not seem to require force. This training focused on precision in form and the quality of presence. Although the author could not yet clearly define what this energy was, differences were perceptible from day to day. For example, her hands would become warm for reasons unrelated to external temperature, or she would sense the space around her without actively moving. These experiences marked her first awareness of what she would later describe as a *radiant* quality of energy.

Despite this subtle awareness, the idea of radiating energy was not yet consciously integrated into rehearsals with the script. In the medium-sized rehearsal spaces, projected energy still appeared to work well. The author relied on familiar methods directed movement, vocal intensity, and the deliberate use of force to respond to cues and direction. These strategies felt effective in terms of communication, performance intensity, and spatial

coverage. There seemed no immediate reason to adjust her energetic approach at that stage, nor did the gentle qualities noticed during Qigong feel directly relevant to the more urgent demands of theatrical rehearsal.

However, moments of what she would later call *radiation* became noticeably present during warm-ups and recovery days, particularly when rehearsal was unhurried or when her body felt centered enough to listen more sensitively. Energy arising from sustained stillness, slow movement, and steady breath brought about a sense of internal fullness and quiet power. The body did not move much, yet it seemed to hold space in a way that felt energetically complete. These sensations quietly crystallized in the background of the author's awareness like a deeper layer beginning to take shape beneath the surface of technical training.

At the time, these qualities were not considered necessary for performance, but they existed nonetheless. They seeded a subtle question: if the day comes when projection alone is not enough, could this other kind of energy this quiet, steady radiance offer something essential? That question would not find a clear answer until much later, during technical rehearsals in the theatre space itself. It was only then when the scale of the space exceeded what projected energy could effectively contain that radiation revealed itself as not only useful, but vital for her work.

Part 2 : A Turning Point in the Theatre

Roughly a week before the actual performance, the rehearsal process moved into the theatre space for the first time. Almost immediately, the author noticed something unexpected: the energy that had felt so reliable in rehearsal no longer seemed to suffice. She continued to apply the same strategies projecting the voice, articulating movement clearly, and directing energy outward to "fill" the space but in this noticeably larger venue, those familiar techniques now felt less effective. Energy that had once filled the rehearsal room appeared to evaporate mid-air. Even when the voice was pushed to full force, it lacked the impact she anticipated. Energy projected from the body's center no longer felt received or reflected by the space. Fatigue set in earlier than expected, and she experienced her body as if pushing against something invisible yet resistant. Although it was clear to her that "what had worked before no longer worked," the precise nature of the problem and its solution remained unclear.

This did not appear to be an issue of physical stamina. The author had consistently conditioned her body in preparation for the performance. Then came a sharp observation from the director, Jarunun Phantachat, that would reshape her approach: "Right now, your energy is trying to shoot out to the audience. But when it pushes like that, it doesn't reach. It can't fight the size of the space." She followed with a suggestion that reframed the entire challenge: "What if you shift from projecting to radiating?" This was the first time the author had heard the words *project* and *radiate* used so distinctly in a rehearsal context not as poetic metaphors, but as conceptual tools for altering how an actor channels energy.

Up until that point, she had been aware of the radiant quality of energy from her Qigong practice, but had never considered it as something to be consciously applied in live performance. Projection had still felt sufficient reliable, controllable. The director's insight did more than identify the problem; it gave permission to explore a different kind of energy, one that was already latent in her body but had never been fully accessed in performance.

Following this advice, the author began to shift her approach. Instead of striking outward with energy, she anchored herself more deeply in presence grounding through breath, finding stability in her stance, moving from a clear center, and allowing the space to enter her awareness rather than resist it. The effects, in her experience, were unexpectedly clear: the body felt less strained, the voice carried greater weight without added effort, and most strikingly the energy began to radiate outward without being pushed.

Beyond these physical shifts, a subtler transformation occurred internally. Where there had once been a constant sense of urgency a need to stay hyper-alert and "manage" everything

on stage there was now a calmer state. It felt as if a weight had lifted: the pressure to "reach," "be clear," or "be enough" had softened. A small change in attitude reframed the space from adversary to ally.

This transition from projecting to radiating did not emerge from solitary analysis, but through attentive listening to the body, to the space, and to the thoughtful observations of collaborators. The director's words named something the author had long felt but never fully articulated. From that moment onward, the idea of *radiating* became a central focus something to observe, explore, and develop in refining her relationship to stage energy.

Part 3 : Exploring the Quality of Radiating

After beginning to experiment with radiating energy instead of projecting it, as suggested by the director, the author noticed a marked shift not only in how she related to the stage space, but also in her own internal state. This shift was deeper than she had anticipated. Importantly, it did not occur in a single moment or from one piece of advice. Rather, it emerged gradually through a rehearsal process in which the director and creative team had, perhaps unintentionally, placed consistent emphasis on spatial scale.

Throughout the rehearsal period, the author was moved between rooms of varying sizes some narrow, some deep, others vast and open. At the time, she did not consciously recognize this as training for radiating energy. In hindsight, however, she came to see how the variety of spatial environments had helped her body become accustomed to adjusting its energy scale intuitively to the space. By the time she stepped into the theatre which was larger than any rehearsal space she had worked in her energy may still have fallen short of fully reaching the back, but she had developed inner tools that allowed her to adapt more readily. She was not starting from nothing.

Radiating energy, as she came to understand it, was not simply a matter of applying less force or moving less. It required a different shift in focus. Whereas projection placed her attention on external targets the audience, a distant point, or a vocal destination radiation redirected her focus inward, anchoring her to her own body, breath, and present emotional state. Instead of straining to reach outward, she needed to inhabit herself fully first. From that fullness, the energy could radiate without being pushed.

This inner state, for her, depended on honest acceptance of her current condition. If she felt tired, she would acknowledge the fatigue; if uncertain, she would acknowledge the vulnerability. Attempts to suppress or override these states were replaced by groundedness and attunement to the body's natural rhythm.

When this inner state felt elusive, the author turned to imagery. She often visualized light flowing from her body, or color expanding into the surrounding air. Instead of trying to "send red energy out," she focused on *becoming* red. Only when that state of being felt solid would the color radiate on its own. It was not about sending a message, but becoming the message so fully that the space itself absorbed it. Another image she frequently used was that of water to inhabit herself fully was to become water, completely filling a vessel: neither rushing nor halting, neither pushing nor resisting, but gently seeping outward. When the imagery resonated with her internal state, her body responded naturally and with power, without the need for mental control.

As this approach deepened, the space itself seemed to respond differently. Where projection had once framed the stage as something to conquer or dominate, radiating redefined it as a collaborator a conduit through which energy could travel and return. The performer began to feel connected not only to the audience, but also to the walls, the floor, and the air. This connection arose not through force, but through co-presence.

Before each performance, she warmed up by exploring two contrasting qualities of radiation: *weighty* and *light*. For example, she might spread a grounded, stone-like presence across the stage floor, or allow a mist-like softness to float gently through the air. In both cases,

the key was to arrive at a stable internal condition from which energy could flow organically from the center. This did not require stillness she continued to move and to express fully but the movement was no longer an attempt to "push" outward. It became less about reaching someone and more about being with herself fully, allowing the energy to travel in its own way. Over time, these states evolved from techniques to recall into qualities to *embody*. Even in small or still moments, she could now radiate without collapse, fragmentation, or excess. The energy remained present, responsive, and alive.

Part 4 : When Silence Responds: Audience Perception of Radiated Energy

Although the energy radiated from an actor cannot be seen with the naked eye or measured by any precise instrument, the author, as a solo performer, repeatedly encountered moments in the performance space that, for her, suggested the energy was indeed reaching the audience. On many occasions, this return was felt in the form of stillness, utter silence, or even quiet tears in the dark. The author had long believed that silence could be a powerful tool in stage communication. However, through the experience of this particular solo performance, she encountered a kind of silence that felt louder and more charged than ever before a silence emerging from a body and mind fully awake and present in the moment.

This perception was echoed in audience feedback gathered through written surveys and online comments. One respondent remarked, "From the very first line, I could feel the performer's energy and she carried that energy throughout the entire piece." Several others noted that even without any visible onstage events, they could still "see the scenes vividly and feel excited by the events" through the performer's physicality, vocal tone, and rhythm of storytelling.

One especially memorable comment described a brief mid-performance moment when the female character was reprimanded by her commanding officer: "I felt the emotional impact and pressure quite strongly," wrote the audience member even though the scene involved no dialogue exchange or physical confrontation. For the author, such responses suggested that emotional vibrations could be generated without forcibly projecting toward the audience, but instead by fully inhabiting the moment and allowing the energy to radiate outward of its own accord.

Another frequently mentioned scene involved the character driving home while listening to a mixtape prepared by her husband. The song playing had the simplicity of a lullaby. The performer said nothing and remained motionless on a chair. Yet, many viewers reported sensing "fragility, emotional unraveling, and the sense of being held once again." For the author, this feedback indicated that even in the absence of text, climactic beats, or significant action, a performer's internal state could still be felt by an audience in a resonant way.

In an audience survey completed by 272 individuals representing 64.2% of the 424 attendees across all three performances one question asked about the perception of energetic transmission: "Although there was only one performer, the actor was able to continuously project energy across the entire performance space." Seventy-nine percent answered "most strongly felt," and 17% answered "strongly felt." While the wording of the question referred to "projecting," the author interprets these responses as reflecting the audience's experience of sustained stage presence, even if the technical approach used was more about radiating.

Another question explored a more specific phenomenon: "The audience could clearly perceive energy in motion, even when the performer was completely still." Here, 74.3% answered "most strongly felt," and 29.3% answered "strongly felt." For the author, this was a striking result not as objective proof, but as an alignment between her internal experience of radiating energy and the audience's reported perception.

Some respondents described the energy in ways that extended beyond intensity. One commented, "The energy reached all the way to the back rows," while another wrote, "She

radiated energy both softly and powerfully without ever running out." Others referred to the character's "steadiness and groundedness" not tied to specific lines or plot points, but to a sense that "she fully owned the stage body, mind, and voice." Such remarks suggest that, at least in this context, radiated energy may be less about volume or overt projection and more about a depth of presence a beingness sensed even without explicit cues or spoken explanation.

This kind of feedback led the author to frame solo performance not merely as sending energy outward from performer to audience, but as engaging in a shared resonance within the moment. When she felt internally full and anchored, energy seemed to flow naturally without being pushed, and audiences appeared able to tune into that current. In her view, radiating energy is not a matter of magic or mysticism, but the outcome of consistent and honest psychophysical alignment one in which the performer no longer tries to transmit, but simply allows herself to be, and in doing so, becomes perceptible.

Part 5 : A Conceptual Proposition

Through the process of rehearsing and performing *Grounded*, the author gradually came to see, in her own case, that a solo performance in a large theatre space could not rely solely on the kind of "projected" energy that had served her well in smaller rehearsal rooms. When such projection stemmed from an effort to "reach" the audience by pushing vocal force or extending physical energy outward, it often created, for her, the illusion of intensity without the desired impact. This familiar approach quietly depleted her physical stamina, which in turn unsettled the steadiness of her inner state. Even when she believed she was expressing power, she found herself silently burning out fatigued in ways that went beyond the body and affected the psyche.

By contrast, a shift in mindset from "projecting" to "radiating" allowed her to stop chasing the space. Instead of working to fill the stage through force, she began centering herself in the present moment, with awareness of breath, alignment, and inner readiness. From that place of centeredness, energy seemed to radiate on its own, requiring no push. For the author, radiating did not mean being still or silent; rather, it was a new attitude toward energy use one that trusted that when the actor feels internally full, that fullness can be perceived by the audience without theatrical strain. In several scenes where she intentionally reduced vocal intensity or avoided overly "controlled" movement, she found that a quieter voice carried greater resonance, and the simplest gestures conveyed a wider presence. What once felt like mere projection began to feel like a shared atmosphere.

This transition did not lead her to reject projection altogether. Rather, she came to view the real skill as knowing when to project and when to radiate. Certain moments in the play called for sharp, forceful energy especially when the character was under pressure or emotionally volatile. In such instances, a clear, directed push felt appropriate. In other scenes those with emotional restraint or an inward heaviness the radiating quality proved more effective. For her, the heart of this shift was not simply about changing how energy was used, but about changing its point of origin: from control to receptivity, from outward expression to inner dwelling, from claiming the stage to allowing it to become a partner, a mirror, and a co-creator of presence.

What the author offers here is not a prescription that radiating energy is the best or only approach for solo performance. Rather, it is an invitation to reconsider the performer's attitude toward energy use. Training to radiate, in her experience, is not merely technical. It is a practice of cultivating an inner state one that harmonizes with body, breath, awareness, and a relational view of space. To move from projecting to radiating is to change not only physical expression, but the very posture of being onstage. This perspective may offer solo performers a sustainable path energetically, emotionally, and even spiritually for sustaining presence throughout a demanding performance.

After the show, she spoke with several audience members who had no background in performance or theatre. Their words aligned closely with her own internal experience. One person said, "It felt like there was energy surrounding you, but I couldn't tell where it was coming from." Another commented, "It was like something was filling the entire room, even though you weren't doing anything in that moment." For the author, such reflections were a reminder that radiating energy is not only something the performer feels from within it can also be perceived externally, even without formal training or theoretical understanding.

On a stage that felt increasingly vast under brighter lights, in louder silence, with space waiting to be activated, she came to realize that the energetic state of an actor cannot, in her view, be separated from the training of body and mind. It is, in fact, the core of that training. Radiating energy may be only one among many states worth exploring, but what matters is the willingness to listen to the body, to the space, and to one's instincts when a new attitude toward communication is needed. If projecting is a movement toward others, then radiating may be an invitation for everything else to arrive at us.

Epilogue: A Reflective Passage From Technique to Transformation

Looking back on the entire training process, what stands out most to the author is not simply the discovery of the concept of "radiating," but the realization that the techniques used in performance were never just physical tools or rehearsal-room strategies. They became portals into a deeper internal shift. Practices such as Qigong, the Eight Efforts, the Psychological Gesture, and the energy-radiation work were not merely ways to manage the body; they evolved into pathways through which she came face-to-face with herself in the most honest and direct way. In particular, Qigong which might appear from the outside as a sequence of gentle, repetitive movements offered the mind a rare pause from the drive to "do well" or "reach far enough." Over time, it released internal tension without her even realizing it.

As a solo performer with nowhere to hide, no scene partner to lean on, and no cues to pause, standing on stage became not only an act of "being with the character" but also "being with oneself" in complete vulnerability. Every tremor of emotion and every weakness in the body was amplified by the lights, the stage, and the surrounding silence. The assumption that "precise memorization is enough" or "emotional access is sufficient" proved inadequate for sustaining her through the entirety of the performance. At one point during the show, despite having rehearsed thoroughly, she felt herself "shrinking" in the vastness of the stage. Her energy seemed to retract and dissolve into the air. For her, this was not a matter of lacking technique, but a sign that body and mind had yet to truly connect. It became clear that no technique could serve its full purpose without also cultivating the inner state of "being with oneself."

The process of radiating energy, then, was not simply a method of projecting force outward. It developed into an internal state that required ongoing practice not only so that the audience might feel the performer, but also so that the performer could feel herself with full presence during the act. This state, in her experience, could not arise solely from memorization or repetition. It demanded sensitivity, deep listening, and the courage to accept oneself exactly as one is even in moments of unpreparedness. Radiating did not mean trying to express everything at once; it meant choosing to stay with what was already clear within, and allowing that to move outward through silence, grounded stillness, and breath. Even when the audience was seated far from the stage, she found that if the internal energy was solid enough, it could still be felt without the need to shout. Conversely, if that inner cohesion was lacking, no amount of movement or vocal strength could compensate. It became nothing more than effort spilling into the void, rather than energy being truly transmitted.

What the author came to understand was not simply "how to use energy wisely," but how to shift her entire attitude toward herself, the character, the stage, and the audience. What

had once been seen as an act of "giving" outward became a process that began with "being" fully and allowing that state to become a gift in itself. The stage was no longer just a physical frame to be filled, but a shared space that called for listening, understanding, and allowing it to reflect back. The transition from projecting to radiating was not only about altering the direction of energy, but about adopting a new perspective on the relationship between actor and space: from control to co-presence.

She discovered that the more she tried to "make it reach," the more rigid and resistant the energy became, leading to exhaustion. But when she returned to the rhythm of her own breath, something began to flow more steadily than any push ever could. In the end, what she gained from this process was not only a renewed understanding of stage energy, but also a deeper lesson: we do not always need to push ourselves. Sometimes, simply being with silence, with breath, with the present moment or even with our own fear and vulnerability may be the most powerful performance we can ever give.

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The Architect of Chaos: Physical Actor Training in Farce Through Mask Techniques for Bernard in *Boeing-Boeing* by Marc Camoletti

Rusharnon Whongkomonl

Abstract

This research explores the application of masks in the training of actors within farcical performances, specifically examining the character of Bernard in Marc Camoletti's *Boeing-Boeing*. The study addresses the blend of specific physical training associated with masks Neutral Mask, Character Mask, and Commedia dell'Arte within the context of theatrical farce performance to hone the actor's precision and comedic timing. The approach to the research integrates practical mask techniques with rehearsal within the framework of Jacques Lecoq's mask techniques as a basis for theoretical analysis. As a researcher, I designed targeted mask training sessions to overcome challenges I personally faced in physical expression and comedic timing. Neutral masks provided barebones physical presence awareness while eliminating personal quirks. Character masks allowed thorough engagement with Bernard's traits, enabling him to respond and react in an exaggerated manner. Commedia dell'Arte masks of Arlecchino, Zanni, and Il Capitano specifically refined comedic timing and broad movement necessary for farce. The scope of data gathering encompassed self-assessments through in-depth reflections and analyses of one's own videos, external evaluation from 342 audiences over three public performances, and focus group interviews with six creative collaborators and one expert in mask techniques. The results indicate significant advancements in physical control and mobility, resulting in enhanced range of motion, agility, and fluidity. Independent evaluations corroborated these findings, with 57.9% of the audience recognizing natural movement and bodily control, and 66.7% acknowledging effective comedic timing. These insights indicate that mask training equips actors with heightened skills in physical mime, thus improving their ability to embody a character, especially those that require rapid emotional transitions and precise physical comedy. This research helps to fill the gap in the literature regarding the application of traditional mask techniques to contemporary actor training, especially for challenging comedic performances.

Keywords: Mask techniques, Farce Performance, Neutral Mask, Character Mask, Commedia dell'Arte, Actor Training

Introduction and Background

The complexities inherent in theatrical farce pose challenges that far exceed those encountered in standard dramatic performance, yet current pedagogical frameworks frequently overlook the genre's distinctive physical demands. Farcical acting is not simply about humour, it requires performers to cultivate advanced physical skill sets, rapid shifts in emotion, meticulously timed comedic actions, and the orchestration of what can only be described as deliberate, controlled chaos. While mask techniques are a staple of actor training literature, there is a noticeable gap regarding their targeted application to farcical roles and their efficacy in fostering the heightened physicality fundamental to comedic success.

The demands placed on actors in farcical situations go beyond traditional character development. Such performances necessitate exceptional stamina, emotional agility, and technical exactitude. Actors must execute highly complicated comedic sequences while ensuring narrative continuity and ensemble synergy. Mainstream training methods often fall short, leaving actors to develop vital farcical skills through informal experimentation rather

than systematic instruction. This shortcoming becomes especially acute when actors are tasked with portraying characters who serve as catalysts for chaos, yet must simultaneously appear to maintain authority amid increasing disorder.

This study seeks to address this notable gap by examining the systematic integration of Jacques Lecoq's mask techniques into the development of farcical performance skills. Although Lecoq's influence on general actor training is well documented, the specific use of his methodologies in roles that require the careful orchestration of comedic chaos remains underexplored. The research centres on Bernard from Marc Camoletti's *Boeing-Boeing*, a character emblematic of what this study terms an "architect of chaos," meaning one who meticulously constructs, yet inevitably loses control over, complex systems. The challenge for the actor is to convincingly navigate the character's attempts at composure alongside his rapid descent into disarray.

Portraying Bernard reveals the broader requirements of farce. The actor must project a facade of confidence and mastery while the physical performance increasingly communicates distress and turbulence. The role demands an intricate blend of physical choreography, emotional authenticity, and ensemble cooperation. Bernard's elaborate plans, coordinating multiple fiancées by their flight schedules, unravel into a series of farcical complications, requiring the actor to deliver swift physical transitions, precise reactions, and consistently effective comedic timing. As Christopher Olsen succinctly states, "In comedy, timing is everything. It's about knowing when to pause, when to emphasize, and when to let the punchline hit" (Olsen, 1999, p. 34).

The rationale for focusing on mask techniques derives from their demonstrated ability to heighten physical awareness, minimize ingrained habits, and broaden expressive range. Yet there is little research on how these traditional tools might be adapted for the specific rigors of contemporary farce. This study contributes to the discourse by documenting how three distinct mask approaches can be synthesized into a structured training program for physically demanding comedic roles, offering concrete insights for actors, directors, and educators aiming to cultivate the specialized skills essential for effective farcical performance.

Research Purposes

1 Objective

To investigate and develop an actor's capacity to embody a character who functions as the "architect of chaos" in a farce, specifically Bernard in *Boeing-Boeing*, through the application of mask techniques.

2 Hypothesis

Training in Neutral Mask, Character Mask, and Commedia dell'Arte will significantly enhance an actor's physical precision, versatility, and ability to execute the rapid, exaggerated movements and comedic timing essential for portraying Bernard as the architect of chaos, thereby enabling natural and effective communication of humour in farce.

Literature Review

This section examines the historical significance of masks in theatre and explores relevant theoretical concepts and exercises related to mask techniques, all viewed through the lens of their potential to empower an actor to command and navigate comedic chaos.

The methodology draws specifically from influential works including Lecoq's *The Moving Body* and *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*, Eldredge's *Mask Improvisation for Actor Training and Performance*, and various works on Commedia dell'Arte, providing a robust theoretical framework for developing the physical skills needed to manage farcical chaos.

1 The Historical Use of Masks in Theatre

The theatrical mask began its journey in ancient Greece, around 535 BC, acting as a powerful tool for transforming characters and amplifying expression. Previously, Greek actors used masks to go beyond their individual selves, making their voices and emotions big enough to reach huge audiences. It was an early, vital way to tell stories with real impact. Fast forward to the 16th century, and Italian Commedia dell'Arte really cemented the mask's role. "Maschera" wasn't just about the physical mask, it represented the entire essence of a stock character, their personality, voice, and unique way of moving. This tradition directly influences the exaggerated physicality and archetypal portrayal essential for a character like Bernard, who embodies a specific comedic type.

In modern Western theatre, Jacques Copeau brought the mask back into focus as a teaching tool with his "Silent mask." Building on Copeau's ideas, Jacques Lecoq developed the "Neutral Mask" which is a simple, plain mask designed to help actors achieve a state of physical and mental neutrality. Lecoq called this a "starting point before action," allowing actors to shed old habits and discover pure, unfiltered physical expression. (Lecoq, 2000, p.38) For an actor getting ready to play Bernard, the architect of chaos, this neutrality is fundamental. It lets the actor build Bernard's specific chaotic energy from a clean slate, instead of overlaying personal mannerisms. As Lecoq explained, this mask is a tool used to enhance physical awareness and understand the actor's self. Wearing the mask reduces facial expression, forcing the actor to rely on body language to convey emotion and tell stories. This technique is particularly useful for farce, where physical expression is key to engineering and responding to chaos. (Lecoq, 2000)

2 Preparatory Exercises Before Mask Training

Following Copeau and Lecoq's principles, physical and mental readiness are essential before engaging with mask work. These preparatory exercises aim to heighten bodily awareness and achieve a state of physical and mental neutrality, enabling the actor to become a more responsive instrument for generating and reacting to chaos.

Preparatory Exercises before Mask Training	
Standing Zero	To establish a balanced, neutral physical and mental state, free from personal expressions that might impede the portrayal of controlled chaos.
Neutrality Walk	To help the actor shed personal gait patterns and discover efficient and unburdened movement, it is essential for an actor who must appear effortlessly in control even as the character's plans unravel.
Undulation and Inverse Undulation	To develop fluid, dynamic movement capabilities, enabling the actor to physically manifest Bernard's energetic attempts to maintain control.
Éclosion & Contraction	To train understanding of how bodily energy can expand and retract, mirroring Bernard's bursts of confidence and moments of shrinking despair.
The Nine Attitudes	Lecoq's archetypal postures, used to explore the relationship between body, space, and expression, providing a vocabulary for Bernard's wide range of emotional states and physical reactions.

Molino	A body rotation exercise that develops awareness of interconnected bodily functions, fostering the coordinated movements necessary for Bernard's complex physical comedy.

3 Neutral Mask

The Neutral Mask, as Lecoq envisioned it, is a tool to help actors tap into a state of pure, uncluttered presence what he called a calm that is the starting point before action. By hiding the face, the mask forces actors to communicate only with their bodies, making them deeply aware of their physical habits. For playing Bernard, the master of chaos, this mask is incredibly important. It helps the actor shed personal quirks that might get in the way of Bernard's unique physical blueprint for creating mayhem. As Lecoq pointed out that wearing the mask reduces facial expression, forcing the actor to rely on body language to convey emotion and tell stories. (Lecoq, 2000, p.36) This technique is particularly useful for farce, where physical expression is key to shaping the humour.

Neutral Mask Exercises	
Waking Up (Le réveil du masque neutre)	To re-engage with the body and space from a state of pure neutrality, allowing Bernard's complex physical journey to unfold.
The 4 Elements	To explore how the body moves in response to universal forces, providing a foundation for Bernard's dynamic and often elemental reactions to chaos.
Walking in Space	To practice simple, universal movements without personal characteristics, allowing the actor to discover the foundational physical vocabulary for Bernard's seemingly controlled world.
The Journey (Le voyage)	To develop storytelling through the body by experiencing various encounters and challenges, helping to sculpt Bernard's arc of escalating panic.
Identification with Nature	To explore the essence of natural dynamics, providing a source for organic and expressive physical movements that ground Bernard's comedic actions.

4 Character Mask

Unlike neutral masks, character masks are all about embodying distinct, specific personalities. They push actors to discover the dominant physical traits and archetypes baked right into the mask, turning the limited facial expression into hugely amplified bodily communication. For Bernard, the character mask becomes an incredibly powerful tool for digging into his architect of chaos persona. It really lets the actor fully inhabit his particular mix of charm, cunning, and that inevitable frantic unravelling. As Lecoq mentioned that Character masks stimulate actors to find clear and specific physical expressions. When facial expressions cannot be used, actors must communicate through the movement of the entire body. (Lecoq, 2000, p.57) Within the context of farce, where exaggerated physical expressions are paramount, character masks serve to amplify the actor's movements, thereby accentuating Bernard's physical endeavours to maintain control, resulting in a heightened comedic effect.

Character Mask Exercises	
Mask Observation and Analysis	A meticulous examination of the mask's characteristics to understand the persona's essence before embodiment.
Mask Transformation	The physical and mental process of "becoming" the mask, allowing specific physicalities and reactions to emerge, guided by the mask itself.

Environmental Response	Exploring the masked character's reactions to varying situations and environments, particularly as his meticulously planned world descends into chaos.
The Paradox of Mask: Counter Mask	Exploring the inner conflicts and complexities within the character's mask and layered performance.



Charater Mask Training Exercises

5 Commedia dell'Arte

Commedia dell'Arte, with its improvisational core and reliance on those distinct stock character masks, offers up a rich language for exaggerated and precise physical expression. The masks, often just half-face, allow for both incredible physical dynamism and clear vocal expression. Think of characters like Arlecchino, with their agile, almost cat-like movements; they provide a direct lineage for developing the nimble, often frantic physical comedy that Bernard's role as the "architect of chaos" absolutely demands. As traditional sources described that Arlecchino exhibits the characteristics of many animals. The agility of the cat combined with the mischievousness of the monkey is expressed through the movements displayed by the actor. This character requires great agility. (Eldredge, 1996) This description perfectly translates to Bernard's need for lightning-fast evasions, frantic orchestrations, and those hilarious physical reactions to his unfolding disasters.

Commedia dell'Arte Exercises	
Stock Character Embodiment	Studying characters like Pantalone (the greedy old man) or Arlecchino (the agile servant) to understand their distinct physicalities, which can be adapted to amplify aspects of Bernard's character.
Mask Connection	Deeply connecting with chosen stock character masks (such as Inamorato for Bernard's charming side, or Zanni/Arlecchino for his desperate agility), allowing the mask to dictate movements and expressions. Lecoq emphasized, "The half-masks of Commedia dell'Arte are very specific; the body must respond in the way the mask demands."
Improvisation with Scenarios (Cannovacci)	Developing improvisational skills based on traditional cannovacci, allowing the actor to explore Bernard's reactions and detailed behaviours within rapidly changing, chaotic scenarios, thereby refining his ability to "architect" or respond to comedic mayhem.

6 Farce

Farce, as a theatrical genre, really thrives on humour that springs from exaggerated situations and movements that just defy normal behaviour. For an actor playing a character like Bernard, who actively builds and then gets completely stuck in this absurdity, top-notch physical skills aren't just important, they're absolutely essential. The ability to tell absurdly comical stories through strong, energetic performances, along with perfect timing for both giving and taking jokes, is the absolute foundation of this genre. *Boeing-Boeing* is a perfect

example of farce, and Bernard's role is truly its comedic anchor. The actor needs to have not just physical agility, but the precision to start and react to escalating chaos, making him genuinely the "architect of chaos" within the play itself.

Methodology

This investigation employed a single-subject case study design, integrating mixed-methods data collection to examine the implementation of mask techniques in developing farcical performance skills. The research incorporated autoethnographic elements alongside external validation measures to comprehensively document training outcomes and performance efficacy. While the design's inherent limitations prevent definitive causal attributions, the systematic documentation and utilization of multiple data sources provide valuable insights into the training process and its observed impacts.

The research process followed a systematic six-phase framework designed to ensure rigorous documentation and evaluation. The initial phase involved comprehensive examination of mask acting methodologies through academic literature, expert consultation, and pedagogical analysis, establishing the theoretical framework for integrating the three mask approaches into a cohesive training program. This was followed by systematic analysis of *Boeing-Boeing*'s farcical elements, with particular emphasis on Bernard's function as both catalyst and victim of escalating chaos. The third phase involved practical application of selected mask techniques through structured rehearsal processes, focusing on developing precise movement vocabulary and reactive patterns. Three public performances were then conducted at the Sodsai Pantoomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts, Chulalongkorn University, from April 4-6, 2025, with each performance accommodating approximately 140 audience members. Comprehensive assessment utilized video documentation, audience feedback surveys from 342 respondents, and qualitative interviews with six creative collaborators and one mask technique specialist. The final phase integrated all research findings and formulated training recommendations.

The mask training intervention was implemented over a twelve-week period with carefully structured progression. Weeks 1-4 focused on Neutral Mask training through six ninety-minute sessions, establishing foundational physical awareness and eliminating personal mannerisms. Weeks 5-8 concentrated on Character Mask development through six additional ninety-minute sessions, exploring Bernard's specific personality traits and physical manifestations. Weeks 9-12 emphasized Commedia dell'Arte techniques through six final sessions, developing the exaggerated movement vocabulary and precise timing essential for farcical performance. Throughout this period, integration sessions during regular rehearsals provided ongoing application opportunities, totalling 54 hours of mask-specific work supplemented by 24 hours of integrated rehearsal application.

Data collection employed multiple instruments to ensure comprehensive evaluation. A structured audience questionnaire assessed four critical dimensions of physical theatrical expression using five-point Likert scales, addressing physical expression clarity, character believability, movement naturalness, and ensemble interaction quality. The survey was designed for ten-minute completion and distributed via QR codes in performance programs. Semi-structured interviews with creative collaborators and the mask technique specialist covered observed changes in physical expression, character development progression, and ensemble interaction quality. Video analysis of training sessions and performances focused on movement pattern identification and technical skill progression, while reflexive journaling examined self-reported development themes throughout the training process.

Research Approaches

1 Pre-Production

1.1. Analysis of the *Boeing-Boeing* Play

Marc Camoletti's *Boeing-Boeing* burst onto the scene amidst the social shifts of 1960s Paris, a time marked by evolving gender roles and sexual liberation. The play masterfully captures the changing tides of love and marriage, earning widespread acclaim and even inspiring a sequel, *Don't Dress For Dinner*. As a classic farce, its comedic brilliance hinges on a sophisticated structure fuelled by precise timing and the actors' vibrant physical performances. The humour escalates from mounting chaos, and at the heart of it all, Bernard is the architect.

A close look at *Boeing-Boeing* reveals the intricate and utterly chaotic world Bernard tries to manage from his plush Paris apartment. His meticulously planned schedule for three flight attendant fiancées, each from a different airline, becomes the very blueprint of his "architecture of chaos." The comedic tension truly ignites when unexpected flight changes throw his carefully arranged rotation into disarray, forcing all three women to converge on his apartment at the same time. The unannounced arrival of his close friend, Robert, only cranks up the tension and chaos, creating a vortex of misunderstandings that even his exasperated housekeeper, Berthe, can't sort out. Bernard's relentless struggle to keep things under control, even as mayhem spirals, is what drives the play's humour.

This three-act play delves into infidelity, deception, and the concealment of truth. Its subtle core message underscores the self-deception that comes from insincerity and the foolishness of overconfidence, themes perfectly embodied by Bernard's character.

1.2. Analysis of Bernard's Character

Bernard stands as the undisputed main character, embodying a compelling blend of charm and confidence. He functions as an architect not only by profession but also in his approach to his polyamorous relationships, constructing a system he believes is foolproof. However, beneath his confident exterior lies a fundamental lack of responsibility and ethics, which ultimately fuels the play's comedic engine. While maintaining its farcical nature, Bernard's behaviour serves as a magnified reflection of societal shifts concerning love and marriage, subtly inviting the audience to ponder the implications of honesty and deception in relationships.

Following thorough analysis of the play and the chosen case study character, I collaborated closely with the director and acting team. This collaboration proved crucial for developing Bernard's specific background and for strategically planning the integration of mask acting training with experts, alongside the broader rehearsal process involving all actors. The focus remained on how Bernard's physical and emotional states, as the "architect of chaos," would evolve and be expressed.

2 Production

My personal dive into mask acting started with a performance theory course and a specialized workshop at Chulalongkorn University, led by Assistant Professor Dr. Wankwan Polachan and Master Nikorn Sae-tang. This initial experience sparked a deep interest in using masks to push past my own physical limitations and develop the ability to embody characters completely outside my comfort zone, especially those

who create or navigate comedic chaos. The teaching principles of Assistant Professor Dr. Wankwan Polachan and Master Nikorn Sae-tang, which were rooted in Copeau and Lecoq's methods, gave me the foundational framework. After that, I thoroughly researched and put together a customized set of exercises specifically designed for portraying Bernard, and then integrated them directly into my own rehearsal process.

2.1 Physical Development Training Incorporating Mask Techniques

My training started by grounding myself. I focused on self-awareness, core breathing, and cultivating a present moment awareness with 'the Standing Zero exercise'. This really helped quiet my mind and body, shedding any personal emotional or physical vocabulary that might hinder Bernard's intricate movements. Exercises like '20-Points Isolation' allowed me to meticulously pinpoint and work through any physical tension, especially in my back, crucial for Bernard's sometimes frantic physicality. Assistant Professor Dr. Wankwan Polachan's emphasis on the Neutrality Walk was a game-changer, it helped me recognize and shed ingrained habits like slouching or pinching my elbows, which went against the confident, upright posture Bernard needed, even as his world collapsed. I also incorporated Lecoq's 'Undulation and Inverse Undulation,' 'Éclosion and Contraction,' 'the Nine Attitudes,' and 'Molino' exercises to build physical stamina, which I realized I sorely lacked. This foundational work was essential before even touching the masks that Master Nikorn Sae-Tang emphasized.

Then came the Neutral Mask. This mask forced me to communicate entirely through my body, stripping away my personal expressions. Exercises like 'Waking Up' and 'the Four Elements' helped me shed my everyday physical habits and discover new ways of moving, highlighting the stark differences between my natural physicality, more earth and water-like, and Bernard's fiery, quick-thinking persona. Moving through imaginary spaces like airports or restaurants while masked pushed me to react physically without relying on facial cues, building immense confidence in bodily expression.

Next, I moved to Character Masks. Each mask embodies a specific personality, demanding I find the dominant physical traits within it. This became a powerful way to explore Bernard's complex mix of charm, cunning, and eventual frantic desperation. Even with a shared mask, I noticed how differently each actor embodied the personality, and I had to actively work to stop relying on my own habitual gestures. Using 'The Counter masks' helped me understand Bernard's layered dimensions, revealing hidden cowardice or pride, and pushed me to find new physical expressions outside my comfort zone.

Finally, Commedia dell'Arte masks provided a rich vocabulary for exaggerated, precise physical comedy. While finding authentic masks was tough in Thailand, a seminar with Assistant Professor Dr. Wankwan Polachan and practical classes with Assistant Professor Dangkamon Na Pomberjra introduced me to archetypes like Arlecchino, Zanni, and Inamorato. Arlecchino's agile, animalistic movements were a direct fit for Bernard's need for rapid evasions and frantic orchestrations. Improvisation exercises, often using *Boeing-Boeing* scenarios, showed me how challenging, yet vital, comedic timing and the precise moment of stillness were in creating humour. I also explored full-face masks for powerful, expansive movements and half-masks for vocal exploration using gibberish, which truly liberated my

emotional expression through body and voice. Exaggeration and animal embodiment exercises further helped me expand my physical range, crucial for farce.

2.2 Rehearsals with the director and casts

During rehearsals with the director and other actors, I kept my mask training separate but stayed in a "mask-like" physical state. Since I wouldn't wear a mask during the actual performances, maintaining that specific physicality was key. Early on, I felt a disconnect without the mask, but incorporating adapted mask exercises (like animal embodiment and improvisation) into regular rehearsals helped bridge the gap. I also found that my physical expression was sometimes closer to Robert's character than Bernard's, so I doubled down on character and Commedia mask exercises, even filming myself to compare my masked movements with my unmasked rehearsals. I learned to consciously recall the physical sensations and impulses from mask work and apply them when unmasked for consistency.

Results

1 Performance Implementation and Outcomes

Three public performances of *Boeing-Boeing* were conducted at the Sodsai Pantoomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts, Chulalongkorn University, from April 4-6, 2025. Each performance accommodated approximately 342 audience members, providing a comprehensive evaluation context for assessing the effectiveness of mask training techniques in character portrayal.

2 Performance Development Trajectory

The performance series showcased a progressive refinement in character embodiment and technical execution. Prior to each performance, Guy Fawkes masks were employed as preparatory tools, chosen for their visual impact rather than historical significance, to facilitate mental and physical preparation for embodying Bernard's character. This pre-performance ritual proved instrumental in establishing the psychological foundation necessary for effective character transformation.

The first performance marked a significant breakthrough in character embodiment, with the performer experiencing enhanced connection to Bernard's physicality compared to rehearsal sessions. However, residual performance anxiety continued to affect comedic timing precision, indicating areas requiring further development.

The second performance demonstrated substantial improvement through implementation of focused calm-mindset techniques and deliberate cultivation of positive ensemble energy. This approach yielded exceptional audience engagement, with sustained laughter throughout the performance and the performer experiencing genuine character integration characterized by increased physical agility and expressive range.

The final performance successfully integrated the optimal elements from previous shows, achieving profound character connection and embodiment. While audience energy levels fluctuated compared to the second performance, the performer maintained consistent character portrayal and technical execution.

3 Quantitative Audience Evaluation

A comprehensive audience evaluation survey assessed four critical dimensions of Bernard's character portrayal using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Data collection yielded 342 complete responses across all three performances, providing robust statistical analysis capability.

3.1 Physical Expression and Movement Quality

Evaluation of physical expression clarity revealed exceptional audience recognition of enhanced theatrical physicality. A substantial 65.50% (224 respondents) strongly agreed that physical expression and gestures were exaggerated and clearer compared to realistic drama conventions, with an additional 21.64% (74 respondents) agreeing, yielding a combined positive response of 87.14%. This overwhelming positive response indicates successful implementation of mask training principles in creating heightened physical performance appropriate for farcical comedy.

Assessment of movement naturalness and bodily control demonstrated strong audience appreciation for technical execution quality. Results showed 57.89% (198 respondents) strongly agreed that movement and bodily control appeared natural throughout the performance, with 21.05% (72 respondents) agreeing, resulting in a combined positive response of 78.94%. This high approval rate suggests effective integration of mask training techniques without compromising movement authenticity.

3.2 Character Embodiment and Believability

Character portrayal effectiveness received substantial positive evaluation from audience members. Analysis revealed 58.19% (199 respondents) strongly agreed that the actor effectively conveyed Bernard's personality and behaviours believably, with 26.32% (90 respondents) agreeing, producing a combined positive response of 84.51%. This strong endorsement indicates successful character interpretation and embodiment through physical performance techniques.

4 Qualitative Feedback from Creative Collaborators and mask technique specialist

Six creative team members including the director, five fellow actors, and One mask technique specialist, provided structured feedback through semi-structured interviews conducted post-performance. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts revealed consistent observations across multiple evaluation dimensions.

4.1 Physical Development and Transformation

All collaborators noted observable and significant changes in movement quality and physical presence compared to early rehearsal phases. Participants consistently reported enhanced physical vocabulary, improved gestural precision, and increased confident embodiment of character physicality. The director specifically noted marked evolution in the performer's ability to maintain character consistency through sustained physical expression.

4.2 Character Consistency and Believability

Six collaborators reported substantial improvement in character portrayal consistency across rehearsals and performances. Fellow actors particularly emphasized the performer's enhanced ability to maintain Bernard's character integrity during challenging ensemble moments and comedic sequences.

4.3 Comedic Timing and Ensemble Dynamics

Four collaborators specifically mentioned enhanced comedic timing and improved responsiveness to ensemble dynamics. Fellow actors reported increased ease in collaborative scenes due to the performer's more predictable and intentional physical choices. The director noted particular improvement in the performer's ability to balance individual character expression with ensemble requirements.

5. Performance Analysis and Self-Assessment

Video recordings of rehearsals and performances provided objective documentation of observable changes in physical expression throughout the training and performance process. Systematic analysis revealed distinct developmental phases corresponding to mask training implementation.

5.1 Pre-Training Baseline Characteristics

Initial video analysis documented limited range of movement vocabulary and tendency toward repetitive gestural patterns. Physical expression remained within the performer's natural movement habits, with minimal character differentiation evident in physicality. Comedic timing showed inconsistency, with limited physical support for humorous moments.

5.2 Post-Training Demonstrations

Following mask training implementation, video analysis revealed expanded physical vocabulary and more varied gestural patterns. Character-specific movement choices became evident, with clear distinction between the performer's natural physicality and Bernard's constructed physical presence. Improved spatial awareness and ensemble responsiveness were consistently observable.

6.Training Effectiveness Assessment

The comprehensive evaluation data confirms significant effectiveness of mask training techniques in enhancing physical performance capabilities for theatrical character portrayal. Each mask training component contributed distinct benefits to overall performance development.

Neutral Mask training established foundational movement principles and mental preparation techniques essential for character work. Character Mask development facilitated specific personality exploration and expanded movement range while breaking established physical habits. Commedia dell'Arte training refined exaggerated physical comedy skills and energy management crucial for farcical performance success.

The integration of these three mask training approaches created a comprehensive physical performance foundation that enhanced character embodiment, improved comedic timing, and strengthened ensemble collaboration. Audience evaluation data confirms successful translation of training benefits into effective theatrical performance, with particular strength in physical expression clarity, character believability, and ensemble interaction quality.

Discussions

The implementation of three distinct mask training approaches successfully addressed fundamental performance challenges, particularly the limitation of repetitive movement patterns that had constrained character development. The comprehensive training program facilitated embodied character connection through physical exploration rather than purely intellectual analysis, resulting in more natural and convincing character portrayal. This approach aligns with Lecoq's theoretical framework regarding the mask's capacity to eliminate

habitual behaviours and establish neutral physical states from which character-specific movements can emerge organically.

Neutral mask training established essential groundwork by developing core body awareness and systematically eliminating personal mannerisms that interfered with character embodiment. This training component provided the mental calm and physical centring necessary for effective character work, creating the foundation from which Bernard's specific physicality could be constructed without the interference of personal movement habits.

Character mask exercises facilitated direct exploration of Bernard's personality traits, including his exaggerated confidence, cunning nature, and underlying fears, enabling organic development of comedic chaos through physical expression while refining timing precision. The training significantly expanded physical vocabulary, pushing performance beyond familiar gestural patterns to discover character-appropriate movement choices that felt both authentic and sustainable.

The incorporation of Commedia dell'Arte techniques, particularly those derived from Arlecchino, enhanced physical agility and developed capacity for exaggerated movement with quick, flexible reactions. This training proved crucial for adapting to unexpected performance situations and managing energy variations required for diverse comedic intensities. The systematic approach to physical comedy development provided essential skills for farcical performance success, particularly in executing the rapid transitions between control and chaos that Bernard's character demands.

However, several methodological limitations require acknowledgment. The single-subject design without control conditions means observed improvements could be attributed to multiple influences including general rehearsal effects, increased role familiarity, expectancy effects from belief in training effectiveness, natural skill progression through repeated practice, and concurrent director feedback and ensemble work influences. The audience evaluation system, while providing valuable feedback, lacks operational definitions for key concepts such as natural movement and comedic timing, limiting the objectivity of findings. The simultaneous occurrence of mask training with regular rehearsals creates temporal confounds that prevent definitive attribution of performance improvements to mask training specifically.

Despite these limitations, the findings suggest that mask techniques offer valuable tools for physical actor development, particularly for roles requiring exaggerated physicality and comedic timing. The systematic application of neutral, character, and Commedia dell'Arte masks provided a structured progression for developing performance-specific skills that addressed individual training needs effectively. The training approach appears particularly beneficial for actors seeking to expand beyond their natural movement patterns and develop character-specific physicality, creating a comprehensive framework for physical performance enhancement that addresses the unique demands of farcical theatre.

This exploratory investigation provides preliminary evidence that integrated mask training techniques may enhance physical performance capabilities for farcical theatrical roles. The positive audience reception, collaborative feedback, and subjective experience of performance transformation suggest potential benefits of this systematic training approach. The research demonstrates that mask exercises serve as powerful tools for developing actor physicality, especially for roles that differ significantly from the performer's natural personality, enabling deeper role exploration and producing more convincing, nuanced, and authentic performances through embodied character discovery.

The integration of traditional mask techniques with contemporary actor training represents a promising area for continued investigation, particularly for roles requiring heightened physicality and comedic precision. While this study offers valuable insights into the subjective experience of mask training application, it also highlights the need for more

rigorous methodological approaches to validate these traditional pedagogical methods systematically.

Suggestions

Future research should implement controlled experimental designs with comparison groups, develop standardized measurement instruments for physical performance assessment, conduct longitudinal studies tracking skill development over extended periods, and examine the transferability of mask-derived skills to diverse performance contexts and genres.

For practicing actors, the profound physical development offered by mask techniques training extends beyond farcical performance to all theatrical genres. However, realizing the full potential of these techniques requires consistent, ongoing practice paired with critical attention to physical and mental well-being. Managing personal schedules, health, fatigue, and stress directly impacts physical and mental readiness for mask work and rehearsals, affecting timing precision and connection with fellow actors. The research suggests that actors willing to engage deeply with mask training methodologies can expect significant expansion of their physical vocabulary and enhanced capacity for character embodiment, particularly when portraying roles that challenge their natural movement patterns and emotional ranges.

This investigation contributes to the limited literature on applying traditional mask techniques to contemporary actor training while demonstrating their particular value for challenging comedic performances. The findings support the continued integration of mask work into comprehensive actor training programs, especially for developing the specialized skills necessary for successful farcical performance. The systematic approach documented in this research provides a replicable framework for other actors and educators seeking to develop enhanced physical performance capabilities through time-tested pedagogical methods.

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Nurturing Third Places: Konstlek på Råby as Artistic Research and Practice for Resilient Creative Communities

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Abstract

This paper showcases Konstlek på Råby, a decade-long community art space in Västerås, Sweden, as a case study in practitioner-led artistic exploration where ethics are integral from the start, not an afterthought. Portrayed and analysed through the co-developed Moral Aesthetic Action (MAA) framework—which embeds ethical imperatives at the heart of creative intervention—our Art in Action Research (AiAR) explores how Konstlek cultivates a liberatory 'third place' (Oldenburg, 1999). We articulate the 'Råbymodel,' a practice-derived approach revealing how core MAA principles—including morally driven disruption, fostering creative indeterminacy (Klinger, 2024), robust practitioner support, and principled 'ethical refusal'—are vital for building youth empowerment and community resilience. This research offers transferable, actionable insights for deeply embedding ethics within community art practice and generating impactful, practitioner-led knowledge.

Keywords: Moral Aesthetic Action (MAA), Råbymodel, Action Research (AR), Community Art, Aesthetic Action (AA), Third Place Theory

Purpose and Background

Starting with Ethical Engagement: The Genesis and Evolution of Konstlek på Råby

This paper delves into Konstlek på Råby, an ongoing community art space in Västerås, Sweden, presenting it as a case study in practitioner-led artistic research. Our exploration begins not with a community in isolation, but with a foundational question: What does it mean to place ethics not as a secondary consideration or an 'add-on,' but at the very centre of artistic practice? For nearly a decade, Konstlek på Råby has served as a vibrant nexus of creative expression and community engagement within a socioeconomically vulnerable neighbourhood. Rooted in Oldenburg's (1999) concept of the 'third place,' its journey traces a 'red thread' from early initiatives like *Råby Planet, Ballongen på Råby, BKK* (the Children's ArtClub) and the mobile, place-activating *Konsthall Ur och Skur*, to its current iteration as an established local art space *Konstlek på Råby*.



From Råby Planet 2018, Foto: Ricard Estay

This evolution—rich with learning, adaptation, and a commitment to place-making and responsive practice—forms a core element of our artistic research. Indeed, it is from the sustained, relational, and ethically demanding practitioner-led artistic exploration conducted

at Konstlek på Råby over nearly a decade that the core tenets of the Moral Aesthetic Action (MAA) framework (Lindblom, 2025) – our primary analytical lens in this paper – were first revealed, tested, and forged. While MAA has since proven applicable in diverse educational and creative contexts, its genesis lies in the lived realities and emergent challenges of nurturing this specific 'third place'. This paper, therefore, not only presents Konstlek's evolving practice – what we term the **Råby model** – but also articulates and grounds the MAA framework through which we understand its contribution to building youth empowerment and community resilience. For those of us embedded in community life—in the rhythms of after-school programs, summer workshops, shared meals, and informal mentorship—ethics are not optional; they are the very conditions that make the work meaningful and sustainable. This paper articulates insights woven from our experiences as co-practitioners, a role demanding continuous reflection on our engagement and influence within the community context, from collective wisdom, and from knowledge that grows slowly, relationally, and sometimes quietly.



Konsthall Ur & Skur, and the now permanent Konstlek på Råby premises.

Guiding Frameworks, Context, and Aims

The Moral Aesthetic Action (MAA) framework (Lindblom, 2025), which guides our analysis, emerged from the insights of years, reflection and action. It was born from a frustration with academic and artistic frameworks that often treat ethics as external to the core creative or research process; MAA, in contrast, is designed to navigate the inherent complexities of such work by embedding ethical deliberation from initiation through to reflection.

Operating within the Swedish context, Konstlek benefits from municipal funding structures which support accessible, free culture programs. This model fosters meaningful, sustained engagement and offers a point of reflection when considering other contexts where community art might be shaped by different drivers. While acknowledging diverse global ecosystems, our experience at Konstlek shows the profound impact of a consistent, accessible, and free-to-participate model.

This paper aims to present and analyse Konstlek's evolving practice—what we term the **Råby model**—and its contribution to fostering resilient communities. We do so through the intertwined lenses of:

1. **Art in Action Research (AiAR)** (Lämmli, 2022; Lindhult, 2008) as our core research paradigm, emphasising our role as active practitioners in an ongoing cycle of action, reflection, and knowledge creation.

2. **Aesthetic Action (AA)** (Klinger, 2024) is a key conceptual tool, particularly its emphasis on 'indeterminacy as an end in its own right' and the creation of a 'bond without terms,' for understanding our interventions.

3. **Moral Aesthetic Action (MAA)** (Lindblom, 2025) as our guiding ethical and practical framework, developed from our practice to integrate ethical considerations, social justice, and care from the outset of any creative intervention.

Third Place Theory (Oldenburg, 1999) for understanding the social space Konstlek creates.

The emancipatory pedagogies of **Freire (2000) and hooks (2000)** for informing our relational and ethical engagement, particularly our critique of 'banking' education and our commitment to a 'pedagogy of love.'

As practitioners deeply embedded in this work, we explore how these theoretical frameworks inform our challenge-based inquiry and practitioner-led knowledge creation. We aim to contribute to the broader discourse on artistic research for and with creative communities. By sharing the Konstlek 'Råby model'—its historical development, theoretical underpinnings, practical applications (such as participatory zine-making as a 'determinate performance of indeterminacy'), and inherent challenges (funding, staffing, organisational navigation)—we seek to:

- Offer transferable insights into developing and sustaining community-driven arts initiatives in diverse socio-cultural settings.
- Demonstrate the Råby model's transformative potential, informed by AiAR, MAA, AA, and pedagogies of love, in fostering social innovation, youth empowerment, and community resilience.
- Invite a critical and reflective cross-cultural dialogue, on shared strategies for strengthening artistic research and practice that empower community-driven initiatives and shape more inclusive creative spaces.

The paper will first outline the methodological approach, detailing how we weave theory and practice at Konstlek. Subsequently, we will present key findings and illustrative examples, drawing on our practitioner reflections and documented practice. The discussion will then reflect on challenges and successes, focusing on the ethical dimensions of unlearning, quality, refusal, and relationality that have shaped MAA and the Råby model. We will conclude with reflections on the historical threads of Konstlek, the significance of indeterminacy as ethical infrastructure, and the nature of governance as ethical praxis, before extending an open invitation for continued shared inquiry.

Approach and Methodology

A Relational Weave: Art in Action Research (AiAR) at Konstlek

The research underpinning Konstlek på Råby and the reflections articulated in this paper are not conducted from a detached, observational distance. As co-authors, we are also co-practitioners deeply embedded in its daily life and evolution. Our research, therefore, is an intrinsic part of the living structure of Konstlek. This embeddedness is central to our chosen paradigm: **Art in Action Research (AiAR)**, as defined by Lämmli (2022) and aligning with principles of quality in interactive research outlined by Lindhult (2008). Our AiAR is always filtered through our lived experience, emphasising an ongoing, cyclical process of action, reflection, and collective knowledge creation. At the core of our approach is the understanding that knowledge does not solely emerge from pre-defined systems or

formal studies, but crucially from **reflection-in-action** (Schön, 1983) within the practice itself. This iterative engagement allows for dynamic adaptation and learning, central to both the vitality of Konstlek and the integrity of our research.

Guiding Frameworks: Operationalizing MAA, AA, and Supporting Theories

Guiding this AiAR process and central to the Råby model is the **Moral Aesthetic Action (MAA) framework** (Lindblom, 2025). MAA represents a critical evolution and ethical operationalization of Klinger's (2024) philosophical concept of Aesthetic Action (AA). While AA provides the 'engine' for disrupting established norms and creating conditions for indeterminacy by fostering a 'bond without terms,' MAA synthesizes this disruptive openness with an explicit, multi-layered **ethical compass**. This compass draws upon foundational principles of justice (Rawls, 1971), the relational ethic of love-as-practice (hooks, 2000), the critical responsibility of bearing witness to injustice (Baldwin, 1987, 2016), and the profound responsibility for the Other (Levinas, 1969, 1998). This integration ensures that the generative potential of Aesthetic Action is consciously and consistently directed towards ethically desirable, just, and liberatory ends. The application of MAA involves navigating the inherent dynamism and potential tensions between its six interconnected tenets: 1) morally driven disruption; 2) iterative transformation; 3) relational impact; 4) explicit moral responsibility; 5) maintenance of complexity; and 6) an overarching moral imperative for societal benefit—provide a lens for our ethically grounded and aesthetically potent interventions. **The application of MAA involves navigating the inherent dynamism and potential tensions between these tenets; for instance, balancing the impetus for 'morally driven disruption' with the necessity of 'maintaining complexity' and ensuring 'relational impact' is cared for, a process demanding ongoing ethical deliberation and praxis.**

Central to the operationalisation of MAA at Konstlek is Florian Klinger's (2024) philosophical concept of **Aesthetic Action (AA)**. We utilise AA in practice by designing open-ended creative activities and provocations. These prioritise the process of questioning and interaction over predefined artistic products, creating conditions for ‘indeterminacy'. This involves fostering what Klinger describes as a ‘bond without terms’—a connection based on shared creative exploration rather than fixed roles or outcomes. Such encounters, which often trigger ‘disorienting dilemmas' (Mezirow, 1991, 2000), are understood as catalysts for transformative learning. Klinger's deeper philosophical exploration of AA as the ‘determinate performance of an indeterminacy,’ a ‘form as question,’ and its capacity to unsettle and impact historical action through its unique form, informs our understanding of the transformative potential of our work. **MAA, therefore, can be understood as AA consciously guided by an explicit ethical compass, ensuring that the openness generated by indeterminacy serves just and humanising ends.**

This AiAR framework, guided by MAA and actualised through AA, is further enriched and specified by:

1. **Third Place Theory** (Oldenburg, 1999): This informs our understanding of Konstlek's function as a vital community anchor fostering creative interaction beyond home and school, a characteristic we continually assess as the space evolves.

2. **Emancipatory Pedagogies** (Freire, 2000; hooks, 2000): Freire's critique of ‘banking’ education and his call for problem-posing, dialogical approaches, alongside hooks' emphasis on a 'pedagogy of love' (underscoring care, mutual respect, and valuing individual experience), are cornerstones of Konstlek's pedagogical ethos.

3. **Countering Commodification & Fostering Belonging** (Chan, 2023): Our AiAR approach critically examines how Konstlek's activities resist commodifying pressures and

genuinely contribute to the social fabric and collective identity of the Råby community, fostering a sense of belonging.

4. **The Arti-fact** (Schiesser, 2015): Tangible outputs (zines, workshop designs, documented reflections) and evolving understandings are viewed as dynamic 'arti-facts.' These materials or processual traces are imbued with practitioner-generated knowledge and serve as crucial resources for ongoing inquiry, reflection, and knowledge dissemination within our AiAR cycles.

Data Generation and Analysis in Practice

The insights shared in this paper are drawn from sources inherent to our relational AiAR practice. Recurring practices scaffold our method, including:

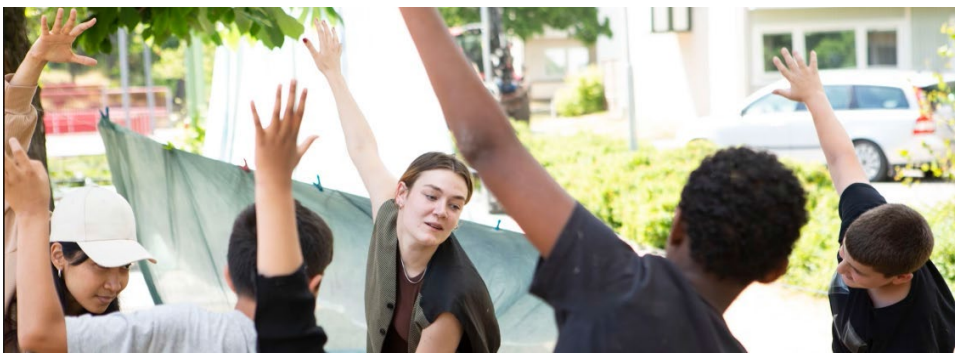
• **Practitioner Reflection:** This is a primary data source, involving ongoing dialogues, personal journals, and critical reflections by us as co-authors and core practitioners. This provides a subjective reflective layer, particularly when considering comparative aspects of community art and navigating the interplay of theory and practice, **while also prompting reflexivity on our own roles, biases, and the power dynamics inherent in our embedded positions.**

• **Documentation of Practice:** This includes photographic and video records of workshops/activities (with ethical considerations for participant anonymity/consent, following GDPR), examples of art created by participants, and internal project reports/plans (e.g., Konstlek på Råby Internal Activity Report, 2023; historical documentation from BKK – The Children's Art Club – and Konsthall Ur och Skur).

• **Anecdotal Records & Observations:** Detailed notes from interactions, informal participant feedback, and observations of engagement within Konstlek contribute to a rich, qualitative understanding of the project's dynamics.

• **Theoretical Engagement as Data Generation:** The continuous interplay between our lived practice and these theoretical frameworks constitutes an active form of data generation and analysis. As we test, adapt, and refine our understandings (Lindhult, 2008) in dialogue with these theories, new insights emerge.

Our analytical approach is iterative and interpretive. We seek insights, and illustrative examples within the collected data that demonstrate the principles and impact of our research. These empirical observations are consistently connected back to our theoretical underpinnings, particularly MAA and Klinger's AA, to build a nuanced understanding of Konstlek's practice. The comparative reflections on community art models, subtly informed by our varied cultural and academic experiences, are integrated as a vital part of our reflective practitioner insight within this AiAR process. We know theory only lives if it can breathe in practice.



Movement workshop with Tova.

Results and Findings: The Råbymodel in Action

Our sustained Art in Action Research (AiAR) at Konstlek på Råby, guided by the Moral Aesthetic Action (MAA) framework and operationalised through interventions aligned with Klinger's (2024) philosophy of Aesthetic Action (AA), has yielded several significant findings. These insights, drawn from our reflective praxis as deeply embedded practitioners and documented through various 'arti-facts' (Schiesser, 2015), demonstrate the potential of this approach to foster youth empowerment, community building, and generate contextually rich, practitioner-led knowledge (Lindhult, 2008). The following subsections detail key aspects of the **Råby model** as it manifests in practice.



A group of children's drawings on a line.

Cultivating a Liberatory Third Space through MAA and Intentional Indeterminacy

Konstlek på Råby consistently manifests as an Oldenburgian (1999) 'third place,' providing an essential informal social and creative hub. Its documented historical evolution from earlier, more mobile initiatives to its current established physical space reflects a deep-seated commitment to the Råby community and an ongoing, iterative refinement of its operational ethos (Lindhult, 2008). This space is actively shaped through MAA's principles of morally driven disruption and iterative transformation, particularly via emergent, youth-led programming.

A prime example is the "Vad är Konst?" (What is Art?) summer zine workshop. This initiative was not a pre-scripted, top-down directive. Instead, as I (Simon Lindblom) observed in my role supporting the Konstlek team, it emerged from the proactive engagement of a former youth summer worker, , who sought further involvement. The core Konstlek team responded by securing funding and, crucially, empowering Tova to lead two new summer youth workers with full autonomy. The directive was simply to *lead an exploration*, with no predefined goals or deliverables. This intentional facilitation of 'indeterminacy as an end in its own right' (Klinger, 2024, p. 134) by 'easing, instead of giving or demanding,' allowed the project's focus—the question "What is art?"—to emerge organically from the youth themselves. The resulting zines, as 'arti-facts,' embodied not just creative outputs but the youth's journey through meaning-making and democratic agency (Freire, 2000).



Vad är konst?/What is art? After four weeks we know less than when we started. Cars- Italia, 8 years.

Beyond specific workshops, this principle of intentional indeterminacy and youth co-creation is a consistent feature. For instance, the physical layout and decoration of the Konstlek space itself have evolved through ongoing, informal input from the youth, who often rearrange furniture, add their artwork to the walls without formal curation, or suggest new materials and activities.

The pedagogical ethos at Konstlek, deeply informed by hooks' (2000) 'Pedagogy of Love,' translates into a tangible prioritisation of a nurturing environment characterised by care, mutual respect, and safety. Cultivating this 'beloved community' is paramount for creating the conditions where Klinger's (2024) 'bond without terms' can authentically emerge. Observations from our shared practice, detailed in internal reports (e.g., Konstlek på Råby Activity Log, 2023), consistently show children and youth engaging in collaborative problem-solving (e.g., collectively deciding how to share limited popular art supplies, or helping each other with challenging techniques observed during open studio time), offering mutual support, and expressing a strong sense of ownership over the space. This direct focus on relational well-being and the co-creation of a supportive atmosphere actively counters the commodification of urban public spaces (Chan, 2023) and is a direct manifestation of MAA's commitment to relational impact and explicit moral responsibility. **For example, a recurring observation is older youth spontaneously mentoring younger children in drawing techniques or helping them navigate the use of new materials, interactions that are encouraged but not formally structured, fostering organic peer-to-peer support and strengthening community bonds.**

The 'Råby model': Ethical Infrastructure and Practitioner Support as Core Components

A crucial finding is that the success and sustainability of the 'Råby model' hinge significantly on the authenticity of engagement and the robust, ethical support structures

underpinning the practitioners' work. This moves beyond pedagogy into the realm of organisational practice and an ethics of care.

The ‘lived experience,’ where "every meeting, every person and every-day matters," nurtured by committed individuals including Katrin Ingelstedt, Jenny Berntsson, Leif Jonsson, Patrick Kretschek, Anna Törrönen, Wichanan Glunrawd, Lina Ahtola, transforms MAA from an abstract framework into a palpable reality. This ensures Konstlek transcends being a superficial ‘band-aid’ to becoming an integral, transformative element of local society. The role of those supporting Konstlek, including the Konstfrämjandet Västmanland board and management, extends to navigating the complexities of funding, local politics, and, crucially, fostering a psychologically safe and supportive working climate for the team. The importance of "BE[ing] there"—to work for their employment safety, to work with psychological safety climate, to over and over again make decisions that look forward—is paramount. This commitment to the well-being and stability of the practitioners, including fair pay and manageable workloads wherever possible, provides the foundation for them to facilitate empowering and ethically sound experiences for the youth. This aligns with Lindhult's (2008) broader understanding of the conditions necessary for quality in interactive research and highlights a core, often invisible, strength of the Råby model: **an aesthetic infrastructure of care that prioritizes human sustainability alongside programmatic goals.** It is important to note that this is an ongoing struggle, and often those most deeply engaged have given far more than their roles demanded, sometimes to the point of burnout, highlighting the continuous need to advocate for and secure adequate resources to truly sustain this ethical infrastructure.

Unsettling Societal Norms: Aesthetic Action, Ethical Refusal, and Localised Disruption

The ‘unsettling’ at Konstlek på Råby, informed by Klinger's (2024) Aesthetic Action (AA), is not a random disruption but targets specific societal norms. This includes challenging prevailing narratives, both those that frame Råby primarily as an 'underprivileged place' and broader societal assumptions that impose a success-mentality where monetary or measurable worth often trumps other values. Konstlek's operational ethos embodies what we term **’ethical refusal’—a core practitioner competence within the Råby model and a crucial operational aspect of Moral Aesthetic Action.** This involves a conscious, principled rejection of demands from funding bodies, institutional pressures, or dominant societal narratives that would compromise the intrinsic values and ethical commitments of the third place, such as its dedication to open exploration, process-oriented engagement, and genuine human connection over purely instrumental or commodified outcomes (Chan, 2023). This practice of ethical refusal is a powerful Aesthetic Action in itself, safeguarding the integrity of Konstlek's unique, ethically grounded environment.

This practice of ethical refusal is a powerful Aesthetic Action in itself. It involves a conscious decision-making process within the Konstlek team and its supporting structures to decline opportunities, partnerships, or framings that might compromise the intrinsic values of the work—such as open exploration, process-oriented engagement, and genuine human connection over commodification (aligning with Chan, 2023). By asserting the community's right to define its own narratives and measures of success, Konstlek protects the integrity of the 'third place' it offers. This ensures it remains a space where value is found in the journey of creative discovery and relational depth, rather than in predetermined outputs, competitive metrics, or externally imposed agendas that may not align with the community's actual needs or Konstlek's foundational principles of care and empowerment. This consistent, often quiet, form of refusal constitutes a significant, localised, morally driven disruption to dominant operational modes and expectations, safeguarding the unique, ethically grounded environment that defines the Råby model.

Yet, as James Baldwin reminded us:

"I never have been in despair about the world. I've been enraged by it... I can't afford despair. I can't tell my nephew, my niece. You can't tell the children there's no hope." – James Baldwin, 1987

This sentiment resonates deeply with the ethos of Konstlek. Even in exhaustion, the commitment to showing up—with hope, integrity, and love—has remained unwavering.

These findings collectively illustrate key facets of the **Råby model** in action. They demonstrate how Konstlek på Råby, through its MAA-informed AiAR, effectively operationalises complex philosophical and pedagogical concepts into impactful community practice, fostering a liberatory third space, underscoring the vital role of ethical infrastructure and practitioner support, and enacting a principled unsettling of limiting societal norms.

Discussion: Interpretation and Implications of Moral Aesthetic Action at Konstlek

The findings from Konstlek på Råby, when viewed through the integrated lenses of Art in Action Research (AiAR), our co-developed Moral Aesthetic Action (MAA) framework, and Florian Klinger's (2024) philosophy of Aesthetic Action (AA), offer significant insights into the practice and transformative potential of community-engaged artistic research. This discussion interprets these findings, focusing on the liberatory power of intentionally facilitated indeterminacy, the critical importance of ethical practitioner support and organisational praxis, the nuanced unsettling of societal norms, and the broader implications for understanding quality and generating knowledge in artistic research.

The Liberatory Power of Intentionally Facilitated Indeterminacy: From Klinger's AA to Konstlek's Praxis

Our work at Konstlek demonstrates a practical and impactful translation of Klinger's (2024) often abstract philosophical concepts of Aesthetic Action into tangible community art pedagogy. The genesis and an ongoing characteristic of activities like the "Vad är Konst?" zine workshop, emerging from facilitator initiative and youth-led exploration rather than prescriptive plans, illustrate a core principle we foster: the 'determinate performance of an indeterminacy' (Klinger, 2024). Reflecting on this process, the role of the core Konstlek team and its practitioners is to create the conditions for this indeterminacy by "easing, instead of giving or demanding," allowing indeterminacy itself to become an 'end in its own right' (Klinger, 2024). This is a direct application of MAA's tenet of 'morally driven disruption,' as it challenges the power dynamics inherent in traditional, outcome-focused creative and educational settings (Freire, 2000).



Arti-facts

The zines and other ‘arti-facts’ (Schiesser, 2015) produced are not merely creative outputs but embody the youth's journey through meaning-making, critical inquiry, and democratic agency. This process underscores how Klingerian AA, by ‘suspending established terms’ and fostering a ‘bond without terms’ (Klinger, 2024), can empower individuals to co-construct knowledge and articulate their unique perspectives. This unsettling of predefined meanings, what Klinger terms a ‘form as question’ (2024), creates the fertile ground for Mezirow's (1991, 2000) ‘disorienting dilemmas,’ often the catalysts for profound transformative learning. The liberatory aspect lies in this shift from passive reception to active co-creation of meaning and value, directly empowering participants.



Arti-facts

Ethical Infrastructure as the Bedrock of Quality in AiAR: The Råby model’s Core

A central argument emerging from our research is that the ‘Råby model's’ success and sustainability are inextricably linked to the often-invisible ethical infrastructure that supports its practitioners. This interpretation aligns with Lindhult's (2008) criteria for quality in interactive research, suggesting that such quality is met not just through pedagogical innovation, but through a sustained, ethical commitment to the well-being, agency, and professional sustainability of the practitioners themselves.

Reflecting on the role of Konstfrämjandet Västmanland's board and management, alongside the continuous efforts of the Konstlek team, emphasises that MAA extends beyond direct artistic intervention into organisational praxis. The commitment to "BE[ing] there... to work for their employment safety, to work with psychological safety climate... to over and over again take decisions that are looking forward" is fundamental. This consistent, ethical support, built by a ‘lineage of dedicated individuals,’ ensures practitioners like Wichanan have the stability and emotional resources to genuinely enact a ‘Pedagogy of Love’ (hooks, 2000). This ‘lived experience,’ where "every meeting, every person and every day matters," ensures that MAA is not an abstract ideal but a palpable reality. This authentic, ethically consistent environment is what allows the Klingerian ‘bond without terms’ to flourish with participants, validating Lindhult's (2008) assertion that the quality of interactive research is deeply tied to its contextual and relational integrity. **The Råby model, therefore, posits that the 'aesthetic infrastructure of care'—encompassing fair remuneration, psychological safety, manageable workloads, and supportive governance—is not a desirable add-on**

but a non-negotiable prerequisite for high-quality, ethically sound, and sustainable community-engaged artistic research.

Aesthetic Action as Social Critique: The Impact of Ethical Refusal

Konstlek's practice of 'unsettling,' informed by Klinger's (2024) AA, is interpreted as a targeted and ethically considered engagement with, and critique of, prevailing societal norms. The 'ethical refusal' described in our findings—declining framings or opportunities that compromise intrinsic values—is more than a protective mechanism; it is a proactive form of social critique enacted through aesthetic action. By choosing not to align with instrumentalizing agendas, Konstlek asserts different values—those of process, exploration, human connection, and intrinsic worth—over purely utilitarian or market-driven logics. This aligns with MAA's tenets of 'morally driven disruption' and contributing to 'societal benefit' beyond mere economic terms. The capacity for 'ethical refusal,' as demonstrated at Konstlek, therefore emerges not merely as a reactive defence, but as a proactive, teachable skill essential for practitioners navigating the often-conflicting demands of community work, institutional expectations, and ethical integrity. It is a vital strategy for maintaining the 'moral' in Moral Aesthetic Action when faced with systemic pressures.

The aim is not simply to critique from a distance, but to actively construct an alternative social space, a 'third place' (Oldenburg, 1999), where these different values hold sway and can be lived. The ethical navigation of this unsettling lies in its grounding in care, affirmation (hooks, 2000), and a commitment to the community's self-definition. This ensures that the questioning of norms is an empowering act of opening possibilities and asserting agency, rather than a purely deconstructive or destabilising one. **This highlights a nuanced aspect of MAA: that disruption, to be morally effective, must be coupled with a constructive, care-centered vision for what *could be*, actively shaping an alternative rather than merely pointing out flaws.**

The Iterative Weave of AiAR: Generating Practitioner Knowledge and Bicultural Insights

The entire journey of Konstlek på Råby embodies the iterative spirit of AiAR (Lämmli, 2022). The 'red thread' tracing its evolution is a testament to continuous learning, adaptation, and reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983)—a practical demonstration of Lindhult's (2008) principles for quality in interactive research. The consistent practitioner reflections, documented dialogues, and adaptation of practices in response to emergent needs have deeply enriched this AiAR process.

As co-authors and co-practitioners from different cultural backgrounds (Swedish and Thai), our ongoing internal dialogue, while not a formal comparative study, has fostered a heightened awareness of cultural nuances in understanding and enacting concepts like "art," "community," "participation," and "ethics." This bicultural lens has subtly informed a more globally conscious and contextually sensitive application and interpretation of MAA and related theories. **This ongoing reflective praxis, inherent in AiAR, also requires acknowledging our own positionalities and the potential power dynamics at play when working as facilitators and researchers within a community, even one as familiar as Råby. It is a continuous process of questioning whose voices are amplified, whose definitions of success are prioritized, and how truly shared ownership is fostered (a point requiring ongoing vigilance and humility).**

The 'arti-facts' (Schiesser, 2015) generated—zines, workshop plans, internal reports, and this very paper—are not endpoints but active elements in this ongoing cycle of knowledge generation. They make tacit, practice-based knowledge visible and offer

transferable insights, demonstrating how deeply embedded artistic research can yield unique, valuable, and contextually rich understandings.

Navigating MAA in Practice: Interdependencies, Tensions, and Limitations

While the MAA framework offers six guiding tenets, their application in the dynamic context of Konstlek is not a simple checklist but a complex navigation of interdependencies and, at times, productive tensions. For example, the drive for 'morally driven disruption' (e.g., challenging institutional norms) must often be carefully balanced with 'maintaining complexity' (avoiding simplistic solutions) and preserving 'relational impact' (ensuring actions do not inadvertently harm the community bonds we seek to foster). Resolving such tensions is not about finding a perfect formula but involves ongoing ethical deliberation, situational judgment, and a commitment to Freirean praxis (action-reflection-action) within the practitioner team. The 'aesthetic infrastructure of care' discussed earlier becomes crucial here, providing the supportive environment where such difficult navigations can occur without leading to practitioner burnout or compromising core values.

It is also important to acknowledge the limitations of the 'Råby model' and this study. While we offer it as a catalyst for dialogue, its direct transferability to vastly different socio-cultural or resource-scarce contexts requires careful consideration and adaptation, not direct replication. The specific funding structures in Sweden, for example, play a role that cannot be ignored. Furthermore, while we strive for shared power, the inherent dynamics of practitioner-researchers working with youth and community members necessitate continuous critical self-reflection on issues of power, voice, and representation. This paper is one interpretation, and the voices and perspectives of the youth and wider Råby community, while informing our work, are primarily filtered through our practitioner lens here. Future research could explore more direct co-authorship or participatory analysis with community members to further decenter traditional research hierarchies.

Conclusion: Weaving Ethics into Everyday Practice for Resilient Creative Communities

This paper has journeyed through the practice of Konstlek på Råby, an ongoing community art space in Västerås, Sweden, presenting it as a dynamic site of Art in Action Research (AiAR). Our central argument has been that through the sustained and reflective application of the co-developed Moral Aesthetic Action (MAA) framework—illuminated by Florian Klinger's (2024) philosophy of 'Aesthetic Action'—practitioner-led artistic research can profoundly cultivate liberatory 'third places' (Oldenburg, 1999), foster youth empowerment, and build community resilience.

The historical evolution of Konstlek, its 'red thread' of responsive, ethically grounded engagement, demonstrates that MAA is not an abstract theorization, but a framework born from the practical necessity of placing ethics at the heart of creative work. Key findings from our research articulate the 'Råby model,' showcasing how MAA's tenets—morally driven disruption, iterative transformation, relational impact, explicit moral responsibility, maintenance of complexity, and an overarching moral imperative for societal benefit—are operationalized. This includes the intentional facilitation of creative indeterminacy to empower youth agency, the critical role of an 'aesthetic infrastructure of care' that ensures robust support for practitioners as foundational to quality and sustainability, and the practice of 'ethical refusal' as a potent form of Aesthetic Action that protects intrinsic values and challenges limiting societal norms. The diverse 'arti-facts' (Schiesser, 2015) generated, from youth-created zines to this very paper, testify to the knowledge-generating capacity of this ethically attuned, practitioner-led model.

A crucial insight, reinforced through our engagement with Konstlek's operational and ethical structures, is that the 'Råby model' thrives because ethics are not an afterthought but a beginning; when this is the case, the rest often becomes surprisingly practical. It is this invisible yet foundational labour—administrative, emotional, and structural—that provides the soil for Klingerian 'bonds without terms' to flourish and for genuine community co-creation to occur. Konstlek's engagement with Klingerian Aesthetic Action, particularly its embrace of 'indeterminacy as an end in its own right' and its function as a 'form as question,' allows it to 'unsettle' societal narratives that might frame Råby merely as a site of deficiency. The practice of 'ethical refusal' is itself a potent moral aesthetic act, safeguarding Konstlek as an integral part of the neighbourhood's fabric rather than a transient intervention.

Ultimately, this paper and the MAA framework it explores offer an invitation to our colleagues. We present Konstlek på Råby and the Råby model not as a definitive template but as a contribution to a shared, urgent inquiry: What happens when we begin with ethics? What if we prioritize and protect openness and emergent possibilities instead of predetermined outcomes? These are not rhetorical questions; they are the real, daily questions that guide our work and, we believe, are vital for the future of community-engaged artistic research. The Konstlek experience suggests that by embracing an 'ethic of unsettling,' by fostering genuine dialogue in spaces of indeterminacy, and by co-creating conditions for presence, trust, and mutual care, we can collectively advance artistic research as a profound force for positive social transformation. It is a call, in the spirit of James Baldwin's unwavering hope, to build practices that are not only aesthetic but deeply, unapologetically moral—weaving ethics into the everyday work of creating more just, resilient, and truly creative communities for all.

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Embodied Cartography and Community Resilience in the Context of the West Philippine Sea

Annelys De Vet[1], Josephine Turalba[2], Lyn Viado[3]

Introduction

Project PANATAG is an arts-based research initiative that explores how artistic practice fosters community, amplifies the voices of marginalized individuals, and reclaims agency in politically sensitive maritime spaces. This article stems from the broader development of the Subjective Atlas of the Philippines, a multi-sited mapping project initiated by the Artistic Research Center (ARC) of the Philippine Women's University in collaboration with Subjective Editions. While the larger mapping trajectory encompasses multiple sites across Luzon and the Visayas—including engagements at Casa San Miguel (CSM)—this article focuses specifically on one of the workshops, namely the Masinloc fisherfolk workshop in Zambales. This singular field site offers urgent insights into community resilience, territorial memory, and artistic co-creation within the context of the West Philippine Sea.

The name Panatag, meaning "calm" or "tranquil" in Filipino, holds both emotional and historical resonance for Filipino fisherfolk. Scarborough Shoal—locally known as Bajo de Masinloc or Panatag Shoal—has long served as a natural refuge for small-scale fishing boats. The shoal's natural formation, with its lagoon surrounded by reefs, has historically offered calm and safe shelter during stormy weather, which is the basis for its local name 'Panatag' (Lopez, 2024). Its calm lagoon and protective reefs once offered shelter during storms, hence its name. However, this sense of refuge has been disrupted by intensifying geopolitical conflict in recent years.

The continuing struggle for sovereignty over the West Philippine Sea, particularly around Panatag Shoal, has heightened the vulnerability of coastal communities. The region has become a geopolitical flashpoint in the broader Indo-Pacific, marked by increased maritime patrols, territorial assertions, and the presence of foreign coast guards that directly impact the daily lives of fisherfolk. Scarborough Shoal (under the names Pulo ng Panatag and Bajo de Masinloc), located approximately 220 kilometers (140 miles) west of the Philippine mainland, is claimed by the Philippine government as part of Masinloc's municipal jurisdiction. An estimated one-third of global trade passes through these waters, making it a vital commercial and strategic corridor (UNCTAD, 2023; Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, 2023). As a result, major powers such as the United States, the European Union, Australia, and China have heightened their visibility in the area, whether through naval presence, diplomatic positions, or infrastructure investment, further intensifying the pressure experienced by local communities. Livelihoods are increasingly threatened by militarization, surveillance, and ecological disruption. In this climate, PANATAG becomes more than a reference to tranquil waters; it signals a longing for stability, autonomy, and dignity. The right to represent one's place, to name and narrate it, becomes both an act of agency and resistance.

PANATAG engages with this terrain by reframing cartography—not as an extractive or imperial tool—but as a method of listening, reciprocity, and co-authorship. Drawing on the Subjective Atlas framework's emphasis on lived, emotional, and sensory geographies, the project invites fisherfolk not as data points but as narrative-makers and visual authors. Subjective Mapping validates memory, story, and embodied knowledge as essential ways of knowing, capable of challenging colonial and technocratic norms of representation.

In the Masinloc workshop, participants engaged in embodied cartography through various activities such as drawing, storytelling, flag-making, and spontaneous songs. The group

primarily consisted of fisherfolk (mostly men), female marine biology students interning at the Department of Tourism, and local artists. Together, they co-mapped their seascapes not as fixed geopolitical units but as lived terrains shaped by tides, dreams, losses, and traditions. While building on the momentum from prior PANATAG workshops, the Masinloc engagement stands out for its immediate geopolitical relevance and emotional depth.

The collaborations with Casa San Miguel and the Masinloc Department of Tourism were formative in building trust and ensuring meaningful community engagement. Casa San Miguel—an arts and education center established in 1993 and deeply rooted in Barangay San Antonio (village), approximately two hours from Masinloc—partnered with PANATAG through its year-long coastal festival, Zambulat 2025, which explores themes of migration, ecology, and cultural memory. Josephine Turalba, director of the Artistic Research Center (ARC) of Philippine Women's University and lead of Project PANATAG, was also a resident artist at CSM. She initiated the Masinloc outreach component and invited other CSM artists to join the workshop. This collaboration bridged ARC–PWU's research initiative with CSM's community-based artistic networks. Together with the facilitation of the local Department of Tourism, these partnerships enabled deeper local engagement, interdisciplinary exchange, and anchored the project in relationships of trust, reciprocity, and cultural familiarity

A conceptual anchor of PANATAG is the Mapa de las Islas Filipinas (1734), created by Jesuit priest Pedro Murillo Velarde and engraved by Filipino artist Nicolás de la Cruz Bagay. While often cited in legal efforts to assert Philippine territorial claims, the map is also a colonial artifact—one that fixed borders and projected imperial control. By juxtaposing this map with the community-generated visual expressions from Masinloc, PANATAG reclaims the right to draw—and to redraw. It repositions cartographic authority from the state to the sea's stewards, demonstrating that maps can emerge not only from surveyors' tools but from the hands of those who fish, remember, and resist.



Figure 1. Young learners actively contributing their insights and creativity during the workshop. Photo by Viado, 2025.

Methodology

To understand the socio-political and cultural dimensions of coastal life in Masinloc, Project PANATAG employed a framework grounded in artistic research, participatory design, and embodied cartography. These methodologies draw heavily from Annelys de Vet's Subjective Atlas framework, which positions mapping as a political and cultural act shaped by lived experience (De Vet, 2007, 2015). PANATAG treats cartography not as a static or

objective tool, but as a performative, sensory, and participatory process that centers co-creation and local authorship.

The workshop design evolved organically as well as was intentional, shaped by the participants' responses, available energy, and unfolding conversations. Rather than following a linear structure, the day unfolded fluidly, beginning with a simple icebreaker, followed by a short presentation of previous workshop outputs to help set expectations and establish rapport, then drawing, sharing, and collaborative engagements that emerged naturally from the group dynamic. While the overall day unfolded with flexibility, many components were intentionally designed. Flag collages, for instance, were offered as a continuous option throughout the workshop. Participants engaged with it voluntarily—some during breaks, others in between drawing or after completing their main work. This open structure allowed for layered engagement and self-paced participation. This flexibility supported varied expressions and levels of participation.

Drawing was prioritized as a low-barrier yet expressive form that allowed for both individual and collective meaning-making. Collaborative drawing with Casa San Miguel resident artists enabled layered interpretations, while participants also shared media—photos and videos—from their mobile devices, which were collected by the project documenter with their consent. Facilitators posed questions such as “What’s the first word that comes to mind when you think of your region of the Philippines?” and “How do you experience your environment through daily life?” to activate reflection. These guided prompts were supported by group discussions and hands-on art-making.

24 Participants included seventeen (17) fisherfolk and extended community (mostly men) and eight (8) student trainees of B.S. in Fisheries from President Ramon Magsaysay State University. Tables were initially mixed to encourage dialogue across backgrounds, but participants naturally gravitated toward configurations where they felt most safe and at ease. Each table was supported by facilitators and CSM artists to assist with translation, motivation, and story-to-image development.

The project aimed to embed ethical care into its structure. Informed consent was secured at registration, and participants received a modest honorarium to compensate for lost income. A gender sensitivity briefing was conducted by a social worker. Facilitators remained flexible, allowing participants to engage in their ways—through quiet drawing, spontaneous karaoke, or oral storytelling. The atmosphere was kept relaxed and hospitable, supported by unlimited coffee, a mid-morning snack, a full lunch, and a mid-afternoon snack served before the workshop concluded. These provisions were essential in sustaining energy and signaling care throughout the day. In Filipino culture, eating together fosters connection and dialogue, and mealtimes became moments of informal exchange and trust-building among participants and facilitators.

This situated research methodology affirmed the agency of all participants, not merely as contributors, but as co-authors. Rather than imposing rigid forms, PANATAG facilitated conditions for an emergent and embodied mapping practice grounded in lived experience, cultural rhythm, and community trust. By facilitating processes rather than imposing form, PANATAG cultivates the conditions for an alternative cartography—rooted in lived experience, collective memory, and the rhythm of coastal life.

Findings / Field-Based Insights

Based on our collective fieldwork experience, we identified four (4) core insights that emerged through co-creative engagements, direct observation, and participant storytelling. These insights are grounded in the reflections, drawings, and lived narratives shared with us throughout the workshop process. They are informed by unpublished field notes authored by the four primary facilitators and documenters of the Masinloc workshop: Annelys De Vet, Portia Placino, Josephine Turalba, and Lyn Viado (all unpublished notes, June 2025):

1. **Community maps reveal profound emotional ties to the sea that challenge official narratives.**
Participants' responses during the Masinloc workshop revealed deeply rooted emotional and cultural ties to the sea that challenge dominant territorial framings. As Turalba recounts, "The act of naming terms like laot [open sea], layag [sail], tyaga [perseverance], banayad [calm], and mamamana [hunter/fisher with bow and arrow] reflects deeply felt experiences and relationships with the sea, which contribute to the emotional and cultural mapping of maritime space." These terms go beyond mere geographic markers; they carry affective, ancestral, and livelihood meanings.



Figure 2. Responses for the one-word ice breaker.

Community-generated maps transcend traditional cartographic boundaries by capturing these emotional, cultural, and spiritual connections—dimensions often absent from official representations. We further observed that their songs, drawings, and stories created a collective mapping, rooted in a sum of individual voices, and inspired or informed by each other. The workshop space itself became a site of both vulnerability and vitality. These expressive cartographies reveal affective geographies that directly challenge dominant state narratives, reframing maritime discourse through deeply personal storytelling and art, focusing on experiences with place rather than depicting 'neutral' geography.
Lyn Viado's detailed observations provide vivid insight into the lived realities behind these maps:

> "Geovanni is a local artist in Masinloc. He creates reggae music and sometimes performs at the beach resorts with his band. He is also a local tattoo artist in the area and was recognized by his fisherfolk friends as a great artist. During the workshop, he created a flag that symbolizes free sailing or 'Malayang Paglalayag' [Free Sailing]. He also drew the common food of the fisher folks, known locally as 'daing' [sun-dried fish], paired with fresh tomatoes and seaweed. According to Geovanni, they typically eat this dish when they can't go out to sea because of bad weather."

Viado also recounts how environmental and geopolitical challenges shape the community's experiences:

> "We used to catch a lot of fish, but now, due to dredging activities in their area, their catch of fish has significantly reduced. Geovanni verbalized that, 'Marami na po ang tatlong isda sa isang laot.'[Catching even just three fish in one fishing trip is already considered plenty.] There are also recent mining activities in their area, which result in flooding whenever there's a typhoon. Other fishermen shared that they usually fish in the area of Scarborough Shoal because this is where a lot of different fish live, and they catch a lot of fish for

a living. However, due to the presence of Chinese personalities and infrastructure in the area, they are not allowed to go there or even near the Scarborough Shoal. They fear reprisals by water cannons from the Chinese if they are spotted in the area. Since the territorial dispute has been affecting their source of living, fisherfolk are forced to find alternative work aside from fishing."

In addition to these hardships, cultural practices remain vital:

"Some participants also shared how they honor their cultural practices when fishing. One fisherman averred, 'Pag pumapalaot po kami, may mga baon po kaming pagkain. Binibigyan po namin ng kapiraso ng pagkain naming ang mga isda at hinuhulog sa dagat para maka huli kami ng maraming isda.' It is also their way of giving back to the God of the sea, which they call 'Bathala,' for all the fish that they catch when fishing. Also, this serves as their charm to catch more fish every time they sail."

Echoing these perspectives, De Vet states, "I believe art opens another space... we ask for their stories, any story, not a particular story," highlighting the power of open-ended, participatory storytelling in shaping alternative spatial imaginaries grounded in lived experience.

2. **Naming Panatag asserts local sovereignty and cultural memory.**

This theme emerged directly from the stories and discussions shared during the workshop, where naming practices—both formal and informal—surfaced as key expressions of identity, memory, and place. In the broader geopolitical context, the contested shoal is referred to by the Philippines as *Panatag Shoal* or *Bajo de Masinloc*, while China calls it *Huangyan Dao* (黄岩岛). These divergent names reflect competing territorial claims and geopolitical narratives. Against this backdrop, the fisherfolk's continued use of "Panatag" or "Bajo de Masinloc" reclaims a localized, lived relationship to the sea, rooted in history, livelihood, and cultural memory.

We heard fisherfolk speak about Scarborough Shoal and their historical fishing rights there, asserting their connection and traditional knowledge about the territory. As Lyn Viado recorded:

"Other fishermen shared that they usually fish in the area of Scarborough Shoal because this is where a lot of different fish live, and they catch a lot of fish for a living. However, due to the presence of Chinese personalities and infrastructure in the area, they are not allowed to go there or even go near the Scarborough Shoal. They fear reprisals by water cannons from the Chinese if they are spotted in the area."

This highlights how naming *Scarborough* affirms their lived experience, cultural memory, and claims to local sovereignty despite territorial restrictions. As Turalba explains, the term *Panatag* embodies resistance by asserting community identity and memory against external impositions

By invoking Panatag, the community reclaims a narrative of peace and safety in a geopolitically tense region. This localized naming functions as both an act of poetic resistance and a tool for galvanizing solidarity. It fosters pride, continuity, and stewardship of land and sea. Naming transforms abstract geopolitical struggles into lived realities—where identity, memory, and place intersect meaningfully (A. De Vet & L. Viado, unpublished field notes, June 2025).

Thus, naming reclaims agency, articulates belonging, and resists erasure. It reinforces the community's stake in shaping their maritime future on their own terms.

3. **Embodied cartography builds collective solidarity.**

Throughout the workshop, we witnessed how mapping and image-making became practices of togetherness. Group artworks—such as Geovanni's flag, symbolizing "Malayang Paglalayag" (Free Sailing)—emerged as powerful expressions of shared identity and aspiration. As Viado wrote, "He also drew the common food of the fisher folks, known locally as 'daing,' paired with fresh tomatoes and seaweed" (Viado, unpublished field notes, June 2025). These drawings, hung side by side, became visual anchors of both personal expression and communal meaning. Through collaborative creation and storytelling, the artworks reflected shared hopes and fostered solidarity across the room.

Facilitators and artists played an active role in animating these expressions, moving from table to table to support, translate, and amplify the stories being told through images. De Vet (unpublished field notes, June 2025) noted that while flag-making was introduced as an optional activity, "more and more people wanted to make one." This voluntary gravitation toward shared visual expression underscored the resonance of the activity.

Co-creation fostered camaraderie across differences. Whether participants were fisherfolk or students, seasoned artists or first-time illustrators, each group found commonality in the act of drawing. The visual nature of the process leveled the playing field and allowed for communication beyond words.

Importantly, the collective nature of the cartographic output—walls lined with flags, maps, and drawings—gave shape to a visual archive of community experience. These works did not merge into a single map, but together composed a mosaic of perspectives that collectively mapped affective, cultural, and ecological connections to place.
The solidarity forged through these shared acts of making extended beyond the room. As Placino (unpublished field notes, June 2025) noted, "The fisherfolk relaxed, had fun, and openly shared their stories, successes, struggles, and difficulties." These moments of collective ease and creative participation laid the foundation for lasting trust and future collaboration. In this way, embodied cartography became not just a method of representation but also a way of practicing solidarity and care.

4. **Art creates safe spaces for dialogue amid maritime tensions.**
In an environment marked by geopolitical tension and insecurity, art emerged as a crucial medium for emotional expression and dialogue. De Vet (unpublished field notes, June 2025) notes:

> "Almost all participants started to draw immediately, without hesitation. And for me, as an outsider, not understanding the language, these drawings were a beautiful way to tap into their narratives, and sometimes stimulate a certain artistic twist (like making the colours more bright)."

She also shares key moments: "The karaoke was brilliant (and opened a more vulnerable space)," "Participants became comfortable quickly," "Fishermen opened up and shared their stories more easily than in journalistic settings," and "The fisherfolk particularly enjoyed the drawing activity."
Turalba reaffirms this through her account:

> "What truly energized the session was the spontaneity. Kapitan Tony became one of the central figures, singing Max Surban's "Kaming Mga Mangingisda"—a joyful listing of local fish species. With Annelys' enthusiastic approval, his impromptu karaoke moment lifted the whole room.

He later translated the song into a drawing, mapping out all the fish he had named, and proudly displayed his work."

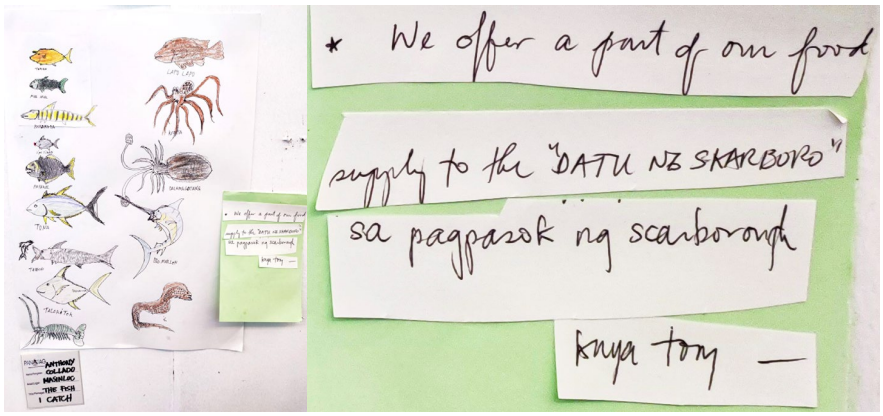


Figure 3. *The fish I catch* by Anthony "Kapitan Tony" Collado. He mentions that they offer a part of their food supply to the "Datu of Skarboro" upon entering Scarborough.

We observed that spontaneous artistic moments—like song and drawing—fostered openness, trust, and storytelling. These creative acts dissolved social barriers and invited meaningful exchange.

The empathetic potential of artistic expression lies in its ability to evoke shared experience, bridge divides, and reduce feelings of alienation, especially in contexts shaped by maritime conflict and displacement. As de Vet observed, "the participants got the concept and felt free to draw" (de Vet, unpublished field notes, June 2025). Within the workshop, this creative openness enabled morale-building and participation, reinforcing the project's goals of co-creation and mutual recognition.

By mediating conflict through creativity, the project contributed to healing and mutual understanding. As Turalba observed, "What truly energized the session was the spontaneity. Kapitan Tony became one of the central figures, singing Max Surban's 'Kaming Mga Mangingisda'—a joyful listing of local fish species. With Annelys' enthusiastic approval, his impromptu karaoke moment lifted the whole room. He later translated the song into a drawing, mapping out all the fish he had named, and proudly displayed his work" (Turalba, unpublished field notes, June 2025).

Additionally, this role of art as a mediator contributes to broader community resilience and well-being. As Placino wrote, "The fisherfolk relaxed, had fun, and openly shared their stories, successes, struggles, and difficulties" (Placino, unpublished field notes, June 2025). The inclusive, dialogic nature of the artistic space reinforced the project's commitment to participatory and emancipatory research, where all voices were heard and valued amidst ongoing struggles over land and sea.

Limitations

While our findings illuminate critical dimensions of artistic research with Masinloc fisherfolk, several limitations should be noted:

Site Specificity

This study draws from a single-day workshop held at the Masinloc Department of Tourism. While previous PANATAG engagements informed the methodology, the insights presented here are grounded in this particular session. Participants came from various coastal communities, including Masinloc (Barangay Inhobol and Goliat), as well as neighboring towns such as Santa Cruz, Candelaria, Cabangan, Botolan, and Subic. However, the workshop

did not reach farther island barangays such as San Salvador, which is geographically closest to Scarborough Shoal and locally refers to it as "Bajo de Masinloc." San Salvador is widely recognized as the Philippine locality most directly affected by maritime tensions. Future research should consider on-site engagements in such communities to access firsthand perspectives from those most immediately impacted.

Language and Translation

Facilitators and CSM artists provided real-time translation across Tagalog and Visayan dialects, but nuances may have been lost. Our reflections are based on field notes and limited recordings, which may not fully capture emotional tone or idiomatic meaning.

Temporal Scope

The Masinloc workshop spanned only one (1) day. While meaningful exchanges and creative outputs emerged, longer-term engagement (e.g., repeated visits, follow-up sessions, or longitudinal tracking) would yield richer data on how art-based interventions influence community resilience over time. We acknowledge that sustaining momentum requires ongoing interaction beyond the workshop's limited timeframe.

Researcher Presence and Positionality

As facilitators—primarily Filipinos with one international collaborator—we were embedded in the dynamics we sought to observe. Our design choices, questions, and methods of interaction inevitably shaped the flow of engagement. While we practiced reflexivity through debriefs and feedback sessions, our presence influenced the outcomes. Future iterations may continue pairing local researchers with external collaborators to ensure a grounded yet critically reflective approach that honors both insider knowledge and outside perspectives.

Materials and Visual Outputs

All photos and videos shared from participants' mobile devices were collected with consent and archived alongside the artworks, which were willingly donated by both fisherfolk and student participants. While not all visual materials could be included in this article due to space and time constraints, they remain documented for future use and exhibition. In future workshops, additional tools such as mobile scanners or digital transcription setups could further enhance archival completeness.

Focus on Fisherfolk Experiences

While we directly engaged with fisherfolk, this article reflects the facilitators' observations rather than first-person narratives or co-authored texts. By conducting the workshop at the Department of Tourism office rather than in the participants' home barangays, we also missed perspectives from family members such as wives and children, whose roles are vital to understanding the broader fabric of coastal life. Additionally, by centering lived experiences, the article does not incorporate broader scientific, policy, or geopolitical analyses. We embrace this as a situated perspective but acknowledge its boundaries.

Facilitator-Driven Voice

This article speaks from the vantage point of the facilitators rather than the fisherfolk themselves. Although we draw directly from their field notes, we do not include first-person accounts from participants, nor can we reflect on the long-term fate of the visual work, as these experiences remain very fresh. Future iterations may consider incorporating fisherfolk

authorship (e.g., co-written reflections or follow-up interviews) and revisit how the community sustains or adapts their creative outputs over time.

Despite these constraints, the Masinloc case remains a valuable exemplar of how embodied cartography and participatory artistic research can foster agency, solidarity, and resilience in coastal communities facing geopolitical tensions.



Figure 4. Group photograph of workshop participants, including fisherfolk and facilitators, at the Subjective Atlas of the Philippines project workshop in Masinloc, Zambales (PH), May 27, 2025.

Conclusion

Project PANATAG demonstrates that art reflects not only a form of expression but also offers an infrastructure of care, resistance, and shared authorship. Through embodied cartography—where mapping becomes a physical, collaborative, and emotionally resonant act—the project created spaces of deep listening, storytelling, dialogue, and creative co-making. This approach moves beyond conventional cartography, which tends to abstract and generalize. Instead, it foregrounds lived experience, emotional geographies, and the culturally grounded knowledge of coastal communities.

In the context of the West Philippine Sea, where maritime conflict frequently silences local voices and disrupts ties to ancestral waters, PANATAG affirms that those who live in close relation to the sea must not be excluded from the conversation. While their perspectives are often overlooked, they carry crucial experiential knowledge. The project helped visualize and amplify these perspectives through artistic research, offering tools, platforms, and language to articulate memories, hopes, and claims that might otherwise remain unspoken.
By centering artistic research as a method grounded in situated inquiry and relational ethics, the project surfaces narratives of refuge, memory, and belonging that challenge extractive and militarized perspectives

Our fieldwork with Casa San Miguel and in Masinloc, Zambales, revealed that artistic co-creation not only produces research insights but also nurtures conditions for community resilience. Through collective acts of storytelling, image-making, and reflection, participants cultivated empathy, trust, and the capacity to imagine livable futures rooted in place. When multisectoral players: artists, fisherfolk, educators, local leaders, and researchers collaborate with mutual care and commitment, the potential for shared stewardship expands.
PANATAG continues to evolve as a growing constellation of artists, communities, and institutions working toward justice and the right to remain. As both process and platform, it offers a model for how embodied cartography and artistic research can sustain dialogue, agency, and resilience in coastal territories facing uncertain futures.

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Making Space: On the Fragility and Force of Collective Research

Olivia Hamilton[1], Andy Miller[2], Jen Lynch[3]

Abstract:

This paper explores the tensions between collaborative research practices and institutional constraints through a three-day event organised of Collective is Critical (CIC), an interdisciplinary creative practice research group based in Architecture and Urban Design at RMIT University. In late 2024, the collective hosted an "UnSymposium", adapting an "unconference" model into a three-day gathering that would foster an interconnected community through a participant-led program centred on shared creative inquiry, critical reflection, and ecological practice. Framed through the interrelated concepts of the minor, commoning, and the tactical, the UnSymposium sought to surface and value alternative modes of working that challenge dominant institutional frameworks and to connect a community of practitioners that shared interests and values. The Unsymposium revealed the difficulties and possibilities in challenging dominant frameworks that favour measurable outcomes over emergent, relational processes. Even in an external setting, and with strong commitment from core members, familiar patterns of engagement and institutional value systems surfaced alongside moments of experimentation and exchange. These dynamics reveal the ongoing complexity of creating the time, space, and resources necessary to support alternative modes of thinking and working. This paper critically reflects on how models grounded in connection, hope, and resilience can be nurtured and sustained within and beyond institutional environments, particularly during times of constrained resources.

Keywords: Commoning, ecologies, pedagogies, minor, tactics

INTRODUCTION:

This paper examines the tensions between collaborative research practices and institutional constraints through the case of the "UnSymposium," a three-day event organised by Collective is Critical (CIC), an interdisciplinary creative practice research group in Architecture and Urban Design at RMIT University. The UnSymposium was held in December 2024, and it adapted the "unconference" model into a participant-led gathering designed to cultivate interconnected communities through shared creative inquiry, critical reflection, and ecological practice. Guided by the interrelated concepts of the minor, commoning, and the tactical, the event sought to foreground alternative modes of working that challenge dominant institutional frameworks and to connect practitioners with shared interests and values. Its program encouraged process-driven exploration, collective action, and the exchange of knowledge across disciplinary and cultural boundaries.

The UnSymposium revealed both the possibilities and limitations of resisting prevailing frameworks that privilege measurable outcomes over emergent, relational processes. Despite the extra-institutional setting and the strong commitment of core members, entrenched patterns of engagement and institutional value systems re-emerged alongside moments of experimentation, openness, and mutual learning. These dynamics highlight the ongoing complexity of allocating the time, space, and resources necessary to sustain alternative approaches to thinking and working. This paper explores the value of alternative models of practice and how they can be cultivated and maintained both within and beyond institutional settings.

THE COLLECTIVE

Collective is Critical (CIC) was started in 2024 to gather transdisciplinary practitioners and researchers focused on commons-based and ecological understandings of the built environment. The collective is made up of people from varied disciplines in several tertiary institutions and design professionals that shared similar interests and values. All were concerned with shared ways of living, working, and learning and how spatial design and affiliated creative practices can catalyse social and environmental change. The collective seeks to develop how design can support shared ways of living, working, and learning and catalyse social and environmental change. It also wanted to create enduring working connections across often disparate, marginalised or minored practices and practitioners to produce visibility, impact of the work and values and community for those involved. The three co-founders of CIC first came together because of overlapping research and practice interests in commoning, creative practice, shared space and ecology and a sense that these concerns were often alternatively overlooked or instrumentalised by the institution.

Establishing a regular pattern of one-hour, agenda-free meetings fostered a pattern of contributing time without being constrained by the immediate pressure to produce outcomes. In environments where time is scarce and productivity is prioritised, making space for open-ended engagement can be challenging, yet it offers both immediate and longer-term benefits. In relationships, it builds a sense of temporal depth that extends beyond the immediate project. This frames activity within a collective continuum, encouraging an ethic of care, reciprocity, and attentiveness, regardless of whether a specific project is long-term or short-lived. The ongoing commitment to meet in this way created new points of connection and helped develop trust in the value of working together as a process that unfolds over time. Formalising their interactions through a university-recognised network, provided visibility and resources but it was more important that it was underpinned by an already established sense of care, commitment and mutuality.

CIC developed from existing commitments to commoning and affiliated values and techniques that aim to transform social and ecological practices through creative spatial practice. Despite varied levels of availability due to work and other pressures, we found that because the relationship was predicated on shared values that the relative input did not need to be monitored for an immediate sense of equivalency (Farrell 2001). An orientation towards commoning during the lumpy and uneven process of instituting an interrelated collective of researchers and practitioners helps negotiate how work is distributed. Paul Carter (2004) describes how to "work collaboratively, passing the shuttle of creative vision back and forth, in a way that advances or changes it pattern, is to imagine community in terms of affiliation rather than filiation. It is a technique for making sense of gaps, interruptions and unpredictable crossovers" (p. 5) This is different to a transactional, extractive or short-term model of collaboration. By balancing non- synchronous equity in the relationship, contribution levels can modulate and shift over time, but potential points of stress are alleviated as the collective accommodates fluctuating external commitments, attention or resources.

One of the first aims of the newly formalized network was to build a similar culture of engagement, support and visibility within a larger group. The three founders invited people through their own networks and word of mouth to come together, present their work and interests to each other and reflect on several guiding questions: How can interdisciplinary creative research reimagine collective life and action in response to pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges? How might we move beyond binary notions of success and failure to embrace more nuanced understandings of the impact of creative

research? What forms of infrastructure and practice are needed to sustain a meaningful community of practice in the face of institutional austerity?



Figure 1: The first gathering of CIC mapped common interests and values across members to generate potential research trajectories and projects. Image: CIC

Engaging with these questions requires sustained attentiveness to the spatial, temporal, social, and creative dimensions of life, particularly as these domains are increasingly subject to extraction, repurposing, or control. Contemporary frameworks often seek to commercialise every aspect of life, promoting access primarily in terms of market value. To practise otherwise means engaging critically with these systems— participating in them without being fully absorbed by their logics, and maintaining space for alternative modes of thinking, creating, and relating. The value of holding a retreat off site and out of town was that it offers time and space for recalibration, connection, experimentation, collective thinking, and practical exploration of new ways of being.

PLANNING THE CAMP:

The cofounders of the collective decided to apply for a small amount of funding and host a camp at an ex-quarry in the Otways ranges, approximately three hours from Melbourne on the lands of the Gulidjan and Gadubanud peoples. The retreat was framed as an Unsymposium - built around a co-created agenda of hands-on, process- led explorations of commoning, experimentation, collective action, and ecological practice.



Figure 2: The Quarry campsite situated on the upper rim of the site.

It was important to the collective co-founders that the values that underpinned the collectives aims and reason to be were also mirrored in the processes and places we got together. This further extended the network and provided lived examples of spaces able to operate in this way. The Quarry, along with several other sites in Melbourne, are run by the These are the Project who have an ongoing creative practice of site and placed based care taking and maintenance projects that enable creative exploration and community activity. These are the Projects had supported earlier gatherings of the collective at Testing Grounds, another site they tended in the centre of the city that was predicated on the same values processes and activities. The Quarry was previously a site of excavation and extraction that now, through their careful and thoughtful stewardship and programming, supports alternate modes of rehabilitation and creative inquiry demonstrating the value of care and commitment to the environment and interconnected communities.

The co-founders acted as hosts and asked the participants to consider this an opportunity to prototype new models for working and learning together and potentially an opportunity to work with someone else in the collective around a common set of interests or ways of working. They were each invited to create an experience or activity that takes risks, encourages curiosity, and prioritises process over a predefined outcome. They were reminded that it was a space where failure was welcome, where questions are more important than answers, and where collective insight can emerge in unexpected ways and encouraged to

explore unfamiliar methods of learning to help reimagine collectivism, education and knowledge. It was hoped the process of developing and being involved would be a chance to unlearn and challenge inherited ways of knowing and create new forms of understanding, exchange, and connection.

The participants were invited to design an activity or experience that engaged the collective in a creative process, translating the principles of commoning, ecological thinking, and collaboration into a shared experience. The prompts for the activities included:

How can we embody ecological thinking? Perhaps through using natural materials, engaging with the land, or collaborating with non-human entities, how might we reimagine the relationship between humans and the environment as co-learners and co-creators?

What does 'commoning' look like in practice here? How can we build collective ownership over our activity and its outcomes? What structures can ensure shared responsibility and care in how we collaborate?

How do we disrupt traditional hierarchies and expand participation? How might we recognise and value diverse ways of knowing and being?

How can we transform the ways we learn together? What practices or tools can help us unsettle established ways of thinking and knowing? How can we engage all our senses in the spectrum of experience in our learning process?

How does your activity foster connections that last beyond this camp? What seeds of future collaborations or projects can be planted here, extending the impact of our time together into the future?"

Participants were invited to take inspiration from The Quarry and the surrounding Otways district and consider how the environment can shape the way we think, act, and learn together. The proposed activity could be playful, critical, or exploratory and use any medium, time frame or approach.

The proposals for creative projects included fermenting workshops, butter, pasta and pesto making from foraged Dandelions, creating bioplastics, natural dying and cordage making, a deep listening float in the pond, star gazing, guided meditation and attunement in the forest, a hike to watch the sunrise, readings, plant LiDAR scanning and projection, sound recording, botanic monoprinting and rainforest and redwood walks. The group also planned menus for collective meals that punctuated or intersected with the workshops around various themes and interests. The proposed activities were easy to engage with and from the fringes of each person's creative practices. No activities were compulsory, and instead, people could join or leave at will.

UnSymposium Activities



Figure 3: Collective pasta making, sharing knowledge and stories. Image: CIC



Figure 4: Pond Float - deep listening and attunement; Image CIC



Figure 5: LiDAR scanning and printmaking exhibition



Figure 6: Contemplating the cosmos - Quarry stargazing. Image CIC



Figure 6: Walking practice – feeling and attuning to complex ecologies. Image CIC



Figure 7: Walking practice – observing life at multiple scales. Image CIC



Figure 7: Attunement - Documenting ephemeral conditions through photography. Image CIC



Figure 8: Contemplative research in action - Sunrise hike. Image CIC

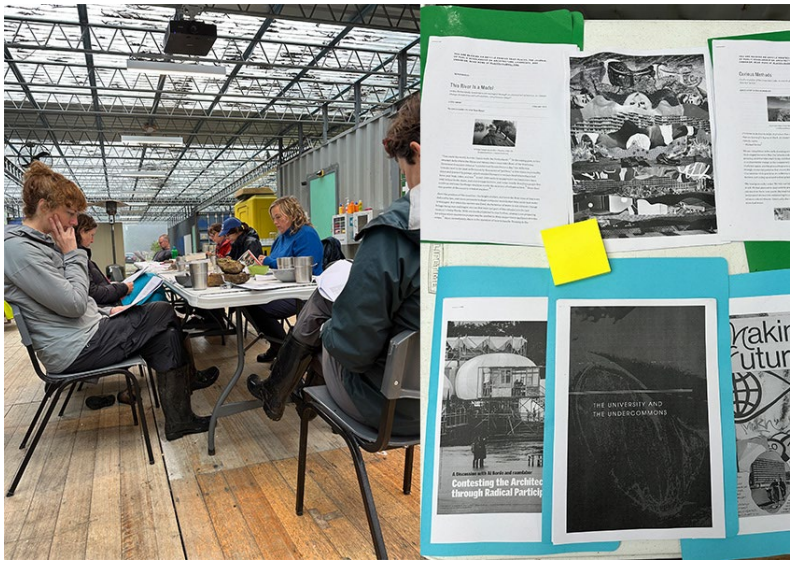


Figure 9: Seeding questions – critical reflective reading. Image CIC

The Quarry provided the ideological openness for exploration, but also the space and the infrastructure. The land is several hectares with a large shed for gathering, a free-standing kitchen and an open-air composting toilet block and bathing area that had been built using repurposed materials from cultural institutions and a deep swimming pond fringed with bullrushes. Dotted around the high cliffs circling the quarry are generous canvas tents with comfortable mattresses, bedding and lanterns. The co-founders hoped that this camp would mark a transition from them holding the group together and setting the agendas to a much more shared and mutual and self-sustaining arrangement.

CONTEXT:

The collective's formation was partly a strategic initiative but also an instinctive orientation toward working in ways that resist the stabilising tendencies of institutional life. Within the university, where creativity is often framed by outcome-driven metrics, risk aversion, and the containment of unpredictability, the group sought to hold open spaces for modes of working that do not conform to these logics. From the outset, the collective had articulated that commoning and ecological practices were central to its existence, but the process of establishing the UnSymposium camp revealed additional conceptual and practical techniques for sustaining work.

These techniques can be understood through an interdependent framework of the minor, commoning, and the tactical. The minor offers a mode of practice that resists assimilation. Commoning provides the relational and ethical structure that allows the groups and work to persist. The tactical offers the means to navigate and subtly reconfigure the institutional environment from within. Together, these concepts allow the collective to maintain openness and instability as productive forces, valuing process alongside outcome and creating resonant spaces for practitioners whose work does not fit dominant models.

Commoning can be broadly understood as the process by which people collectively manage or care for a shared resource. However, it also refers to the relational practices that emerge when people sustain a shared interest, project, or purpose. At its core, commoning involves situating individual interests within broader collective concerns, prioritising the well-being and ecological health of the community. It emphasises acts of care, responsibility, and stewardship that individuals bring to maintaining shared spaces, work, and relationships. In today's social and ecological context, commoning activists argue that such values must become central to all human practices and political systems. Spatial design has a specific responsibility and ability to engage with these values. As professional designers, architects, landscape architects, educators and associated practitioners, this knowledge can be transmitted to students or enacted through projects and disseminated and experienced beyond the collective.

Erin Manning's approach to creative practice within and alongside an institution is useful for understanding how the minor can be a guide within the context of the institution. In 'The Minor Gesture', she describes the minor as a set of temporary forms of life that move through the everyday, destabilising dominant political structures and generating new modes of perception in the gaps. Manning (2016) describes the challenges of sustaining minor creative work and collectives within the structures of an academic institution. In her terms, the "minor" thrives when practices resonate across difference. Commoning provides that "field of resonance" (p. 1), enabling dispersed gestures to cohere without losing their instability. It allows practitioners to identify shared values, making minor work more visible and legible within institutional contexts while resisting assimilation into fixed forms.

Adopting a minor approach was not a strategic decision but rather an instinctive orientation. The collective was initially established to support disparate and sometimes isolated practitioners to unify through their capacity or commitment to functioning in the minor while still needing to translate value within a 'major' – in this case, the institutional context of the university.

In an institution, the aspiration to support creativity can often be in direct conflict with maintaining control, high levels of risk avoidance, closing openness and containing unpredictability. Drawing on Michel de Certeau (1988), the tactical operates in the interstices of dominant systems, responding to shifting conditions with improvisation and subtle

disruption. While the tactician manoeuvres through institutional gaps, commoning turns these tactical moves into sustained capacities, ensuring that interventions are not isolated acts but part of a collective ability to respond and adapt over time. It transforms momentary opportunities into enduring spaces for practice. De Certeau observes how repressive systems force occupants to devise other ways to operate, producing new social relations which deviate from dominant models. These 'tacticians' can take advantage of opportunities and over time open the fabric of control within these enclaves for inventive inhabitation. The tactical, then, becomes a means of navigating and subverting systems from within, through responsiveness, improvisation, and subtle disruption.

Stavros Stavrides links tactics directly to commoning. He explains how dominant institutions legitimise inequality, distinguishing between those who know and those who do not, between those who can make decisions and those who must execute them and between those who have specific rights and those who are deprived of them. (Stavrides 2016). For Stavrides, the tactician does not simply navigate the gaps in the system; they transform these openings into sites where collective values can take root. He describes how the tactician operates by finding places they can 'insinuate' themselves into the dominant rhythms, not simply destroying or suspending them, but "taking advantage of the opportunities created by them" (Stavrides, 2013, p. 43). Commoning is thus an active process of holding open and protecting spaces generated through tactical engagement, enabling minor gestures to survive and evolve. Stavrides believes that a person operating tactically can read and recognise dominant systems and therefore, is also able to recognise spaces left open by the dominant systems available as new areas for temporary occupation.

Hegemonic environments inevitably repress creativity through overlays of control that enclose the openness, but also enable it through forcing alternate ways of negotiating them. When systems compulsively seek to maintain familiar protocols and control, they inadvertently instigate the inventive acts that operate, just as compulsively, to evade them. Stavrides (2015) notes that in institutions, the "power is first and foremost the power to decide" (p. 15), Navigating the power structures tactically gained approval, time and funding from the institution to support the collective through which we could also further our other agendas. In this way, the university's frameworks and funding become the very means through which minor, tactical work is sustained

As a model of collective research practice, the approach resonates with Tim Ingold's (2017) observation that "Research is as much about the discovery of questions in practice as about the answering of them by way of practice" (p. 74), with curiosity and care inseparable in this process. By cultivating a community of practice that validates non-linear, process-driven forms of research, the collective makes visible approaches that dominant systems often overlook. In doing so, it provides solidarity and shared purpose for researchers and practitioners, particularly those early in their careers who might otherwise be marginalised within risk-averse institutional cultures.

CHALLENGES

Finding a time in the calendar was challenging due to meetings and other work responsibilities, but more because of the perceived scarcity of time. Our current understanding and use of time has been shaped by systems of control and productivity, effectively colonising how we relate to time itself. This distortion undermines sustainability in all its forms: creative, social, environmental, and political. Felix Stadler (2004) argues that "we need … time and freedom to experiment much more" (p. 28), because the repressive controls destroy future innovation. When time is treated as scarce or rigidly divided into

separate zones of work and leisure, it becomes difficult to slow down or to justify dedicating time to activities outside performance-indicator-driven priorities.

In response, the act of hosting was approached as a way of disrupting these temporal constraints by inviting people into relationships grounded in care and conviviality. Hosting was conceived as an interstitial process where engagement is occurring differently, yet symbiotically for the various participants. In this sense, hosting was not simply a logistical function but a minor gesture: an open-ended mode of engagement in which the shape of the event would emerge from the interplay of those present. Commoning underpinned this approach. The expectation was that, once convened, participants would bring their own energy, resources, and interests, expanding the collective capacity and redistributing labour. Several online meetings before the camp introduced the conceptual prompts, shared logistical information, and co-designed a loose schedule.

The invitation to the camp was taken up by approximately 15 people. The co-founders took on most of the preparatory labour, framing it as hosting and an activity in itself. There was food to gather from the markets, materials to find or buy and car-pooling to organise. The time and effort required to do this work were balanced by the enthusiasm for the project. In the final days before the camp, several key participants withdrew due to illness or competing responsibilities. This thinning of numbers and anticipated contributions challenged the collective's ability to sustain momentum. In this moment, the tactical dimension became visible: those who remained adapted the program in response to reduced capacity, shifting activities, scaling back expectations, and using the smaller group to deepen connections rather than attempting to maintain the original scope.

CONCLUSION

From one perspective, the camp failed to achieve its aim of catalysing a broader and more cohesive collectivisation. The outcomes and impacts were very unclear and the desire for coherent outcomes and a clear narrative was difficult to relinquish, even within an explicitly minor framework. However, reframed through commoning, the event's value lay in the intensified relationships among those present, the freedom to experiment without the weight of predetermined outputs, and the strengthening of the core group's shared commitments. In this sense, the tactical adjustments made under constraint did not simply salvage the gathering but generated conditions for future work. The interplay of the minor, commoning, and the tactical reframes failure as generative. The reduced scale became an opportunity to explore more flexible, emergent forms of collaboration that could persist beyond the camp. This aligns with the collective's broader ethos of working within and against institutional logics, using available resources to hold open spaces where alternative ways of thinking and making can take root.

The event has consolidated the commitment in the core members to working with each other and from their shared values that have continued to manifest in ongoing and distributed ways. Since the UnSymposium camp, various participants have led projects that further encourage collectives and engage with the same values and strategies tested in the conference. For example, one initiative, Collective Curriculum, led by two CIC members (Olivia Hamilton and Bridget Keane), began an evolving, open-source archive of compelling pedagogical exercises that respond to the climate crisis through creative practice exhibited as part of Melbourne Design Week. The archive will continue grow and is now a collective online resource to inspire a range of action and ways of thinking about climate, pedagogy, and creative practice. Another camp participant (James Carey) initiated a symposium around the theme Collective Publics, gathering a range of spatial design practitioners explicitly

concerned with how public space supports the experience of publics. The outcome of this event will become an edited journal issue. Both these events demonstrate the concept of the tactician offers a way to navigate institutional systems and spaces to uncover alternate trajectories, relationships, and modes of operation. It is a mode of practice grounded in attentiveness to shifting conditions, with the flexibility to diverge from expected paths and the capacity to respond to, and resist, external pressures such as dwindling resources, limited availability, or fractured attention. It enables the group to adapt to unfolding conditions without losing sight of shared values. The minor orientates toward instability and openness; commoning supplied the relational and material structures that allowed the work to persist despite setback. Together, these concepts framed the camp's challenges not as derailments, but as opportunities to practice the very forms of adaptive, interdependent, and situated creativity the collective seeks to sustain.

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Botanical artists' relationships with Plants : Cases from Indonesia, Thailand, and Singapore

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Disclaimer

Although I am not a botanical artist myself, I had the privilege of participating in the recent exhibition as a curator rather than an artist. My insights into the creative processes are derived primarily through observation of my wife, the artworks, and interviews with her friends.The ongoing research is still in its early stages, and initial findings are subject to change upon publication.

Background

Artists study their objects before realising them into final artworks. Their mode of observation is different from that of the scientists in that their main intent is to portray plants as accurately as possible, as opposed to gaining insight into its biological systems, just like scientists. This raises the question, do botanical artists solely work in service of scientific knowledge, or do they produce their own knowledge? What are the relationships between the artists and the plants that bring about the knowledge? Are there national differences between these artists?





Previous Research
Between Art and Illustration

Botanical arts sit between botanical illustration, which heavily emphasises its accuracy, and flora art, which freely takes plants as its subject matter.
"A botanical illustration is a detailed, scientifically accurate representation that captures a plant's transient, sometimes fragile structure" (Harris, 2023).

Thus, it ambiguously and, sometimes, creatively navigates the tension between disciplined accuracy and unrestrained exploration (D'Alessio, 2024).

Further, we need to ask whether and how the botanical artists are seeing themselves as unique source of meaning (Hauser, 1951), a mere artisan, or a partner to the plants (Middelhoff & Pesselmann, 2023).

Botanical Illustration and Floral Art



Medicinal Parasite
Ink on Paper, 29.7 x 21
Yuanito Eliazar, 2024



Music Bouquet
Watercolour on paper
Eunike Nugroho, 2018

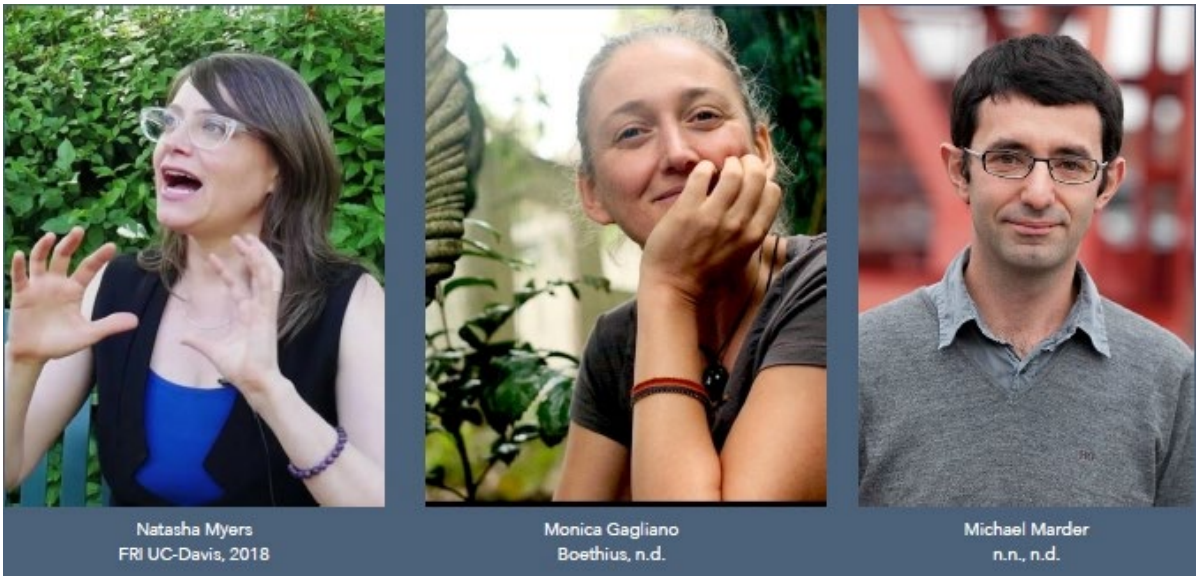
Previous Research
Turn to Plants

'the plant turn', a recent swerve in attention to the fascinating lives of plants among philosophers, anthropologists, popular science writers, and their widely distributed, electronically-mediated publics. " (Myers, 2015).

This turn does not only shift our attention to plant, and see them as sentient and intentional beings, but also 'lure' us into thinking like a plant. What does it mean? It means aligning our interests and paying our closest attention to the minute details of plants' behaviour. In effect, our attention is turned into 'vegetal' thinking (Marder, …).

This has been observed in the scientific community, but do we see the same phenomenon in the artistic community?

Vegetal thinking



Previous Research
Relationship with Plants

"Do I just start yarning in voice? Do I just observe the way she grows? Do I listen to her with my spirit? As I sat there wondering these questions, I thought about reaching out and touching the tree. Maybe then I could connect and hear something. As I approached the tree, I placed my hand on her thick dark trunk and asked'can I please have a yarn with you?' (Research Diary Entry 2018). " (Arnold, Atchison, McKnight, 2021).
Plant researchers, regardless of their identity, attempt to build reciprocal relationships with plants (Gagliano, 2018). Differently, D'Alessio (2024) sees the relationship as 'dynamic', pulled by an agentic view on the one hand and a control view on the other. More traditionally, botanical artists in general form an instrumental relationship with their plants as objects of observation and painting (citation needed).

This Study

The researcher curated the Indonesian BAW 2025 and proposed the concept of human-plant
relationships to the exhibition committee. During the painting process, the researcher provided the artists with several excerpts of text that conveyed human feeling for plants, such as letters from Melbourne citizens to the city's trees or a personal narrative from Kimmerer's book "Braiding Sweetgrass." After completing their artworks, the artists wrote reflected on and wrote about their relationship with plants. Upon reading their writings, the researcher expanded the data collection to encompass Thai and Singaporean artists, inquiring about their initial encounters with their subjects and the primary factors that drew them to them. This resulted in 65 (ID), 7 (SG), and 57 (TH) responses. Their responses are analysed using thematic analysis and here are some tentative findings.

Some Tentative Findings

Knowing

- artists make their time to know a plant's characteristics before painting, not only studying its visual appearance, but also life-cycle, habit, and its sensory qualities (tastes, smells, surface, etc.);

The tree I painted (Syzygium aqueum) grows on the roadside in front of my house. I observed this tree for about one year, taking samples and photos of each stage of its cycle - flowering, fruiting, etc. I researched its lifecycle, habitat, distribution, medicinal and food uses. I sketched, drew and painted all of its parts. I watched as bees pollinated the flowers and bats ate the fruit. I observed another S. aqueum tree in my neighbourhood to find the similarities and differences. (SG02).

- knowing the plant's visual qualities is critical to tackling the challenge of visualising it on a medium of choice (usually paper);

Its spatulate, sturdy and glossy red-veined leaves, It's clusters of magenta and white, pinwheel-shaped flowers reminding one of raspberry ripple. But most striking was it's ovoid, waxy, deeply crimson fruit that made it look so juicy and delicious. So I wanted to present these parts, unified by the various shades of red that permeated the leaves, flowers, buds and fruit. (SG03).

Knowing

- in the process, some artists might make personal connection with the plant.

it reminded me of internal human organs such as the lungs, spinal cord, heart, and nerve nodes — organs that are vital for life. Some of these organs are missing from my own body, so I included those internal organs in this painting to make it whole. (TH02).

Then, what kind of connections do artists make with plants?

Connecting

- the kinds of relationship artists make with plants can be categorised as connected with and/or connected through plants. 'Connected with' means the artists initiate or allow themselves to a contact and see the plant as an end/party of the interaction. 'Connected through' means the artist knits the plant into a wider network of relationships/stories.

Dimensions of Connection

- visceral connection means an arational, deeper, and, mostly, spontaneous attraction to a certain type of plants;

I paint only the plants that I want to paint. There are many kinds of my favorite flowers, and fruits that I want to paint. 100% of the plants I have painted, I had the feeling of wanting to paint at the first moment that I saw it. (TH09).

One day, I was captivated when I saw sunlight falling on your heart-shaped, pointed leaves. They looked so beautiful and pleasing to the eye. The more I looked, the more enchanting they became—almost as if they were calling out to be painted. (ID03).

Dimensions of Connection

- instrumental aspect is the most common connection artists make with plants.

Painting it was a long journey full of effort. My fascination began with its unique flower—small, white, with a crown of branched, curly filaments that looked like lace. The technical challenge of capturing it in watercolour sparked my curiosity to give it a try. Its fruit, long and sometimes twisting like a snake, with striking patterns and bright colour gradients when ripe, made me even more eager to paint it. (ID14).

Dimensions of Connection

- spiritual dimension forms when an artist view plants as manifestation of the higher being.

And it was you—chosen by Him as a form of His love for me, in the fulfilment of His will. It was fulfilled that my disappointment was exchanged for a lesson: humility and surrender. In a moment of urgency, God placed you in my heart, moving both my hand and soul—and so, you came to life on the once-blank sheet of paper, bringing forth a beauty that placed a smile on my face. […] A lesson in humility—that I am nothing apart from His love, and that love will always be present in all who truly know. (ID71).

Dimensions of Connection

- intellectual (?) dimension means plants are good to think with.

Evidence has yet to be found (likely no evidence), but thinkers and researchers do that.

More questions

- What role and how do national contexts play in the formation of artists-plants relationships?
- Do certain relationships grow stronger in certain national context? What and how?
- How do artists make use of this knowledge to go deeper in their artistic journey with plants?

Curating the KonTra Series as a Heterotopic Platform for Emerging Malaysian Choreographers

Mohd Zhafir Muzani Mohamad

Abstract

KonTra series is a mixed bill dance production that highlights six contemporary works inspired by traditional elements from six Malaysian choreographers in each series. KonTra was presented by The Actors Studio Seni Teater Rakyat at Pentas 2, the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Center (klpac) and curated by the resident choreographer Zhafir Muzani. Started from KonTra: Bianglala (2022) focuses on experimenting with the Malay traditional art form, followed in the same year by KonTra: Asirvatham, experimenting with the 'blessing' concept in the Indian community. Then, KonTra: Borneo in the following year, exploring the Sarawak and Sabah cultures. The recent series, KonTra: Yùeguāng, is the fourth instalment, venturing into the Chinese traditional element in October last year. Curating the KonTra series allowed emerging Malaysian choreographers to create new work and utilise traditional material as inspiration to convey the message and ideology in the space of heterotopia. Foucault defines heterotopia or 'other space' as a real place in society that is different from the typical space that consists of special rules, purpose and meaning. Through a heterotopia lens, the idea of contemporising the traditions in the KonTra series can be seen as a platform that offers emerging choreographers a space of otherness which challenges the conventional boundaries between contemporary and traditional dance, a temporary and evolving space; each series reshapes its identity through the diverse background of its choreographers, and as a space of both inclusion and exclusion, not only for the choreographers but also for the audience experiencing this 'other space' of artistic negotiation. Looking at KonTra as a heterotopic space, courageous emerging choreographers experiment with contrasting elements and invite a new way of thinking about the alternative space for dance-making in Malaysia.

Keywords: Heterotopia, Contemporary, Traditional, Curator, Choreographer

Exploring Arts Education in Cambodia: A Case Study

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Abstract

This presentation explores how the subject of Arts Education can play a significant role in enabling learners to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for cultivating a foundational understanding of artistic expression and appreciation. It aims to nurture creativity, curiosity, critical thinking, tolerance, and aesthetic sense in children and young people. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport in Cambodia envisions a holistic education policy that integrates STEAM learning, designated Arts Education as a standalone subject, for grades 1 – 9, as outlined in the General Education Curriculum Framework of 2016. Arts Education subject comprises components such as dance, music, singing, drawing, handcrafts, and art appreciation.

However, given the current situation with limited resources, the Arts Education curriculum is not yet fully implemented in the public schooling system. The National Arts Education curriculum is in its final stage of development, with assistance from a Japanese program. Although Cambodia has numerous talented artists, there is a scarcity of arts educators in general schools, despite the recent launch of a teacher training program aimed at educating arts teachers.

In practice, we observe that students engaging in various art forms build confidence, promote self-expression, and develop positive attitudes and behaviours. This engagement ultimately enhances their overall learning experiences and prepares them to interact effectively with society, instilling a deep-rooted understanding of their own cultural context. In conclusion, Arts Education plays a vital role in the holistic development of children and young people, nurturing their creativity, emotional health, and social skills while laying a foundation for lifelong learning and personal growth.

Analyzing the Opportunities for Ban Laem Homestay to Develop Tourism Activities through a Performative Experience Framework

Khalid Midam

Abstract

Drawing on firsthand observations from eight tourism events, this article explores how Ban Laem Homestay, a coastal Muslim community in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Southern Thailand might enhance its community-based tourism through a performative experience approach. While the community offers culturally rich and engaging activities, many are delivered in a fragmented manner, often lacking narrative coherence and structured facilitation. The study considers how principles from performance theory, storytelling, and creative tourism could be applied to reframe these activities as immersive experiences. It highlights opportunities for the community to craft shared storylines, clarify the roles of local guides, and design each activity as part of a cohesive journey. By doing so, tourism in Ban Laem could evolve into a participatory form of cultural expression that strengthens both visitor engagement and community identity.

Keywords: Performative Experience, Community-Based Tourism, Storytelling, Creative Tourism, Ban Laem Homestay, Cultural Performance

Integrating Feminist Pedagogy in Vietnamese Graphic Design Education: Reimagine the Design Learning experience

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Abstract

Responding to the challenge of revitalizing and empowering student communities through inclusive learning experiences, this presentation explores the implementation of a feminist pedagogy framework in undergraduate graphic design at British University Vietnam (BUV). Through a critical investigation of non-feminist practices in design higher education and guided by feminist pedagogical theories, the researcher designed, facilitated, and documented a series of feminist-informed workshops. The presentation will share key insights and lessons learned, contributing to the ongoing dialogue on pedagogical innovation while offering practical strategies for enhancing inclusivity. This work demonstrates how empowering both students and educators can foster an equitable learning environment and revitalize the design community.

Delhi Dancescape: Dancers navigating presence and representation

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Abstract

India's capital city, Delhi attracts large number of national and international visitors because of it position as the capital, the fascinating architectural remains, and its role in promoting the performing arts. This has encouraged many art practitioners including dancers to make Delhi their home. This presentation is an attempt to explore the dance ecology, that has developed in this city since Indian independence. The growth of premier institutions, the state patronage, the cultural policies and the overall proximity between the structures of patronage and the dancers, have made this city a hub of dance-related activities. Such activities include dance institutions teaching specific classical and folk dance forms, many dancers migrating to Delhi to make it their home, annual fundings, state recognitions of individuals, forms and institutions, spectacular events such as the Republic Day Celebrations, numerous annual festivals and invitation for foreign tours organized and funded by the Government of India. The active cultural processes in this ecology have been identified by dance scholars as hope/ identity assertions, (re)inventions, claims of authenticity, creative expressions and representation. This presentation analyses the relationship, agency, the sense of rights and expectations that dancers have as inhabitants of Delhi, by using multidisciplinary methodologies of history, performance anthropology, dance studies and cultural studies. It also hopes share some reflections on the research-in-progress that aims to reflect on the dancers' responses and responsibilities in the changing scape of the capital city, the fast-altering audience perceptions and the contemporary trends of aesthetic understanding.

Sultanate Monuments of Ahmedabad as Community Anchors

Riyaz Latif

Abstract

The historical identity of the city of Ahmedabad in western India is at its core delineated by the surviving corpus of monuments – mosques, mausoleums, water structures and so on – dating to the Gujarat Sultanate period (15th – 16th centuries); their presence as the city's defining emblems of heritage has been central to the city being declared a UNESCO World Heritage City in 2017. These Sultanate monuments, distinctive due to their architectural configurations which seamlessly assimilate the earlier indigenous temple building traditions into their visual and structural expression, stand out for their intricate ornamental idiom, which makes them singular within the overarching sphere of Indo-Islamic architecture. However, the afterlives of these monuments have been quite varied where some representative structures are primed for cultural consumption through heritage walks and so on, while others – of no less historical significance – suffer relative neglect, dilapidation and encroachment. In a singular way, this variance in the afterlives of the Sultanate monuments of Ahmedabad is irrevocably entangled with the nature of transforming community practices in relation to their reception, and this presentation seeks to address in a very prefatory manner the significance of these emblems of heritage in molding the ways in which people – communities – receive and impart meanings to them. The central question which this presentation seeks to address in this regard is: how has the communities' engagement (or the lack of it) with these monuments as active or passive consumers shaped their relationship with the historical identity of the city as a living organism. To that end, the presentation, by foregrounding this distinctive architectural corpus, seeks to reflect on the issue of artistic exploration and its potential to engage, inform and transform creative communities.

Embodied Resistance, Memory, and Social Imaginary in the "Woman, Life, Freedom" Movement: A Study of Participants' Experiences

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Abstract

In one of my artistic research-based projects, *Kariznew*, performed at the Attakkalari Biennial in Bangalore in 2011, I explored the concept of *Collective Gesture Memory (CGM)*—a repertoire of gestures, body movements, forms, and associated concepts embedded in the cultural memory of a community, serving as a resource for creating dance and physical theatre. According to the hegemonic social imaginary, some of these gestures are regularly used in daily life, while others appear rarely or are reserved for specific events and contexts. In that project, we revisited CGM through a creative process that reinterpreted elements—particularly those from religious rituals—as new artistic materials to reveal fresh dimensions of otherwise rigid religious bodily practices.

A similar process could be seen in the Woman, Life, Freedom protest in Iran in 2022. One major theme of the protest was resistance against the oppression of women's bodies and the hegemonic gender performativity imposed by religious doctrine. Protest participants performed and shared subversive gestures—embodied expressions that had been banned or suppressed by the dominant social imagination.

Social movements are fertile grounds for collective creativity. In this context, creativity connects collective memory to the formation of social imaginaries. Artistic research can analyze these connections and the processes of transformation rooted in collective creativity. My inquiry explores the relationship between the process of collective embodiment and its impact on hegemonic social imaginaries in protest contexts, as well as its potential for artistic research focused on embodiment, memory, and imagination. How do participants extract gestures from collective memory, revise and share them, and generate new symbolic forms that contribute to emerging social imaginaries?

This study presents a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with four women from Bandar Abbas and Tehran, focusing on their embodied experiences, cultural memory, and imagined futures during the 2022 *Woman, Life, Freedom* movement. The findings highlight how the body and performativity served not only as sites of resistance but also as mediums of creative political expression and gender redefinition amid state violence and cultural repression.

Participants described performative acts—such as walking unveiled, burning headscarves, clapping as part of local wedding rituals, collectively stamping the ground, shouting slogans, and standing silently in protest—as symbolic and creative actions. These embodied gestures redefined what it means to be a woman in public space. Emotional transitions—from fear and shame to pride and collective empowerment—were deeply interwoven with these bodily expressions.

These gestures were not only reactions to oppression but also citations of collective and cultural memory. Some referenced legendary figures, past movements, maternal heritage, or familiar images from television and cinema. For example, group clapping was inspired by wedding traditions in southern Iran. Nonviolent acts such as standing silently or unveiling recalled iconic protest images, such as Vida Movahed's.

Regarding social imagination, women envisioned a future where bodily autonomy and gender expression were no longer controlled. Several observed cultural shifts after the protests: increased courage among young women, changing attitudes among men, and the normalization of personal choice around wearing the hijab.

In sum, this study reveals how women's bodies in southern Iran became living archives of resistance, reclaiming cultural space through gesture, emotion, and memory. These embodied narratives contribute to a feminist social imaginary that challenges hegemonic gender norms and fosters new collective visions of freedom, bodily autonomy, and women's rights.

Keywords: embodiment, collective memory, social imagination, artistic research

The Process of Presenting an Adapted Play as a Stage Reading Performance: A Case Study of The Country of the Blind

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Abstract

This practice-oriented research titled "The Process of Presenting an Adapted Play as a Stage Reading Performance: A Case Study of The Country of the Blind" aims to study the process of presenting issues of conflict in Thai society. The researcher selected H.G. Wells' 'The Country of the Blind' as source material, adapting two endings of the Thai translation published by SM-Thai Publishing and translated by Manorah into a stage play.

The researcher analyzed both published versions to examine Social Conflict, Concept of Power, Concept of Discourse, and the play adaptation process. Data was collected from general audience members through anonymous questionnaires and discussions with playwriting experts. The story, addressing otherness in society, was adapted to reflect and critique social conflict issues in Thai society while communicating that humans should analyze differences rationally to facilitate change and coexistence. The adapted play was presented through stage reading performances three times at Sripatum University's Multipurpose Building.

The research found that stage reading performance presents plays accurately and completely, reduces rehearsal time, and applies to different contexts between "the sighted" and "the blind" through reading and non-reading scripts. However, limitations include requiring collaborative decision-making between adapter and director regarding storytelling proximity to actual performance, and the format's unfamiliarity to general audiences may cause viewer uncertainty.

Nevertheless, presenting ideological conflicts is universal and can be understood across different social contexts. Stage reading performances help audiences connect with ideological conflicts in Thai society, generating post-viewing discussions and debates, demonstrating the format's effectiveness in engaging audiences with complex social themes.

Keywords: Adapted play / Stage reading performance / Concept of Power / Concept of Discourse / Social conflict issues in Thai society

Introduction

The short story *In the Country of the Blind* written by British author H.G. Wells was first published in 1904, with a revised edition in 1939. The narrative addresses themes of superiority and inferiority expressed through sight and blindness, issues of morality and correctness arising from different perspectives, and conflicts of opinion between minorities and majorities. These emerge between groups with extremely different beliefs and ideologies that lead to the division of people based on shared beliefs, thoughts, and experiences, where those who differ are pushed to the opposing side. This literary work has created perspectives

on beliefs and social conflicts for the researcher and other readers, as mentioned in the afterword of the Thai edition published by SM-Thaipublishing.

The researcher chose the foreign literary work in *the Country of the Blind* by H.G. Wells, which contains the core idea that humans should analyze differences rationally to enable change and coexistence in society, to adapt into a stage play and present it as a stage reading performance. This is because the researcher wishes to communicate political perspectives and ideological conflicts in Thai society that have occurred and continue to occur. Additionally, the researcher wants to reflect to the audience that politics is something that surrounds us and cannot be avoided, and aims to encourage viewers to question themselves, others, and society. This is intended to lead to rational discussions despite having different ideologies, experiences, or political opinions, and to effectively foster understanding and reduce social conflicts

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Research Objectives

1. To study the presentation of an adapted play in stage reading performance of *In the Country of the Blind* by H.G. Wells, in order to communicate the core idea that humans should analyze differences rationally to enable change and coexistence in society.
2. To study the issues of conflict in Thai society through the stage reading performance.

Research Hypothesis

The presentation of an adapted play in stage reading performance of *In the Country of the Blind*, aimed at presenting the core idea that humans should analyze differences rationally to enable change and coexistence in society, will enable audiences to connect with the ideological conflicts occurring in Thai society.

Research Methodology

1. Manage copyright procedures for the literary work *In the Country of the Blind*
2. Study and research information regarding literary adaptation to theatrical scripts, political theater that has occurred in Thailand, Thai context and culture, political concepts in Thailand, concepts of society and coexistence, concepts of conflict and otherness in society, by studying: • Books, textbooks, academic articles, research papers, dissertations • Online media in Thai and English • Interviews with artists who create playwriting works, cross-media script adaptation, and creators of political theater in Thailand • Context and narrative in the literary work *In the Country of the Blind* in both ending versions:
    - Content from the first publication in 1904
    - Content from the second publication in 1939
3. Compile knowledge gained from studying information on literary adaptation to stage plays, contexts used in adaptation, and various concepts
4. Analyze the narrative of the literary work *In the Country of the Blind* in both ending versions, and apply it to the process of selecting, adjusting, cutting, adapting, and adding content from the literature to suit stage play format

5. Structure the plot, design characters, and develop the story that has undergone the process of selecting, adjusting, cutting, adapting, and adding content from the literature to develop into a play script
6. Write the play script and develop it in collaboration with the advisor
7. Apply for human research ethics approval
8. Assemble the production team in various positions, including casting actors and selecting a director
9. Rehearse the reading performance with the team, actors, and director
10. Present the play in reading format to audiences including theater experts, those interested in performances related to communicating social conflict issues, and the general public
11. Collect feedback from the director, actors, advisor, experts, and general audience through post-performance questionnaires, interviews, and seminars with experts:
    - Opinions from playwriting experts
    - Anonymous questionnaires from audience members
12. Compile data and work processes from the director, actors, advisor, experts, and general audience through questionnaires, interviews, and seminars with experts
13. Conclude research results by analyzing data, personal records, opinions from the director, actors, advisor, experts, and general audience

Research Scope

This research will study the presentation of an adapted play in reading performance format of *In the Country of the Blind* by H.G. Wells, in order to communicate the core idea that humans should analyze differences rationally to enable change and coexistence in society, as it appears in the literature.

The Short Novel "The Country of the Blind"

The short story *The Country of the Blind* written by H.G. Wells was first published in The Strand Magazine in 1904. Later, the author revised the original content by making minor word changes to better fit the context of the story and added to the ending from the original 1904 version, republishing it in London's Golden Cockerel Press in 1939. The researcher has used both versions of the short story *The Country of the Blind* in Thai translation from SM-Thaipublishing, translated by Manorah, into an adapted play.

The brief story of *The Country of the Blind* tells of a man named Nuñez who set out to climb mountains with other mountaineers. But during their journey while camping in the forest, Nuñez accidentally fell from a cliff at nighttime and discovered the legendary country of the blind that he had heard of before. This gave him the idea to rise up and rule over the blind townspeople with the power of sight that he possessed. However, no matter how much he tried to explain and persuade the townspeople to understand and honor his ability to see, it was futile. The blind townspeople had been afflicted with a strange disease that caused them to lose their sight for 15 generations, making them unable to perceive and understand what Nuñez was trying to communicate. Moreover, this made Nuñez appear as a fool trying to speak of things that didn't exist. When Nuñez couldn't revolutionize the townspeople, he rebelled and fled from this valley country of the blind. However, his escape didn't go as hoped due to lack of food and inability to find a way out of this mountain, so he returned to

the country of the blind in a weakened and emaciated condition. This time, Nuñez surrendered to all the beliefs of the townspeople and lived serving them, until Nuñez fell in love with Medina-saroté, the only person in the country of the blind willing to listen to stories of the world of sight. However, this love was opposed by all the townspeople due to Nuñez's inferior social status. Ultimately, at Medina's request, the townspeople would accept Nuñez if he agreed to undergo surgery to remove what they called his eyes. Suddenly, Nuñez felt insecure at having to lose the only belief he had and believed made him see this world more broadly than others in the country of the blind. Even his beloved Medina, who always listened to him, didn't understand him but thought it was merely the frightening imagination that he created. He agreed to his lover's request but chose to ask to stay by himself on the hill where they both used to spend time together before the surgery, and escaped once more by climbing the cliff, ending with him lying down looking at the sky for the last time.

The first publication of *The Country of the Blind* ended only here, leaving behind Nuñez's escape and letting readers imagine what would happen next to Nuñez, Medina, and the blind townspeople. When it was republished again, some vocabulary was changed to better suit the context, such as "thanks to wonderful science" becoming "thanks to knowledge from above" and additions were made to the ending to make it more complete, with the following content

After Nuñez climbed up to the hill where he and Medina had often come together, he began looking for a way to survive to preserve the one truth he believed in and held onto—sight. Just as he was about to climb away, the sound of moving rocks and cliffs grew louder. Nuñez saw cracks on the cliff that was about to completely collapse. He decided to return to warn the people in the country of the blind. But when he insisted that the cliff would collapse because he saw cracks, this further impacted and shook the townspeople's beliefs. This made the townspeople even more violent than before, physically harming Nuñez. When Nuñez saw that he couldn't persuade the townspeople to believe, he changed his goal to taking Medina away with him, until both survived and lived together as a couple in Bogotá. In the final part, the story shows that when someone came to persuade Medina to treat her eyes to heal them, she chose not to treat them so that the world she understood and held onto would remain the same as it had always been.

Staged Readings

Staged readings are performances that present dramatic works before an audience in a format that closely resembles radio drama or audiobooks. This type of performance provides an opportunity to hear the content for evaluation and collaboration with writers on script development. It allows for gathering feedback and criticism from audience members who attend the staged reading, timing verification to determine performance duration, and serves as excellent practice for actors to develop their script reading skills. Additionally, it can showcase the production's potential to audiences and investors.

Sam Graber (2013) noted that staged readings differ from table readings conducted in private spaces without prior rehearsal. Table reads serve as part of the script development process, continuing until the work becomes more complete and ready for its first public performance. The primary purpose of staged readings is to receive feedback on the strengths

and weaknesses of the script from the audience, with a secondary purpose of helping the production team consider the next steps for that dramatic work.

Furthermore, Graber provided recommendations for the working process of staged reading as follows

1. Meet with actors and production team before beginning the script reading
2. Prepare documentation explaining the procedures and processes involved in writing and developing the script, so actors and production team understand what stage of the collaborative working process they are currently in
3. Provide introduction and explanation of the staged reading format to help audience members unfamiliar with this type of performance understand the presentation format and objectives of this production
4. Avoid using tables that negatively impact the actors' performance, such as tables too small for the number of actors or tables so high they obstruct the audience's view of the performers
5. Use music stands for holding scripts
6. Scripts used by actors should be appropriate for stage performance, with font sizes and styles that are clearly visible, and electronic devices should not be used for reading scripts
7. Stage directions and actions appearing in the script should be read by a narrator
8. Minimize explanations of stage directions
9. Cast actors appropriately for the characters defined in the script
10. Actors and directors should honor the script by not arbitrarily changing what occurs in the dramatic work, since the purpose of staged readings is to hear audience opinions about the script and develop it into a complete dramatic work
11. Basic stage lighting design can assist in storytelling, such as indicating time transitions
12. Follow the timing specified in the script, including intermissions if written into the dramatic work, as time management is part of script development
13. Avoid work that might create unexpected incidents

Creative Process

1. Selecting the Issues to Communicate from the Main Ideas of the Story

The novel "The Country of the Blind" has distinctive features that can be interpreted in various ways after reading, under the presentation of narrative perspectives through main characters like Nunez and the business partner character at the end of the second publication by H.G. Wells. Both characters are sighted people, just like the readers. The main story demonstrates social structures and conflict problems, mostly narrating about class, power, and discourse in dividing groups of people in society. The entire story takes place in an imaginary land, along with the proverb that becomes a key phrase in the story: "In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king," which means that even people with minimal abilities or opportunities can succeed when compared to those who have nothing at all. This sentence itself makes comparisons and divisions between groups of "those who have little" and "those who have nothing" through vision, as appears in the literature.

Therefore, the researcher interprets the main core idea of this literature as: humans should analyze differences rationally to create change and enable coexistence in society. This is shown through the actions of characters from both sides in the story, who come with firm adherence to beliefs about vision, leading to conflicts that might cause severe clashes or

hatred toward those with different opinions. Meanwhile, when one side agrees not to express opinions without serious discussion for mutual understanding, people with different views might coexist but remain misunderstood, and differences of opinion can always arise as issues. Therefore, ultimately, for true coexistence, all parties must open their hearts and communicate to create change in society.

2. Character Design Process

Since the presentation of the adapted play "The Country of the Blind" uses a staged reading format with the highest proximity to actual performance, costumes and physical movements are employed to indicate physical differences, which reflect the alienation in thoughts and beliefs. The characters are divided into groups according to their alienation as follows:

2.1 Sighted Characters and Blind Characters

The sighted characters in this story include only Nunez, Alvar (Nunez's friend), and Dario (Nunez's friend's wife). However, most of the performance takes place in the city of the blind, where Nunez is the only sighted person among the blind townspeople. Therefore, to help audiences see the convention of using sight as a difference in thoughts and beliefs, the researcher wrote the adapted script to have the blind townspeople wear blindfolds. The blindfolds chosen by the researcher are made of lace fabric that, when worn, still allows the wearer to see the surrounding area and read the script in their hands but prevents the audience from seeing the actors' eyes.

2.2 Medina-Saroté Character and Other Blind Townspeople Characters

The researcher chose to have the character Medina-Saroté wear a blindfold of a different color from the other townspeople to emphasize her alienation from the other blind townspeople. This highlights Medina-Saroté's sense of alienation from the townspeople and the difference in her facial features - her face appears distorted because she has eyeballs inside but cannot open her eyes, unlike others who have no eyeballs and whose faces are sunken where the eye sockets should be. All of this aims to show audiences Medina-Saroté's neutral position between the sighted and the blind.

3. Rehearsal Process

This performance presents the dramatic work as a staged reading, where the researcher and director discussed and agreed upon the presentation format regarding how closely it would resemble stage theater. They concluded that the performance would closely resemble stage theater while still holding scripts to ensure actors could read and speak correctly according to the content created by the researcher. The production included blocking (predetermined movement patterns), costumes for all actors to wear and change, and essential props for storytelling. This was to experiment with storytelling from a script that emphasizes the use of physical differences between characters to convey the story's theme.

During the rehearsal process, reading through the entire script together took a total of 43 minutes. After the script development process combined with rehearsing performance, gestures, movement, and emotions in each scene until weaving the story together, it took approximately 50-55 minutes total. This duration aligned with the researcher's intention for the adapted play to have a performance time of approximately 50 minutes to 1 hour. The total

rehearsal period was 9 days before the performance day, divided into the following rehearsal phases:

3.1 Pre-Theater Rehearsals

The pre-theater period lasted a total of 6 days. Since the director was unavailable during the initial period from April 24-25, 2025, the researcher conducted activities independently. The initial rehearsals by the researcher involved first reading, discussing and designing each character's background, designing relationships between characters within the story, then beginning script rehearsals, designing the overall stage picture, and practicing stage positions while reading scripts. Subsequently, the director assisted with character development and adding conventions starting from April 26, 2025.
Since this was a staged reading format, the director developed an approach that would further distinguish between sighted and blind people. The director chose to have the blind townspeople focus their eyes on the scripts in their hands and use their sense of hearing as guidance for performing as authentically blind as possible. Meanwhile, for the sighted character, the director wanted the actor to memorize the script as much as possible to become a character who uses sight with other characters and the surrounding space.

3.2 Theater Rehearsals

The performance venue was a multipurpose building rather than a traditional theater, space arrangement required adjustments to the performance to suit the limitations of the available space and equipment. A daily rehearsal schedule was created and implemented to allow actors to become as familiar as possible with the performance space.

3.3 Performance Days

There were 3 total performances: Friday, May 2, 2025, at 2:00 PM and 6:00 PM, and Saturday, May 3, 2025, at 6:00 PM at the Multipurpose Building, Sripatum University. A panel discussion was held among the researcher, director, and lead actors, replacing the expert in playwriting and adaptation who suddenly fell ill. The researcher recorded the performance and sent it to the expert for later feedback to the researcher. The researcher will compile all feedback to guide future development of the adapted play "The Country of the Blind" and performance format.

4. Script Development and Revision Process

4.1 Script development to the second draft

In the first draft of the play, the story opened from the perspective of the blind townspeople to introduce their normal daily life before an ominous sign occurs, causing the elderly woman character to prophesy that change will come. The townspeople then discover Nunez lying injured in the forest.

After conducting a read-through with the actors and director, the director and I agreed that this was redundant storytelling with the following scene, and we wanted the story to be told through the main character, Nunez. I therefore revised the script by removing the opening scene and keeping the scene where the townspeople find Nunez injured in the forest, while incorporating necessary content from the removed scene into this scene instead, such as the telling of the ominous sign from the wisdom above.

4.2 Script development to the third draft

After completing the second draft and conducting rehearsals with blocking, it became apparent that some dialogue was inappropriate for the situations occurring in the

story. For example, Nunez mutters complaints about others even when those people were nearby, or Nunez having dialogue that extensively described locations and his own thoughts. I therefore cut and revised the dialogue to be more appropriate to the story's situations, including some lengthy sentences that made the actors' stage movement awkward if they had to wait for the action to finish along with the sentence, or wait for the dialogue to end before beginning the next action. For instance, when Nunez realizes that the two men who found him injured are blind, he speaks about the myth of 'the country of the blind' that he had heard before, and when he finishes speaking, the two blind men arrive at his location. However, since Nunez's dialogue was quite long, it created an imbalance in the rhythm between the characters on both sides.

Additionally, dialogue was added in the beginning and middle sections to develop the background and relationship between Nunez and Medina-Saroté. In the original short story, the relationship between them is told from the middle of the story onward and is narrated as a concise summary of their relationship. The character Medina is interested in Nunez because he is different from everyone else, similar to herself, but she doesn't truly accept what Nunez believes—she can only listen and somewhat overlook those differences."

4.3 Script development to the fourth draft

Due to scheduling conflicts among the actors during rehearsals, one actor withdrew close to the performance date, preventing me, the director, and the team from finding a replacement in time. Although the character named Izza was merely one of the blind townspeople, he had a sibling relationship with the character Guido in the story. Moreover, both characters served as caretakers for the main character Nunez in the early part of the story, with considerable dialogue and interaction with Nunez. Therefore, it was necessary to revise the script and adjust the relationships, personality traits, actions essential to the plot development, and dialogue among the other blind townspeople.

The changes made included shifting the initial appearance from Izza as the one who takes in and cares for Nunez to Guido as the younger brother instead and changing the motivation from seeking labor to tend animals to wanting to receive blessings from the wisdom above for his sick sister by doing good deeds and caring for a newborn creature like Nunez.

Additionally, this character's blunt speaking style and tendency to ridicule Nunez's words and thoughts played a crucial role in provoking Nunez's anger, ultimately causing him to flee the town in the middle of the story. Therefore, the script revision required making the other blind townspeople more prominent in viewing Nunez as merely a newborn creature who fantasizes about non-existent sight, despite having different personality traits, in order to enhance the sense of alienation between Nunez and the blind townspeople.

Research Results Summary

The researcher evaluated the results from the cross-media theatrical adaptation, collecting data through discussions with the thesis advisor, director, actors, and expert in writing and adapting theatrical scripts, as well as gathering data from sample groups of general audience members who voluntarily answered anonymous questionnaires. The evaluation was based on all 3 actual performance rounds.

Feedback from the Director: The director commented on the reading-format performance that initially there was still confusion about what type of reading format the performance would be, because from the director's own experience, they had worked with 2 formats: actors sitting and reading scripts in place, and when each scene arrived, the actors performing in that scene would stand up to perform while holding their scripts on stage. However, through discussions with the researcher who wanted to see visuals as close as possible to the written direction, an agreement was reached to perform in a reading format with spatial arrangements close to the script, using blindfolds and stage props necessary for appearance in the theatrical script.

Feedback from the Thesis Advisor: The advisor noted that the storytelling in the adapted format still followed the original structure very closely, and the time compression in the latter part of the story was rushed too quickly, causing some segments to skip through time periods and lack important rhythms for the main character Nunez's decision-making. Additional suggestions were made to possibly add some story elements from the original to expand the narrative showing Nunez's thoughts before deciding to flee until changing his mind to return and help the blind townspeople from the mountain collapse. Regarding the script presentation in the reading format that the researcher chose to be close to stage theater performance, it made the stage directions and actions specified in the script visible, but required precise rehearsal and discussion to prevent errors and create images from mutual understanding between the script adapter, director, and actors.

Feedback from the Expert: The expert commented that the reading-format presentation close to stage theater performance made the staging directions and actions specified in the script clearly visible, and holding scripts and using them to differentiate between sighted and blind people helped show the differences between the two groups more clearly. However, this difference did not yet provide deep symbolic meaning. Due to the Colombian context in the story, it might make the audience feel difficult to access initially, especially Spanish phrases or character names that are unfamiliar to Thai audiences, causing audiences to become familiar and follow the story only around the middle of the play. Adjusting the context to Thai might help increase audience intimacy. Regarding storytelling in the script, many segments could be adjusted to reduce dialogue and convey through actions or performance instead, and some segments could expand storytelling to add stories about how each side grew up and learned to live, leading to the origins of both sides' decisions in the ending.

Anonymous Questionnaire Results from 81 Audience Members:

- **Ability to follow and understand the story of living together with people in society smoothly:** Strongly agree 53.1%, Agree 33.3%, Moderately agree 13.6%, Slightly agree 1.2%
- **Ability to follow and understand Nunez's story of being discriminated against by society in the land of the blind:** Strongly agree 63%, Agree 30.9%, Moderately agree 4.9%, Slightly agree 1.2%
- **Townspeople's blindness effectively conveying unwillingness to accept new things:** Strongly agree 65.4%, Agree 25.9%, Moderately agree 8.6%
- **Story content reflecting social conflict impacts:** Strongly agree 59.3%, Agree 30.9%, Moderately agree 7.4%, Slightly agree 2.5%

- **Script's ability to convey awareness of the importance of differences and understanding for social coexistence:** Strongly agree 64.2%, Agree 23.5%, Moderately agree 12.3%

Additional Audience Comments on Reading-Format Performance: Initially felt unfamiliar with this performance format, but understanding developed over time. Wanted more realistic stage props, and dialogue delivery sometimes stuttered slightly due to holding scripts during performance, making speech seem like recitation in some parts. Some characters still didn't give the feeling of truly believing they were blind, actors' voices were sometimes soft with strange pronunciation, and initially many actors didn't show emotional engagement and interaction with the story and other characters, but the atmosphere improved when reaching the middle of the story. Regarding the venue, seating was arranged in a single horizontal line, making it impossible for audience members in the back to see some scenes where actors sat performing on the floor. Suggested tiered seating arrangements.

Research Hypothesis Verification: From this research's hypothesis that presenting the adapted theatrical script as a reading performance of "The Country of the Blind" to present the core idea that "humans should analyze differences rationally to create change and enable coexistence in society" would help audiences connect with ideological conflicts occurring in Thai society, the researcher found that many audience members might still be unfamiliar with this performance format and might need time to adjust and understand. With scene arrangements almost identical to what was specified in the script using small stage structures instead of rocks, curtains instead of house structures, while still using necessary stage props for story progression such as shovels and cloth, this created audience thoughts wanting more realistic scenes and stage props.

Recommendations

From the research results and development of the play adapted from the literature "The Country of the Blind," the researcher has discovered concepts and processes for play adaptation in more diverse aspects. The adaptation of plays from short literature through the processes of selection, modification, cutting, adaptation, and addition, in this research the researcher was able to utilize these processes in conjunction with adapted play—allows storytelling to be more suitable for the play format, including the appropriateness of time and venue for performance. Particularly, the processes of adaptation and content addition to make the climax more causally connected with the main character's decision-making actions will significantly impact audience understanding and emotional response, as advised by the director, advisor, and experts in playwriting and adaptation.

rehearsal time should be increased, even for stage reading performances, to emphasize emotions and feelings in connection with the play. The extent to which this stage reading presentation format resembles full theatrical performance depends on the researcher's research objectives. If the goal is for audiences to judge based more on the script, the similarity to full performance should be reduced. Alternatively, if the goal is to provide audiences with an experience close to actual performance while maintaining some script reading to indicate it's a performance still in the play development process, a different approach should be taken.

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