

# A FRAGILE LABOUR OF FRIENDSHIP

excerpts from an essay written by Yon Natalie Mik

*SoftMachine: The Return* operates within global circuits where difference risks being commodified, yet it foregrounds fragility and impossibility as strategies of resistance. The portraits are shaped not only by the artists' practices but also by economies of presentation that can render cultural specificity into consumable surplus. Rather than offering closure, the work insists on incompleteness, staging unfinished traces of relation—precarious yet enduring. Within this frame, it repeatedly turns to the motif of friendship. Not intimacy or affinity alone, but a fragile labour that sustains proximity across asymmetry. The question is not how to resolve difference, but how to remain near it: What does it mean to rehearse another body's rhythms, to inhabit its movements, while knowing that assimilation is neither possible nor desirable? Friendship here is less about sameness than about persisting in relation, despite misalignment.





Surjit Nongmeikapam

This orientation is choreographic as much as ethical. To rehearse another's movement until it alters one's own is not only documentation but ultimately relational embodiment. The impossibility of "becoming the other" is never concealed; it becomes a structuring tension. Solidarity is reframed not as full understanding but as proximity that accepts dissonance. Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of spiritual pedagogy offers one way of grasping this logic. Knowledge, for her, is not accumulation but recursive practice across spirit, intellect, and body. In *SoftMachine: The Return*, knowledge circulates through translation, rehearsal, and failure. Ka Fai functions less as transmitter than as conduit, where knowledge passes provisionally, subject to transformation. It is a return to the body, where the body itself becomes the archive—circulating contingently and vulnerably, rather than preserving intact forms.

Writing this essay was guided by the desire to become a closer friend to Ka Fai, to attune to his rhythm, his concerns, and his questions. The text leans toward him, and in doing so becomes vulnerable, aware that full alignment will not be possible. It is as if my words build another soft machine, porous to his influence—contingent by the traces of his movements while generating new ones of its own. For years, I have followed his practice closely, yet this is the first time I write in anticipation of what has not yet appeared, returning to earlier works as a ground for rehearsal. The risk of such writing—speculative and unfinished—makes the text fragile, but it is carried by trust, by the support structures we as friends seek to build together in order to sustain life under power. I place this text within Ka Fai's wish to persist together, as a fragment that may, one day and in some provisional form, become material for a rehearsal of proximity and care. To write about return without having yet witnessed it is, perhaps, to return already.



Xiao Ke x Zihan

Yuya Tsukahara



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