

da:ns Lab (5th Edition)

20th-23rd July 2019

Artist Meeting & Laboratory as part of *da:ns* Festival

Collaboration between Dance Nucleus &
Esplanade Theatres by the Bay (Singapore)



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da:ns Lab: Listen to Country	2
On da:ns Lab by Chloe,	3
Day one,	4
On the indie genius,	4
On country,	4
On memory and movement,	5
On country as landscape,	6
On country as oral histories and memories of ancestors,	9
On country as land/ecology,	11
Day two,	13
On dancing in public space,	13
On culture from body memory,	14
On mirrors,	14
On censorship,	15
On Monopoly!	17
On being independent,	19
On Interdependence,	20
Day three,	22
On distant teaching,	22
On privilege and not-travelling,	28
On money,	28
On failure,	28
On unlearning,	29
On judgement,	29
On scanning and seeing,	31
On inclusivity,	32
Day four,	34
On artistic solidarity,	35
On food as the heart of Agora,	36
On exhaustion and exuberance,	36
On micro-utopias,	37
On re-defining Agora,	38
On Uferstudios,	39
On da:ns lab by Sze,	42
Facilitator and Curator Biographies	42
Participants	46

da:ns Lab: Listen to Country

“Responding to the shifting ground and changing climate - environmental, political, and economic - many artists in the performing arts have begun to augment their practices with a sense of urgency. This involves a critical re-examination of the arts ecology, the role of the arts and artists, and a greater emphasis on a model of relevance over that of excellence.

Compelled to address more directly social engagement and community participation, it can be argued that the arts in general, regardless of discipline or form, have begun to dovetail in performance, whereby as a relational practice, the arts attempt to play a more substantial role in building more dynamic, more equitable, more sustainable, and more meaningful relationships within their circumscribed contexts.

Furthermore, some artists are also reimagining themselves as curators of their own projects, in which the frameworks and formats for artistic engagement can potentially be renegotiated on the artists’ own terms. Accordingly, many artists are initiating projects that are self-directed in order to reclaim a sense of autonomy and agency, and to redefine the ways in which they can more directly, as well as more critically engage with their socio-cultural contexts.

The word ‘curate’ comes from curare (latin), which means ‘to care for’; the curator being traditionally a carer of cultural artefacts in a museum. Adapted into the performing arts approximately over the last 15 years, the role of the curator as a ‘carer’ of cultural conversations has never been more critical, especially when so many aspects of our lives require care today: mitigating against environmental collapse, listening to dissenting views amidst political deadlock, even reviewing self-care or countering precarity, burnout and exhaustion among freelancing artists.

The verb of the day seems to be ‘to listen’. As well as to speak, issue statements and to take a stand, the artist who cares also needs to build in listening as a salient ingredient in their artistic practice. Besides speaking more forcefully and more persuasively. How can we be better at listening to our communities?”

- Curator, Daniel Kok

Documentarians’ notes:

We (Sze and Chloe) respond, engage, critique, and archive da:ns Lab 2019: Listen to Country. Being both dance practitioners, we are participants as well as witnesses to how the invited artists engage with the participants, an inside and outside gaze. What kind of collective discussions are activated? How may they have a ripple effect in our respective practices as cultural workers?

Some notes on the formatting of this archive:

- We have decided to speak/write/archive in first person, to give a more direct felt sense of the discussions in the room as they happened. Coming to terms with the impossibility of being purely objective, we take in our subjectivity as a place of power as artists and archivers in this role.
- Chloe has responded to Day 1 and Day 3, while Sze has responded to Day 2 and Day 4.
- You will find sections of verbatim transcription within the archive, to bring in the actual voices of people and to avoid any overriding of our own perspectives, which can lead to the risk of tainting over the original language and tone spoken on the day itself.

On da:ns Lab by Chloe,

Singapore as a transitory city that has enough infrastructure to house an interweaving of cultural workers from wide and far flung areas into one room. A gathering that holds potential to bring existing cultural conditioning to the surface and the possibility of breaking old patterns into regenerating new ideas, allowing failure, provoking perceptions, and supporting each other in our multiplicity. Having been to da:ns lab in 2017 and 2018, this is one of many ways to participate through both discourse and experimentation to understand the Singaporean dance ecology, within a global performance/dance context.

The theme Listen to Country was able to specify the engagements into more a constructive discussion, which was necessary. Jacob Boehme from Australia was a good way to start the da:ns lab, since the first introduction was done through a movement workshop. To speak of dance in depth, it was helpful to start by being in the body, before talking about the body. Jacob's movement exercises focused mostly on using memory and applying it as a choreographic technique derived from indigenous values. While Xiao Ke and Zi Han similarly explored understanding their culture through body memory, but with a very different approach. Their sharing provoked dialogue on how they deal with self-censorship as artists in China, looking at contemporary dance through the lens of dance forms on the daily public square, and initiating a artist-version game of Monopoly which they named A-Game. The third day was facilitated by Martin Schick, known for his works on the redistribution of resources as a way of working. As a response to the climate catastrophe, he made a conscious decision to lead the session through Skype to reduce CO₂ emissions, so he was able to stay in Switzerland, rather than flying to Singapore. His presence via a camera and flat screen definitely change and challenge the dynamics of interaction. His absence however made space for more regional participants to be present at da:ns lab this year. Lastly, the fourth speaker was Paz Ponce from Agora Collective, an artist-run collaborative practice space in Berlin. Her workshop was filled with continuous tasks of text, embodiment, conversations, writing, and more. It took us to the point of feeling overwhelmed and exhausted, especially after four days of intensive engagement. This point of exhaustion was also part of her provocation, where we got to the edge of desperation, and almost delusion, the start of when more interesting results arise.

Noticeably, da:ns lab this year had the highest level of engagement and diversity in disciplines, which kept an elevated level of intrigue, it allowed for respectful, yet honest and vulnerable responses to each other. As compared to a less effective lecture-student format, people had enough conviction to speak, interrupt, question, and importantly, play.

Day one,

As I write this, the Singapore skyline is hazy from the neighboring forest fires. A reminder of the call of the climate crisis. The haze returns every year and treated is treated society in Singapore as a normal part of the weather. All conversations at this point are interwoven to our ecology. This year's da:ns lab theme *Listen to Country* brings questions about our relationship to land. What is our place in relationship to the land we live on? What does it mean to listen to the land? What can we do to respond to the call of the land? Are we willing to listen?

On the indio genius,

I quote Kidlat Tahimik, National Artist and Father of Philippine Independent Cinema, whose works critique the division of globalization, capitalism, and tradition. Kidlat coined the term *indio genius* of people who identify with indigenous values, but are not from a direct indigenous ancestral lineage. *Indio genius*—I find to be a good framework of indigenous intervention within a contemporary content to read the engagement with the work of Jacob on our first day at da:ns lab.

Jacob Boehme is a Melbourne-born and based artist of Aboriginal heritage, from the Narangga (Yorke Peninsula) and Kurna (Adelaide Plains) nations of South Australia. Jacob is the founding Creative Director of YIRRAMBOI First Nations Arts Festival 2017.

Jacob introduced himself by sharing his ancestral lineages. His work in Australia fills the gap created through colonial indigenous erasure – of language, of people, of memory. As a young actor and trouble-maker at the age of 13, a social worker put him into a theatre class instead of juvenile detention, which led him to study dance at the Aboriginal Island Dance College in Sydney, where he learned from Aboriginal elders and where Jacob adapted pre-colonial performance models of interdisciplinary song and storytelling. Of which, one of these models was shared and practiced with us in his workshop. He also generously gave the participants the opportunity to take this model and share it with others in our own contexts.

In the South of Australia, the erasure by colonization was heavier and absence of culture more felt, as compared to the North where there is a stronger presence of Aboriginal historical narratives and songs due to slower colonization. In the South, banning and censorship of song and dance led to Aboriginal communities continuing their ceremonial practices in secret. Jacob initiated the YIRRAMBOI festival for the revival and reclaiming of cultural practice, pride, ceremonies, and connection to country.

Jacob's presentation leads me to question: Jacob comes from an indigenous lineage, which gives him the authority to reclaim indigenous narratives, but how about everyone else? There is risk in cultural appropriation, especially when it comes to the indigenous. **How does one build a holistic relationship with a community where art can be an expressive medium to mutually benefit both the artist and the community?**

On country,

Country meaning landscape, a place you have been given to be custodian of, not the owner, but the custodian. How you treat that country directly reflects how healthy you are or not. Jacob mentions that his elders say *"if you treat country badly, you will in turn be sick"*.

Singapore has grown so quickly and fast, that it makes me question if we are going to die as quickly and as fast? At the rate we are going, with continuous air-conditioning, which acts as a lighter and heats up the city twice as fast as the rest of the world. Indoor gardens, to replace the wild land that has grown freely, in the name of economic development. It is only the privileged who can afford to even consider thinking about potential positive changes for the climate. Those who are the most affected by it are the marginalized communities on the fringe. If we choose not to act, the haze will only thicken. Smoke doesn't see country borders, nor does melting of ice, or warming of oceans. How then can we re-think listening to country in Singapore?

On memory and movement,

Jacob goes on to speak about the interconnectedness of memory, movement, trauma, and DNA. How trauma memory from our ancestors remains coded in our DNA and is something that everyone can tap into. He works within this approach through movement.

“Listening to country” also means listening to the body. We spent the next few hours being in the body. The 33 participants formed a large circle and we were each asked to prompt a brief stretch, giving each person a chance to lead the warm up.

We then went into a series of tasks of memory and movement.

1. Search for memories
2. Extract those memories
3. Turn those memories into a physical action
4. Turn those actions into a single choreography
5. Perform it with people following your movement behind you

What is a strong memory of a manual labor job you have done? We were asked to mimic the movement specifically and clearly and identify each others' tasks. Then Jacob led into more personal questions and tasks – What is your first memory of childhood with your Mother? What is your first memory of your Father?



We broke into two groups, one group as witness, the second group as performers. Each performer was tasked to dance the memory, while the group behind the performer would echo and also perform that memory. This process created a transmission of memory through the body and a witnessing of memory with the spectators. It added a layer of depth to knowing each other on a kinesthetic level. It gave us grounds for an immediate bond, sharing a deeply personal side of our history, without directly telling people, without necessarily understanding the context logically.

Shawn shared that *“...the exercise felt like a crash course in embodying the entire room’s history as a repertoire. It was easier to access those experiences through another person’s action, rather than my own. I was also asking myself – What were the kinds of actions that felt more dissonant with my body? At the same time, being aware when an action feels familiar to my body. I felt there were two main types of movement, one that was action oriented, and one that can dwell and had an emotional arc, those were the ones that allowed me to access history.”*

Later on, we explored a group movement choreography exercise responding to the theme of ‘feeling home’ when you are not at ‘home’ (or, on your own country). It gave the participants the opportunity to co-create together as a collective, compared to as individuals in the earlier exercise.

On country as landscape,

In the afternoon, Jacob shares more on landscape as a defining factor that shapes who we are. Being near salt water as compared to fresh water changes behaviour in people. **Environment breeds behaviour for generations to come.** *“When we speak about a country, we are speaking of landscape.”*



This opens up into an engaging and exciting discussion.

Daniel: *“Singapore for me is actually dislocated from the land. Our history often times starts with the 60s, the time of British colonialism. In the 60s, the racial groups were very divided, there was no strong sense of nationhood. When Singapore became its own country, we had to learn quickly to forget all of that. We forgot our dialects. All that got erased. All the Indians are presumed to speak Tamil, all the Chinese learned Mandarin. Everything got reduced and simplified. To add to that, the indigenous people in Singapore, they (the Malays) became the minority group, and they were treated in an odd way, and the politics of that have yet to be unpacked. We don’t spend so much time on how we really belong to this land. Added to that, the rapid need to change our economic situation, from agriculture into high-tech telecommunication services. We actually don’t have any real relationship to the land. Our buildings get torn down, people protest but are not listened to.*

As a subject then what do I connect with? Is there anything left for me to connect to? I have no choice but to think about people and places as country. If we make another leap to think about dance. I am thinking about dance as a practice of displacement of movement. How do I deal with a sense of displacement?”

Other Singaporeans in the room add to that conversation on displacement.

Loo Zihan: *“Because of Singaporeans’ context of constant deliberate erasure, the response we have to the term ‘listen to country’ is instinctively a very adverse response. ‘Listen to country’ reminds me of propaganda. **It really took me some time to try to find a way to engage with the term ‘country’: I immediately have the sense of the nation, in a way that is oppressive and can be draconian or severe.** I am not sure how we grapple with a benign notion of country?”*

Jacob continued to question and provoke the room, asking everyone if there is an existing relationship with the indigenous in Singapore? Which becomes a heated discussion on the complexity of indigeneity, especially in Southeast Asia as an archipelago, as compared to Australia as a continent.

Cui: *“It is not that we do not have a relationship. For the indigenous groups, there has been a lot of carving of seas and erasure of identities. It’s not just about the history of colonisation and the history of migration throughout centuries, within the region, across Asia, as well as a large diaspora. I come from a dialect group that were exiles sent to the Southernmost point of China, and they were last of the Chinese migrants to come to Southeast Asia. They do not even have a place in China. I feel that **country is less of what I***

receive and carry with me but what I choose and will do and draw to. Personally, I draw a distinction between country and nation. There is a distinction between what is national identity and what is country, which is an imagined space that floats above geography. Although, for you, because you have a strong connection to ancestry and history to receive that's tied to the land. Mine is one that's moved from island to island, from seas to seas."

Amin: "We could be fighting about who is indigenous. At the same time, I feel we are cultural orphans. I find it problematic, the Malays or whatever fits into that Malay label is orphaned because of what the region is to us. I like to say "constitutionally indigenous" so I don't have to deal with the contestations of what indigeneity in the country means. But, I feel indigenous to this island, to this region. I see the culture of maritime Southeast Asia to be mine as well. I see it to be part of who I am. I am all for the Nusantara. I am abhorrent of the colonial legacy that has carved us onto many different paths. I think the way I am, how emotional I am, also has to do with privilege. I am a minority and yet sometimes I am not able to decide for myself. Yes, in certain times, when any minority starts talking about Chinese privilege, suddenly, I am Malay or Indian and not Singaporean. It is complex."

Fehzah: "**I do find it problematic the notion of purely indigenous because we are so mixed, we have influences from everywhere.** There is Malay from Indonesia or from Malacca. Is it our land because we were born here? **Our history is so nomadic in that sense, it is hard to say we are indigenous to this land.** As a Malay, I know that is not a word I would use to describe myself constantly. There is too much race and culture that has been collapsed under the term Malay. In Singapore, it has been constructed in a way where you do not own the land. This is a transit place. In your lease, you only have 99 years. Even then it is not something I can pass to my children or grandchildren. I am curious to actually know what is our relationship right now within the context of the various identities that we have. What is our relationship to the Malay archipelago?"

Chloe: "Personally, I do feel an affinity and connection to this land and that is affirming enough to have a sense of indigeneity. If we look past the 60s, at the Orang Laut and their seafaring and nomadic nature... It is actually quite similar to how people in Singapore live today. There is a lot of cultural mobility, it is very transitory. Maybe, we are more similar to our indigenous lineages that we know to be."

Shawn: "**What kinds of forms of kinships or networks of care can we re-create?** How can we care? How can we accompany? I am interested in finding ways to nourish these relations."

KC: "Is it possible to go beyond owning the land? Is it possible to have a connection to one's neighbourhood or environment? For instance, when I go away and come back and I see a tree cut down in my neighbourhood, I feel that a murder has taken place. It is this visceral feeling you have with the land. You can't really describe it in words, but it is something quite magical. This moment occurred for me when I visited Bukit Brown Cemetery. I was there for a tour, it was a rainy morning, and it was a visceral and emotional experience for me."

Xiao Ke: "When we think about country in a geographic way, it is related with political benefits. Somehow, most of us always change our attitude to who we are. For sample, if I am Korean-Chinese, in mainland China I can choose to identify as Korean, but I am living in China. If I move to Europe, I can choose to be defined as Chinese. How we identify ourselves also changes. My question is – Why do we only have one way to simplify and identify what is country? How can we refresh our ideas on country?"

Paz: "I am from Spain and I live in Germany. Country is the social contract that we as a society have. What we have in common is that we pay taxes, which enables us to be a social custodian of the country. Those

who do not work they are not regarded as able citizens — they do not exist. In Germany, there is a problematic thing now where it is part of a culture of able-ism. Are you paying taxes? Are you working? Meaning, you are represented if you are a custodian. If you do not work, as thousands of people do not work, such as women who care for the house, basically they do not exist. Able-ism is differentiating because we are regarded as parasites who suck resources from the state because we are not able to produce. The only differentiation is do you produce? Why do we have to be defined by what we produce?"

On country as oral histories and memories of ancestors,

As the conversation shifts into remembering stories told by our grandparents, it raised provocations, frictions, tensions, and further questions within a Singaporean context. Interestingly, this sharply changes the direction and perspective of Jacob's original intentions, which was to have a second movement exercise based on stories of our ancestors. We ended up instead in a heated conversation about voluntary amnesia and trauma within familial ties.

Cui Yin, Loo Zihan, Sze and Nabilah speak about how in Singapore, family storytelling is not a usual mode of connection. The older generations were determined to forget trauma so as to move on. Questions were raised on how to expand the notion of kinship beyond genetic ancestry? Here is how the discussion went:

Jacob: *"If we go with the notion of country as a commitment to family, those that have walked before us, without them we wouldn't be here. It is through those ancestors that have given us the opportunities today. This is where I'd like to shift the focus into a movement exercise. I was wondering, if we could do two more memory exercises and apply it to the choreographic technique. Think of a story that you have been told by a grandparent of ancestors you don't know."*

Cui: *"That doesn't exist."*

Jacob: *"Your grandmother has never spoken about her mothers and elders?"*

Cui: *"My grandmother speaks a different language."*

Loo Zihan: *"Their dialect is different from our dialect."*

Jacob: *"Is there any story you have heard from the older generations? Whom you have never met?"*

Zihan shared that for the older generations, there was a deliberate willing of self to forget due to the trauma of the past, poverty, migration, violence, and war. Shawn questions the room on how we can expand to think beyond genetic ancestry?

Aparna: *"I was thinking how much of culture is passed through stories, which is one way. It is only in the mid-nineteenth century where there is the homogenization of how the world is transformed. If we are talking about migration that has happened over half a millennium, there is cultural continuity, though not necessarily through the passing of stories... I feel there is something about different ways of passing on values. Some of which are verbal, some are different forms of encouraging different forms of behavior. **Here as a dance space, there is a lot of embodiment and transfer of histories.**"*

Chloe: *"I feel for many of us here that blood kinship is a source of estrangement and rejection, and so you don't go there as a source of healing, because it is the source of trauma. Your sense of family, story, history,*

then comes from other sources, or ideally, inside. Perhaps, you'll find a rhythm, or dance, or song, where you find a source of home. I am curious about **ways we can look beyond a racial boundary.**"

Jacob: "It is not beyond your blood, it is in your blood. Your DNA memory, every two generations, it tracks back. When you do come across songs, or rhythms, or something that feels familiar to you. DNA memory is going two generations plus two generations plus two generations back. It is already in your body, that's why you remember. It is already in us."

Nabilah continues to share on how she finds freedom in being able to re-make our own myths, finding a strength of being present, rather than digging into family trauma. While Zihan shares his resistance to a genetic determinism of who we are, a narrative that has been woven, spun, used, and inflected as a weapon to discipline Singaporeans. Shawn shares that in trauma discourse, it is not just genetics that one inherits, but also how the environment changes the genetic expression. I think the understanding of genetic inheritance of trauma needs to be contextualized. Sze also shares how remembering and identifying with a culture that is an oppressing majority brings upon cultural guilt.

Paz: "When a nation state works based on geography there is a consensus of forgetting. From that point zero of the collective decision of when one is a country, things happen very fast, people consciously eliminate where they come from because its more 'efficient' to move forward."

Cui: "I don't care about reconciliation or lost things along the way. But, I know that I have been programmed to a culture that has cut me blind and deaf to many people and their experiences because of the nature of my identified existence as Chinese. I feel that, **maybe it is not about listening to country, but thinking about how your country is where you are listening to.** Maybe those who are listening should be listening to those that are subjugated. For that is how I inhabit the present situation in Singapore. There is no such thing as Chinese, that word is a fake word. The concept of Chinese-ness is of a soujourner, of being diasporic, of being multiplicities. In and of that, then for what? The label is just a demographic label. **The label I have been given has caused a lot of unnecessary harm. That harm is what I should be listening to, rather than to focus on what came before me.**"

On country as land/ecology,

Jacob shifts the conversation away from country being something to with your blood or culture. Country being environment and ecology. What is your relationship to that? What is the position of responsibility to ecology and environment? What are people's feelings on how that plays in your practice?

Andrei: *"Listening to country for me in context of what I do (as a Festival Director) and where I am (the Philippines) is providing a sense of belongingness, to make them feel seen or heard."*

Preethi: *"In India to find unbuilt land is almost impossible because the population is increasing. In the last few years, a group of us have been occupying open spaces. How do you be in these open spaces? How do you inhabit those places? These are spaces where our thinking is starting to develop. Taking action upon open spaces. There was such an urgency that some of us bought land, so that nothing could be built on it."*

Sze: *"I have a strong sense that the local environmental context of Singapore and its situation as a confluence of things is a context of transformation over time. And, I try to think about transformations at the time of the ocean, not in the time of human life. In the time of the horseshoe crab which has retained its inherent genetic makeup, and how it has not needed to change in a million years. With that project, I work with things that come to these shores, to look at that transformation and how those things have been reclaimed by the sea. It is also a connecting to the sense that migration, say of my grandparents, is only a small scheme of the larger changing or non-changing patterns."*

Chloe: *"I work with soil and I think my hands in contact with the earth is a way to listen to country. The way information is being passed can also be ephemeral in this way, the insects that come by, the dragon flies, monitor lizards, frogs, and all of that translates into my work as an artist. That is one way to listen to country, to listen to nature. I feel one way to break the illusion of separation of man and nature is through plant medicines. I feel it is so deeply profound, it can be a re-wiring of our cells and neuropaths, that is also another way to listen."*

Amin: *"Before this talk about indigeneity, the idea of land was important, that allowed me to reflect upon traditional ideas with nature pre-Islam. Understanding of the wind in itself as a way to describe modes of being and understanding. And, nature was a way of looking at the life or understanding life of Malay people before Islam. After Islam, it became quite a sanitized way of looking. A lot of training in traditional dance it was mostly from nature, how soil works, and returning back to the land."*

Jacob: ***"In order for us to go forward ecologically and environmentally, I do think it is important that we consult with as many indigenous communities around the world as possible, who have spent long periods of time and managed them pristinely; until the coming of the industrial revolution and after the industrial revolution. We need to start listening to those that have been listening to country for a long time in order to go back to the land renewal. Because unfortunately, we have fucked it."***

We close the day by having a conversation on the current fellowship that Jacob is under for the next two years. Where Jacob has the opportunity to seek alternative business models based on indigenous cultures around the world. To re-look for ideas of the art market that is more focused on cultivating craft rather than selling performance as product. Which leaves us with room for actual on the grounds, possibilities.

We did not end up doing the initial movement exercises that Jacob had planned. There is no conclusion. There are no answers. There cannot be answers in four days. This conversation is too complex to unpack in a workshop or two. However, we did arrive somewhere. Ideas surrounding the urban-indio, the notion of country beyond nation-state borders, country as ecology and environment, listening to people that listen to country, listening to those that are subjugated, as a way to listen to country, and a myriad of layers that each can unpack in one's own way.

Sze's thoughts on day one:

I appreciated Jacob's sharing of his work and practice very much. He offered a sincere perspective on something we don't discuss that much here - injustice to indigenous people and ritual links to forefathers, land, language, and the act of politicising group identity.

He led us to create movement from specific lived memories of the body, of people who are important to us - a set of his choreographic tools that are an alternative to looking at specific steps or aesthetics. The principles seemed too simple to me at first but I could sense the sincerity and commitment to the method, and I can imagine how this helps him to access rich material from collaborators in communities who don't relate to the formal aesthetics of Western contemporary dance or choreographic concepts. The group ritual exercises that we did together based on this approach turned out to be very evocative, and everyone watched each group-solo with rapt silence.

It was a pity that we did not end up spending more time on his discussion of his current initiative for the curation of indigenous arts, through a new set of organising principles that don't follow the systems of neoliberal capitalism.

Day two,

“I find that it's hard for my body to dance. Dance is a luxury for me. Now I'm trying to find new ways to understand what is dance.” -Xiao Ke (in her day 1 introduction)

On Day 2, Xiao Ke x Zi Han (XK x ZH) introduce themselves with an enigmatic video clip of their work *大力伤害* (*Darling Hurt.Crush*), showing a video of them driving to a busy location and arranging several white T-shirts to be run over by passing cars.

Their presentation that follows has an air of informality and playfulness as they discuss their works, and raise questions about individual expression and the body in public spaces, which bodies define contemporaneity in movement, and their strategies to deal with censorship in China when running their NIAO NIAO festival. Another work shows their attempts to express the disorienting experience of the familiar and unfamiliar in their encounters with Japanese culture. They use each of these works to invite a group discussion on various themes. The second half of the day is devoted to their “A-Game” - an adapted game of Monopoly (titled “The Great Artist” in Chinese), and a subsequent round played in teams with inputs from dans lab participants.

On dancing in public space,



*Republic of Dance. Text in Chinese: “If I dance fast enough, loneliness cannot catch me”.
Image courtesy of Xiao Ke x Zi Han.*

Republic of Dance was based on the daily public square dances common in cities across China, danced by older folks. XK x ZH mention that they initiated this project after being asked frequently about “China’s contemporary dance”, leading them to seek out dances danced by everyday Chinese people. XK x ZH approached this with the following questions: Is public square dance different in various cities? How do public square dances change Chinese society? What is the body memory of mainland Chinese? It was also a way for Xiao Ke to connect with her parents’ generation, whom she previously did not identify much with as they had different lifestyles and what she perceived as bad manners (e.g. speaking excessively loudly).

XK x ZH identified distinctive elements in the public square dances which they related to Chinese body memory: poses with the Little Red Book and positions influenced by Maoist Moral Operas, pauses for photography, and a unique concept of the use of music which was not count-based. They also observed that the public square dance groups generated their own forms of community and communication, with their own groups using online forums. **They noted that body memory lingers, even though China changes**

very fast. These memories influenced a whole generation, but wondered how a younger generation understands this?

Public square dancing also says something about how Chinese use public space. Despite overseas impressions of control in communist country, Chinese people use public space a lot and don't care what others think. The dancing was an important expression of happiness for a generation with painful memories.



Republic of Dance. Image courtesy of Xiao Ke x Zi Han.

XK x ZH toured a work based on public square dances to Weimar, Germany, and brought some Chinese public square dancers with them. They selected in particular the square where Hitler had proclaimed the Third Reich. The local dance community was invited to join their old ladies and engaged with surprising enthusiasm. Xiao Ke reflected that perhaps all humans have a similar feeling of happiness in a public square when doing things together.

On culture from body memory,

Sze mentions that propaganda displays are a familiar feature of Singapore culture (the National Day Parade, the Great Singapore Workout) that most artists tend to disdain but perhaps we could think about that more. Fehzah speaks about how basketball courts and spaces between blocks of flats in Singapore are used for line dancing and exercise. She also mentions “smaller body memories” such as cooking by feeling, and weaving food with leaves, memories that were inherited from great grandmothers. Gua Khee is amazed by the gathering of young and old for free Zumba classes at her local shopping mall, and how everyone seems to know all the steps without apparent communication.

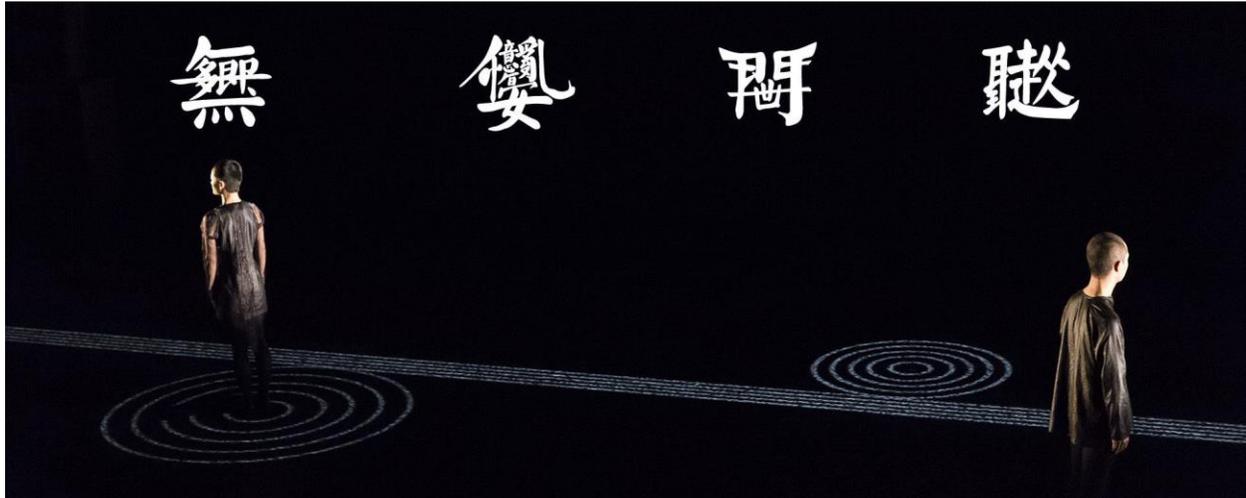
Preeti notes that the Indian diaspora has its own versions of dances for Bollywood songs from the 40s, such that pop culture enables that music and dancing to become something with an ownership beyond India and de-emphasizes national identity.

Cui Yin points to the underpass near the Esplanade, where in spite of signs not to dance or sit, there is a rich variety of activity by skateboarders, street dancers, line dancers, gatherings of migrant workers and people sleeping. Chloe adds that it is a space with an informal schedule of different activities on different days.

On mirrors,

“Sometimes we have to jump out of our own country to understand other countries, as a mirror to understand ourselves.”

XK x ZH created *Miniascape* (小风景) during a 3 month residency in Japan (in 2015, after the Fukushima nuclear incident). They noted the gap between Chinese and Japanese cultures and world views, even though the traditional culture was closely connected and they are neighbouring countries. The historical narratives in the respective education systems portrayed confusing portraits of the other.



Xiao Ke felt a strong sense of cultural affinity in Kyoto, where the old architecture, Buddhist practices and how people communicate and interact in society made her think of ancient Chinese culture and customs originating from China that had been lost. Zi Han recounts a dreamlike sense that everything was culturally familiar but incomprehensible.

XK x ZH show Kanji/Chinese characters they created for this performance, which gave a sense of cultural connection without specific meaning. Their new project is about Chinese identity research where they have interviewed Chinese in Singapore and Thailand.

On censorship,

XK x ZH's instant theatre initiative in Shanghai *Too late/NIAO NIAO Festival/Instant Theatre* was created to circumvent the Chinese censorship process. They created their own inflatable theatre and festival to support independent young artists and show their own work. Through an open call they assembled 30 performing artists and amateurs and together created a work called *Too Late*. They later brought the Instant Theatre to Penang but regretted it because it was so hot!



Instant Theatre. Image courtesy of Xiao Ke x Zi Han.

The context for *Too Late* was that XK x ZH had several shows for the theatre censored prior to this. They sensed that the censors' objections were arbitrary, and were frustrated with the negotiations to modify their shows. It was also difficult to get approval for a theatre in a public space. They circumvented this by collaborating with the West Bund festival in Shanghai, who didn't bring XK x ZH to the censors' meeting. They had an agreement that they would not say that XK x ZH's events were a performance. Instead, they hosted "free workshops".

Xiao Ke feels that it isn't so hard to figure out how to navigate censorship in China. **She refuses to stop working because of self-censorship – which is more powerful than government censorship.** So they choose to circumvent the censorship process and work with little resources, even though if one is happy to negotiate, one can get huge funding and space.

Xuemei shares about Drama Box's inflatable theatre the *Goli* (marble), created to address the aesthetics of community theatre in a different space. It is a challenge to maintain and repair the structure, while the ambiguity of ownership of public space makes licensing tricky. The porosity of public spaces also creates the requirement that all content performed in the *Goli* needs to achieve a "G" rating because you can't control who will accidentally encounter your work and feel offended. The company realised that the redefinition of space was becoming something interesting in itself.

Xuemei describes a sense that the censors are constantly trying to catch up with artists. Cui Yin notes that even talks and buskers in Singapore require licenses. Xiao Ke responds that Singapore seems to be a game where it is hard to imagine anyone breaking the law – unlike China where artists in big cities still have this possibility. Zihan and Kai respond that there are still situations where Singapore artists can avoid regulation, such as sharing in private events, and informal practices such as those in the Esplanade underpass where participants are presumably ignorant of licensing requirements and do not feel a need to self censor. Zihan feels relief that the censors seem to be catching up rather than running ahead, in contrast to the 90s when performance artists were seen as a security threat. The censors had tried to run ahead of artists and measures become disproportionate.

Xiao Ke and Henry mention the censorship of artists in Taiwan and Macau because of their participation in the Sunflower Revolution. Yikai shares about the performance *Provisional Alliance* in the Taipei Arts Festival. A variety of activists, artists and politicians had been invited as performers for a work about decision making in government. The involvement of political candidates was perceived as biased and there was pressure from the press, mayor and venue to cancel the show or remove some participants. The artists were able to proceed with a modified script, because they had the support of their venue, and in Taiwan artists won't be stopped if they really want to do something.

Zi Han recalls that *Republic of Dance* was censored when it was scheduled at the Shanghai Power Station, a government contemporary arts museum. However the institution also played the important role of protecting the artist. **The performance proceeded informally un-ticketed and by invitation, and the censored text “cultural revolution” was instead covered with beeps and blacked out subtitles. In his opinion, this made that part of the performance even stronger.**

On Monopoly!

The afternoon session is dedicated to a game of monopoly designed by XK x ZH, which they couch as a way to “complain constructively” and have exchanges about different independent artists’ and curators’ contexts and dilemmas. In 5 different groups, participants play the game with a lot of laughing and screaming, while the pick-a-card (similar to the original Monopoly “Chance” and “Community Chest”) scenarios cut close to home with typical dilemmas of the independent artist such as setting artistic integrity against popular recognition and money, or formulating on-the-spot pitches. In a second round, participants contribute their own scenario cards and play an even more exuberant group round.



The discussions prompted include:

- Why do artists always want to join festivals, what kind of festivals do you think are good for you? Is independent always related with poor, no support, and hardship? Thinking about whether opportunities are good for your work, good platforms for your work. What is your relationship with festivals?
- The role of money and institutions as organizing principles.
- Whether recognition and international touring should be regarded as an end goal for artistic practice.
- How to balance family priorities with art-making.
- Organisation of collectives: Should collectives should only allow people to leave when they can but not when they want? Who benefits most? Do we all move together?
- In an argument with a collaborator, do you choose your friendship or the success of the work?
- Self-care and downtime.
- How we regard situations where sexual relations can advance careers.
- Whether competitions are a productive way of allocating resources, and if they nurture participants. Whether this is preferable as an alternative to more opaque systems.
- How should a curator respond to an artist that they have invited who delivers a sub-par work. Should the focus be on the artist's overall practice rather than the work? How can a programmer frame a work or check in with the process of a commissioned work?





On being independent,

XK x ZH admit that they “cancelled” the cash element in the game because it became problematic to talk about buying opportunities or festivals. Their board design reflects a basic map of the art environment that they work in and is only one system in which to think about art and independent practice. Cui Yin points out that **the origin of Monopoly was not to celebrate capitalism but to encourage players to think about the benefits of a non-capitalist system and players had an option to veto the rules of a monopolistic system.**

Sekar says that artists in Solo are visually and technically mature but lacking in reflexivity and resources to develop this, in comparison to Yogyakarta. To her, to be independent means to not have private support from government and institutions, and not working for institutions. It is important for her practice to be independent so that she can work with different disciplines and support what artists want to do. **Paz responds that in her experience the key to maturing practice is to develop a vocabulary,** which can be done in one year.

Preethi talks about how we can develop spaces for dialogue where a work is not only judged by number of tickets sold. Building dialogue with the public, media and people across many fields is crucial in a place of ruptured history, without ready-made discourse. It is also important to engage peers to look at each others' work and push in directions that you wouldn't normally go yourself. Many artists in Chennai are disappointed that being articulate in English and the language of contemporary arts has become so crucial to any sense of value, but there was a recent move to develop discussion of concepts and abstract ideas in regional languages.

Daniel suggests that the paradigms that keep dancers trapped are: seeing dance as a visual and technical practice, emphasis on festivals and making shows. **What if dance practice doesn't mean being alongside other disciplines, but the ability to think about an expanded ecology?** In a global context of falling audience numbers and funding cuts, co-production is only a stopgap measure. The onus is on the independent artist to think creatively about other ways of engaging public rather than creating more shows to jam into an already failing market system. The latest Arts Sector plan is an opportunity for Singapore independents to reimagine ourselves and reframe ourselves to the National Arts Council.

On Interdependence,

Cui Yin states that she is averse to the word "independent", which assumes a dichotomy and separation from institutions and authority. That perspective dehumanises people who work in institutions and those who accept support from them. **Her own interest is more about how to create the conditions for creating and experiencing art, working collectively and interdependently. She is interested in what other languages of value we are creating; giving each other a language of meaningfulness that can't be translated into cash.** To assume markets are neoliberal is to also ignore the value of stallholders in markets and public squares that are also a form of community.

Xiao Ke responds that at a basic level for her and Zi Han, the basic premise is to try and be financially independent. There is "big funding" available in China, but 100% of the granting foundations are organisations they do not trust. As independents they have the power to decide to do or not do, and try to separate money from their work. Being independent in China is also about collaboration, and a perspective of building an ecology and an environment for art. Initiatives such as the NIAO NIAO festival and the iPANDA forum are XK x ZH's attempts to build possibilities for a new arts ecology without funding. Their work *Darling Hurt (Rainbow)* where Xiao Ke walked across Shanghai with a clothes rack - engaged audience in a different way from conventional performance.

To Loo Zihan, "independent" means that you are flexible to get resources from everywhere but you have very strong principles, determining what you do and don't want to get. You have to take care of yourself.

Yikai speaks about Thinker's Theatre, his independent venue, and Tua Tiu Tiann International Festival of the Arts, an independent festival. He agrees that being independent is about having more flexibility in time and creativities. Young producers today in Taiwan are starting to think that it isn't necessary to go into an institution to get resources. The strength of being independent is in knowing what resources one has. Not everything is about money.

Sekar says that in Solo, she is focused on activating a next generation of choreographers after Eko Supriyanto. There is a need for a mutually supporting ecosystem of independent art workers to encourage and support young artists and their practice, and help develop their ability to talk about their work. For example, there is Melati Suryodamo's programme *Onstage*, which invites young artists to create new work and be articulate about their work.

Paz says that in Germany, visual arts independents are those not represented by a gallery - trading support for some loss of independence. In performing arts, independents are those not from state sponsored companies. KC notes that independent visual artists have the supporting infrastructure of the arts market system, that provides opportunities to showcase your work more frequently than perhaps an independent dance maker would.

Jacob describes the Australian context where independents were facing a difficult situation with massive arts funding cuts removing the 40% funding allocated to small and medium organisations who had collaborated with the independent sector. The demands for not-for-profit arts organisations to follow a profit imperative are set up to fail.

Yi-Kai appreciates that we addressed how independent artists navigate the landscape. It resonates with his own experience as an independent practitioner as Director of The Thinkers' Theatre Taipei, a small venue founded by arts managers and producers in 2013 when there were few spaces for independents. The theatre selects 4-5 artists to support and promote annually. The Tua Tiu Tiann International Festival of the Arts is a street performance festival started to bring together local independents and to benefit businesses in their area, building on a history of social movements and arts in the district. The festival opts to take only 30% government funding and raise the rest from private companies, rather than 80% government funding with the condition that they have to follow government policies. That situation made Yikai realise the importance of being independent.

Daniel asks how dance address the social dimension of itself in an aesthetic sense? Must dance always be needing to engage outward groups? Must the artist always be burdened with extraneous concerns?

Kai responds to XK x ZH's day by singing the Soviet anthem.

Day three,

This day was quite different from the rest of the other three days of the *da:ns lab* programme. It was also led by an artist facilitator, Martin Schick, but the format of the workshop itself was an experiment because he chose to try out a practice of facilitation without being in Singapore. The first half of the day is conducted via an embodied representative – Norhaizad Adam, who stands in front of the room as a presenter and relays Martin’s speech as received on a bluetooth earphone. The second half of the day is conducted by Martin via direct video link.

The experiment of long distance facilitation faced several technical challenges, contributing to the sense of distance and difficulty. This prompted substantial discussion in the morning amongst participants during the coffee breaks on the dynamics and perceived structures of authority produced by the format – including that Norhaizad was apparently reduced to a mouthpiece obliged to convey Martin’s bidding, and that Martin seemed to speak from a position of authority. These led into an adjustment of the room after the lunch break. Before continuing with the programme, Martin sought feedback from participants and asked if it was possible to engage without prejudging.

On distant teaching,

*“Martin’s reason to not be here is deliberate. He is looking at how to work differently after travelling extensively and running an arts centre in Switzerland. He has decided to change radically how he works and collaborates. He proposed not to be here but experiment with how to conduct activities with us, to try to see how to be close to us without having to be physically here. How to take care of ourselves - travel - impact on environment and own body, and losing contact with community around you. If you look at time and physical abilities as a resource or opportunity cost, then you can’t be flying around all the time. But to build international relationships is crucial to many artists’ way of working today. **How then can we find a way to be in close communication, without constant travel?**” – Daniel Kok, Curator*



Martin's Presentation

(note: because of its performative and scripted quality, this section will be reported verbatim.)

First I would like to take my pants off cos it's hot in here. So don't get confused because of this.

(Norhaizad takes off his pants and stands before us in his underwear.)

I'm an artist and an activist. The activist thing is something I write about myself in CV but it's not really true. It's just that it's something I would like to become. I live most of the time in Switzerland but I have no fixed home, a nomadic existence. Today I didn't sleep well, didn't sleep at all. I had maybe 30 mins of sleep. This is a practice called polyphasic sleep, originating from the Middle Ages practice of sleeping early and having some life in the middle of the night. Polyphasic sleep was practiced among many people including Leonardo Da Vinci, Napoleon, and Nikola Tesla. Bucky (Buckminster) Fuller slept 30 mins every six hours. Scientists say that this was not trying to be creative.



My Unpractice is Unlearning. This is the Unlearning centre (slide photo) in the Blue Factory, a place for innovation in Switzerland where I work as a cultural manager. This is an Unpresentation. I am going back in time with the idea to see where all of this comes from.

The General Guide for school children is issued officially to every school child in Switzerland. Children will never ask to be part of this. I would like to change this with an artistic project. We created General Guide 22 with "general" children. This is the Head of the Education Department holding the guide, now you see a child replacing her as Head of Education. We squatted an HQ for our department. Children gave inputs to make a very serious book and take children seriously. We manifested an installation from the children's drawing to be the new HQ. It was a cloud and becomes "cloud learning" which seems to be very contemporary.

Children's police. They fight for their future. Creating new laws based on security of their own future - sustainable laws. They go into the city and ask people if they respect their laws. If they don't they will get a fine. This was a way of taking an institution to change the concept. They took the official uniform of Zurich police. It's almost impossible to say no to the fines they are giving out. This was an instrumentalisation. As artists we have to be very conscious and attentive.

This is my attempt for a revolution with elderly. These are the placards and banners with their slogan: "We still exist/Uns gibt es noch!" We did a short demonstration and sit-in in the park. It was a very personal revolution, connected with the topic of revolution in Egypt. We also tried to get the attention of their neighbours, by writing banners with their thoughts, e.g. "Contre la connerie en generale" (against stupidity in general). Some of their political manifestos contradicted each other.

Breaking limits of private, where the public penetrates the private, is interesting for me in my work. Here you see 1 km of small flags going through different apartment windows, back doors. People can visit the apartments and see flags. (Fanions!)



Image courtesy of Martin Schick.

I also break my own private sphere. I offered an internship in my private life. He celebrated my birthday with my family, replacing me.

I'm going to a dance topic because you like dance, I guess. I will try to nudge this from dance into something experimental.

I am trying to create a training on post-contemporary dance. I don't know what it is, but it forces me to investigate. Attempt to find new styles in neighbourhood, e.g. Agglorobics. We showed this in Kortrijk, a Belgian festival with a lot of unpractice. We are on the way in this idea of unlearning: a festival where people in cars and drove out of the city, and the festival happens where people stopped at train barrier, out in the field. Food came in bags from a helicopter.

This is the catharsis of this presentation. You need energy for 10 mins. This is the part where I start to cut my head off as a symbolic gesture to not participate any more in the logic of what performers are supposed to do.

Theatre is an institution that puts up a lot of questions for me. With the climate crisis, theatre is in a difficult position. We're used to having guests from afar, and artists travel a lot to be important and locally recognised.

Solutions. *I attempt to stop touring and only perform locally but collaborate internationally. One solution that provokes other solutions to appear. I am still looking for someone in Asia to perform this piece in Asia. So if you're interested, you can contact me.*

(Norhaizad relays Martin's forced laughter. The discomfort and laughter turns out to be infectious.)

X minutes on how to sell work. It was sold before it was created. The whole issue is the selling of the performance to programmers. We create a story of what is happening on stage. This is a change of the logic of production in this project.

Half bread technique. (Which was performed at The Esplanade Annexe) This project is a kind of intervention into the theatre. I send a parcel to people motivated to perform this piece. The postman comes on stage asking if this is the audience for Half Bread Technique, and if they say yes the postman says "This parcel is for you". The audience will have to unpack the piece and perform it themselves. And they are paid for it. It's a theatre without an actor.



Image courtesy of Martin Schick.

Not my piece: post capitalist for beginners. I was also a beginner as someone who tries to get out of the system. But it is almost impossible when you are in the theatre. So the whole piece became a farce about not participating in the system, creating a micro-system which is the only thing that's possible within the bigger system.

Cmmn Sns Project. This is my current project. I like to be substituted by someone. As this piece was becoming a product, we didn't only give away products (e.g. shampoo), but we also gave away the piece as a product so others could do it as well, and sell it again as they do it, and others can put their name on it. E.g. Davis Freeman performed at the same place and time – so the piece becomes product for itself.

Curriculum Ruinae. This is a CV of all the things that didn't work out in your life, an accumulation of failures. A different way to present yourself.

(Martin asks for examples, and Kai and Sze volunteer.)

*I am now a Haizad-Martin hybrid. Haizad is free to interpret and talk as he wants.
It's not clear anymore who is speaking.*

How does the production of performance engage in the fundamental issues of our advanced neo-capitalist age?

Bojana Kunst: "The artist today as the quintessential figure of creative capitalism."

Randy Martin: "Dancers as the ideal labourers of an idealized creative economy."

I use these voices so that it's not just me speaking now.

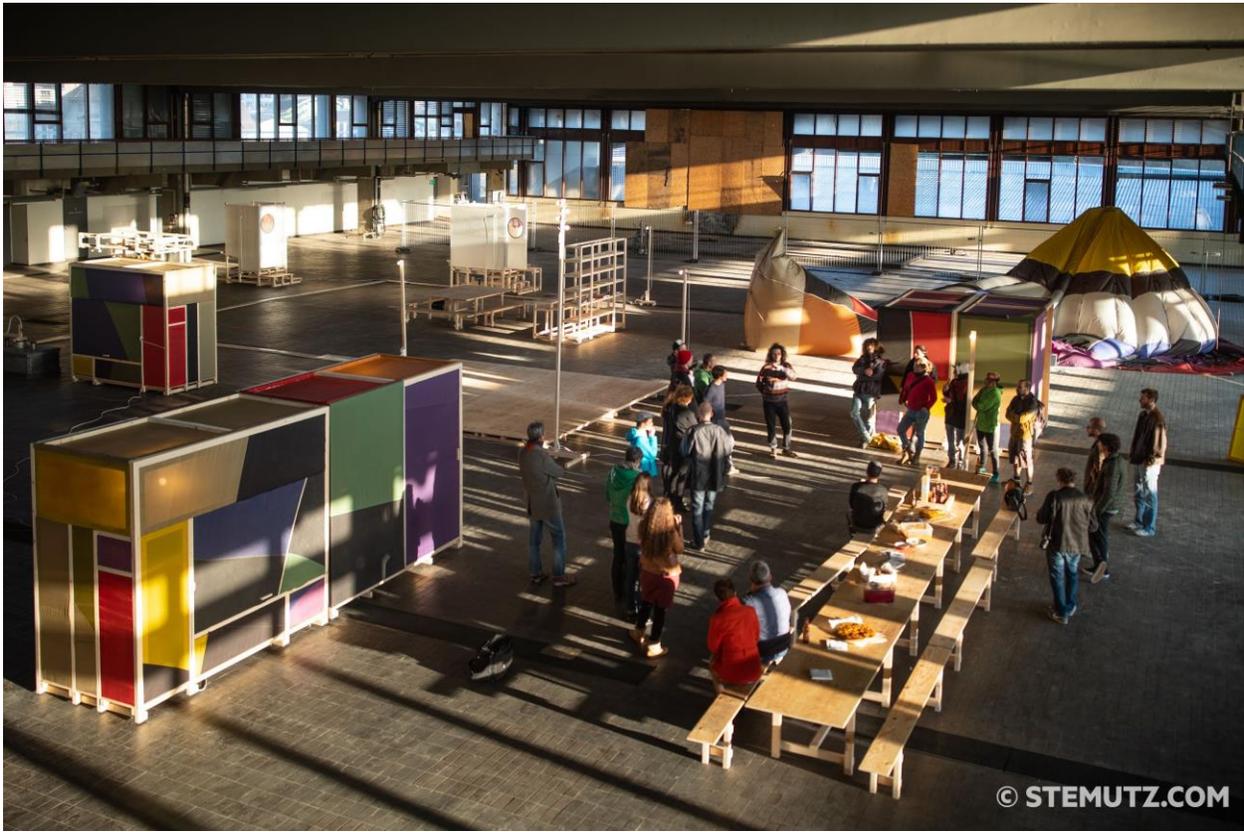
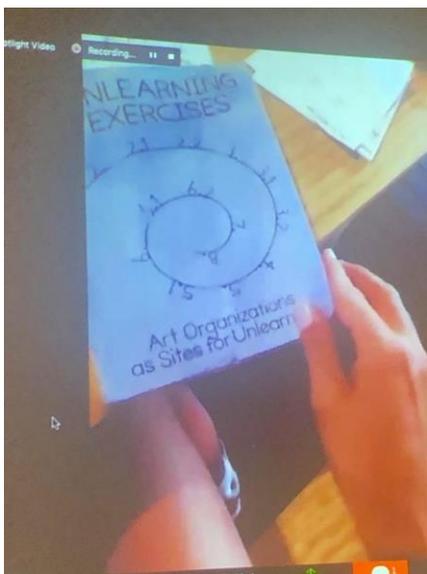


Image courtesy of BlueFactory.*

Following the presentation Martin gives a webcam tour of the Unlearning Centre, created together with architects interested in creating a village, a space for unlearning. As learning was conceived as something that people do when living together, the space was created with living and public meeting spaces, special tables and chairs that could turn to meet others or to work. Martin was interested in how he could transmit this space abroad.



Martin guides the group through some examples of embodied unlearning:

- A Minimal yoga session/Unyoga. Where one practices the sun salutation with full intention in imagination but physical movement is minimalist.
- A Camp for Climate meditation to music sampled from Greta Thunberg's speeches.
- A chair-balancing meeting.

On privilege and not-travelling,

Susan notes that it has become fashionable to talk about the difficulty of deciding to create a way of life of not travelling and the dilemma of wanting to be a global artist. For example, Jerome Bel. She asks Martin to elaborate on the obstacles, and quality of work arising from this practice and the notion of the hybrid. Loo Zihan asks whose bodies can afford not to travel and who can make the choice and agency to do so.

Martin-Norhaizad: *"We don't know yet. This is something new for us. We are reacting without knowing where we are going. That makes it very performative and experimental, without saying how it has to be. There are many failures. There are no small answers for small questions. [Not travelling as an artist] is a practice that for many years practiced by mostly western artists. Something that we cannot say everyone should do, not everyone was doing it before. The more we talk about it the more we get into a trap. It is interesting to get into a trap so we can learn something about it."*

On money,

Martin-Norhaizad: *"I love talking about money because it's one thing that is difficult for Swiss artists like me and for Haizad. We are both in our privileged situation. Talking about money is easier for us. In Switzerland I had to be on the road to earn money because not every city has the same conditions for production. So I'm a special Swiss case. Since I'm working locally as a cultural manager my financial situation is much better."*

I think that performing arts will have to come back to a state of something immediate, something dangerous, something where you don't know what's going to happen. There will be less reproduction of well rehearsed pieces and this is mostly interesting in the dance world. It has to become interactive or immediate or lose a lot in the competition/comparison with other media."

On failure,

Martin-Norhaizad: ***"Hopefully what we're doing today turns out as a big failure."***

Kai in a whisper to the microphone:
*"Hi martin, I'm impressed that you didn't show up. It's the most unprofessional thing I have ever seen. **I'm interested in ways of becoming less professional because it is a way of fulfilling needs that are not met in professional theatre settings.** One unprofessional thing I'm interested in currently is having sex at rehearsals. I wonder if you ever consider having sex by proxy? Do you think it's one microsystem that's interesting to create?"*



After a break, the organisers have resolved some technical issues. When we resume and see Martin everyone waves. Martin apologises for the "prison situation" (the sense that Norhaizad was trapped as his interpreter) and the technical glitches. He wonders

how to “overcome” Skype, and says that intimacy in distance and how can we reach proximity are big questions for him.

On unlearning,

To questions from Susan about the process of unlearning and the intentions behind the architecture of the space, Martin elaborates that unlearning is about slowing down and being less in the productive mode (therefore sleeping boxes), and deep learning that takes place when one had experiences over a longer time. Architecture-wise, sleeping was allocated the same importance and space as the toilet and benches – a Corbusier-like approach to a minimal or perfect size.

Daniel comments that the Unlearning Centre offers a space to question and ameliorate social practices at the micro level and the self. **He wonders if the unlearning practices at the individual level could also question the foundations of society and mobilise people in bigger ways, as an act of resistance.** Martin responds that one point of unlearning is to reduce the efficacy of the production mode and raise consciousness of what we are doing right now and what those practices lead to.

Chloe asks how unlearning can apply within local context, and Aparna noted that the unlearning exercises might be more useful in systems and for individuals not used to constantly unlearning and rehabilitating as artists do. Martin responded that he had presented his approach to unlearning, but did not intend to explain to us what unlearning was.

Preethi comments that unlearning was a concept present in many histories and parts of the world. We were very aware that we were listening to the unpacking of a whole system.

For lunch, Martin has 2 proposals. (1) an “un-lunch”, to not chew and allow food to dissolve in our mouths. (2) He also asked that participants pay attention to habits, things that might be unlearned.

After lunch, Martin apologised for “bad vibes”. He admitted that it had been difficult to sense the room and that the technical problems had made it difficult for him to feel like he was communicating. The morning was meant to be an input phase and the afternoon was meant to be more active. He invited participants to bring up any questions, frustrations or reservations.

On judgement,

Martin: *“I feel sad that in the art world there is a tendency to go into judging and then put a distance and disengage. You can feel this onstage when an audience is feeling provoked or disappointed because they have some expectation. This is more present in arts than elsewhere. It confuses me but I think it’s an interesting point to think about judging as a habit to position ourselves in the artist environment. I made an effort this morning to not just talk from me but to let others speak, for example using the book. I invite you to get out of a judging mode and to get into something that is happening right now, rather than something that is materialised from being named.”*

Gua Khee sums up that she heard that Martin would like a leap of faith in going along with you and that the group would have another conversation at the end.



Exercising unlearning,

Martin invites participants to propose habits they had observed that they would like to unlearn. Examples range from conventions of how we dress and groom ourselves, how we organise our meals and schedules around meals, apologising for our bodily presence, apologising for an unpronounceable name, politeness, trying to save situations, thinking in silos, how to love.

Participants meet in groups and define what they wanted to unlearn, and find a practice to do so. Major themes that appear as summarised by Martin:

- 1) Do half of something
- 2) Be open to luck
- 3) Describe what you're doing
- 4) Go cuddling in public
- 5) Put your body in space
- 6) Give w/o expecting anything back
- 7) Offer provocation within generosity
- 8) Get wet
- 9) Replace a cigarette with something else

The group opts to try no. 5 together, and takes up space at the Esplanade shopping mall entrance by lying and sliding on the floor and blocking the way, much to the bafflement of a tourist group. The experience rather re-energises the group. After the unlearning activity, Martin shows a video of a Body Weather performance with farm animals that was respectful of their presence and input. He leads the group to practice this approach by selecting an object or machine in the room and scanning it visually then responding in movement, to test our relationship with objects and devices, so as to be outside ourselves.



On scanning and seeing,

Bernice notes that during the “scanning” exercise, she was trying to not see other people and trying out not wanting to be seen, so that the movement would not be about what it looks like from the outside. Susan is interested in how the scanning could go beyond surface and engage different levels of seeing. Chloe reflects on the attention to materiality in the scanning exercise, as material objects were already very privileged and that we needed to deprioritise materiality and its vicious cycle so that we could look deeper. Martin responds that he will revisit whether “scanning” is the most appropriate word.

Daniel asks if role-playing instead of speaking as ourselves can allow us to suspend judgement. Kai responds that she understands that speaking in public is already performing, and that she tested what she was saying by saying it. Aparna appreciates Martin’s call to not be so judgemental about what’s being offered. Referring to the “scanning” exercise, she related it to her traditional practice where one regularly observes and borrows from the natural and animal world - a deep, complex and valuable practice.

Jacob highlights traditional societies’ methodologies in coexisting with the environment that might address the climate crisis and social-political crises led to by neoliberalism and industrialist history. KC is interested in how to follow up on da:ns lab so as to make a material change in how we work, and strategies that will allow the change to have a multiplier effect.

Kai asks how we know when we have listened, and whether hearing something uncomfortable makes one listen deeper, and potentially change one’s views.

Respondents:

Shawn invites us to **dwell on the word “failure” and to be careful about how we use the word. How do we situate failure as a practice? Failure of what, in what context, unlearning in what context?** Judith Halberstam’s *Queer Art of Failure* describes a strategy that queers the normative logics of society, where failure is an important way of life for queerness. **Failure is also tied to promise. If there is no promise, there is no failure. What then is the risk?**

He also notes how words have become very important for us, our particular way of life, our history, asks how we can listen and respond to that. If nothing is undone or unlearned, maybe you’re not listening but projecting beliefs. Maybe you’re not listening carefully enough. The first two days were collectively intense, with a subtle language forming through listening, recognition, and resonance. How could we extend those relations, even if one was participating remotely?

Henry notes that the extent of unlearning depends on careful listening, and that listening, especially to the body, takes a longer time. Returning to issues of rights and access and privilege are linked to the term “independent” discussed on Day 2, Henry recognises the privilege of our experience, our CVs, language capacities, and our network that allows us to be here. He asks how one could participate remotely and “channel” ourselves to learn? He sees that Martin is searching for a new perspective on practice, and feedback on conventions of an arts industry that he cannot escape. He questions what is missing in the remote interface, and asks Martin if he considers this day a failure or success.

In response, Martin says that **“risk is never a failure.”** Although the situation was uncomfortable, the group was getting closer in what we are reflecting about. Sharing similar backgrounds and wishes creates a common mental space. **“Maybe the complicated situation is the teacher, especially when we have to find ways to get out of the situation.”** He notes that he is listening much more carefully to what the participants are saying, because of the situation. *“What I get from you is very fragile; I get less but I treat it with more care to get something out of it.”*

Intimacy in distance will be necessary in the near future when we have to change our practices. *“If I can feel disgust and boredom from a distance, I should also be able to feel intimacy. Intimacy or sex appears as a topic in the distance.”*

He also admits that he has attempted to unlearn a desire to please and fulfil participants’ expectations. He recognises that *“this also costs something.”*

On inclusivity,

Cui Yin recognises the frustrations of the day, but shares that she began to see this as a rehearsal for inclusivity. *“We prioritise being able to be somewhere so much that it centralises resources. We focus on gathering to be a way of including, or to get something done. What if to decentralise is to allow us to include more people, more languages, and to “unconference” ourselves? What might this change in my practice as a producer?”* Daniel adds that Martin’s not flying to Singapore has allowed Dance Nucleus to stretch the budget to invite more regional artists to attend *da:ns lab*.

Sze’s thoughts on day three:

In retrospect I found this day quite energising, and observed this in the group as well. The unfamiliarity of the situation prompted some immediate scepticism, but that in turn **surfaced questions about expectations and the conventions of engagement between artists, the conventions of being engaged to present one’s practice, the politics of pedagogy vs participation, questions about the economics of privilege** regarding the choice of not travelling, and the inherited subtext of colonisation that cannot help but present itself when a white body speaks to an audience of primarily yellow and brown people. My sense was that **the engagement that arose created new connections among the participants, and a heightened state of reflexivity and awareness of micropolitics.**

This day also made me revisit my own assumptions about rehearsal process and experimentation. I was surprised by the resistance I felt to Martin’s presentation; my personal objection was that it seemed ill-prepared in technical terms and superficial in content - perhaps trying to cover too much ground in too short a time. I recall nodding when Martin responds *“Hopefully what we’re doing today turns out as a big failure.”* My self-image is that I am an advocate for and practitioner of live improvisation. Negotiation of the unexpected, sometimes with difficulty, is an artistic practice in itself and I think one of the ultimate forms of being in the moment. I resonated at the theoretical level with Martin’s comments on how improvisation and liveness in performance is one way of resisting the economics of performance making and resources required for rehearsals.

Yet I found this difficult to reconcile with the heightened performativity of the clearly prepared text of the lecture-performance of Norhaizad-as-Martin. I realise I am quite bound to the conventions of performances (including improvised ones) needing to be prepared, and expecting them to be good. Was the lack of technical rehearsal for the mic set ups a demonstration of resistance to economic structures, or was it just lack of planning? Was the unmanifested desire to allow Norhaizad to be an equal speaking voice in the hybrid due to a dedication to immediacy, or a lack of effort to pre-engage with Norhaizad the artist and his practice and solicit his contributions to the lecture content? I also realise that the “judgey” attitudes among participants was compounded by our lack of familiarity with Martin. Things may have been quite different if he had in some way participated in the preceding two days, and if we had already had a sense of his personality and vulnerability as a fellow participant.

Day four,

The fourth and last day was facilitated by Paz Ponce, a Berlin-based independent curator & arts educator. Paz is taking the place of Sheena McGrandles who was initially invited but was unable to come because of family commitments. Paz's lecture was especially useful for fellow arts managers and producers, or artist led businesses or companies. She shared the fragilities and journey of **Agora Collective, a Berlin-based Center for Collaborative Practice**, speaking with eloquence, poetry, and speed. Similarly, her tasks for us consisted of groupings to brainstorm and discuss the place of independent practitioners, collective efforts within artistic communities, and international collaborations. Leading into a series of tasks that felt somewhat irrational yet meaningful. Such as, taking a nap for 20 minutes, then having a conversation either on the phone or in person, then, somehow, it ended in a collective massage chain.

We also gladly disrupted a public space. We went to the underpass area of Esplanade to have a series of walking conversations of specific memories that we have, in relationship to the skills we value in ourselves. We had to repeat back our partners' stories, which was a good listening practice. This exercise felt performative. We then had to write these stories, and compiled all of them in an ocean of collected memories. From these pieces of paper, we re-read our memories, written by others that we had a conversation with, and we selected snippets to create a carpet on the floor of the Esplanade Annexe. At this point, we were exhausted. It turned out that this was one of Paz's intentions: to take us to a space of new ideas. Paz offered a multitude of little ideas throughout the day, one thing leaking into the next. No grand ideas of how to work, how to converse, or how to create. Only a series of suggestions, for us to take, or leave.



The Curriculum - Challenging the conventions around self-development, productivity, and high-performance. Workshop by Paz Ponce.



Paz's presentation:

Agora Collective was founded in 2011 by a multidisciplinary team as an independent project space. Since then, Agora expands its mission to be a place to conceive and experiment with models of working together; providing stable spaces for artists to engage within collaborative and community-based practices.

On artistic solidarity,

Agora means *now*, in Portuguese, the language of its Brazilian founders and also coincidentally, in Greek, Agora is the place for encounters and exchange, the market-place. Agora's focus has ranged from food and hosting practices, co-working spaces, event series, workshops, and programming, as well as with a strong take on visual and performing arts. The four pillars of Agora, considered to be essential values that come together in hybrid programming to express Agora's core value of artistic solidarity. The pillars also determined the function of the respective floors of the Mittelweg building.

1. Nourishment (food)
2. Experimentation (art)
3. Production (work)
4. Education (learn)

Questions that the Agora founders worked with: How can we make a community in Berlin? How do you develop an architecture of encounters? Possibilities of people to interact?

She then shares about the significance of the physicality of a space. **How one response to the way the building is structured, to the "skin" of the rooms, the definition of the floors, and how that cultivates an organic growth.** Agora has inhabited different spaces. From 2011-2016/17 they were based in a five-story historic former factory building in Mittelweg, and then from 2017-2019 in the upper and then lower

floors of a large industrial warehouse in Rollberg. Both locations were in Central/South Berlin in Neukölln, a rapidly gentrifying neighbourhood. She acknowledged that artists too have contributed to that gentrification. The initial move to the expanded space in Rollberg prompted the addition of a fifth and missing pillar Play/Move which became the first dance house for Neukölln. They also planned for an extensive complex of 26 artist studios.

The growth of Agora came in forms of highlighting sustainability structures which dealt with the binary of a business model and a non-for-profit structure. With the insistence of trans-disciplinary practices through their four pillars, the collective produced: a co-working space, an event series, workshops and programming, community dinners, production and experimentation, education, a garden. The discursive emphasis was on: processuality, experimentation, collaboration, interdisciplinary, participation, community-driven, critical engagement, and artistic solidarity.

On food as the heart of Agora,

Agora explored the kitchen as a space of pedagogy. Agora would host community dinners that were open for all, where the cooking and cleaning was done on a voluntary basis. This brought an awareness to the invisible labours of a space. There were a lot of storytelling sessions around food, as well as permaculture workshops. There was an intermingling of cooks, dancers, and choreographers. They had various Chefs-in-Residence who would experiment every day with a different menu - which turned out to be unsustainable as a business model. The Agora café was a failed project, a failed business. But, it was an interesting one.



Image courtesy of Paz Ponce.

On exhaustion and exuberance,

Throughout the years, Agora would review ways of collectively approaching work through vast curriculums of artists working collaboratively and using art as a relational tool. Agora was a partner member of the Collaborative Arts Partnership Network, a dynamic and contemporary form of arts practice that straddled

the categories of participatory arts, socially engaged arts, community arts, and arts in social and community contexts. Artists interested in engaging with people to make exceptional art often engage with communities – a neighbourhood organization, people united by a hobby or interest, like a chess club, working fishermen, farmers, or asylum seekers.

Collaborative arts encourages cultural democracy by contesting notions of authorship and the idea of the artist-genius working in isolation. Work that is made collaboratively with different groups often exists outside of the gallery and traditional theatre spaces. Instead it may take place in a prison or a hospital. It can also be interdisciplinary.

How can we host smaller economics circulating from space for the artists themselves?

How can we test modes of assembly?

How can we play with architecture and space?

Where does art intersect with the social?

Agora shifted their sustainability model from 2016/17-2019 from a dual structure of co-working business and non for profit cultural association model. The organization operated as a cultural association, only, entailing shared rent, space division, external funding, rentals, and Municipal support. The way of working has always been based on freelancing, now it was heavily based on pro-bono work. There was a fixed core team of co-curators/artistic directors/self-managed artist communities and collaborative practices (led by Caique Tizzi, Sheena McGrandles, Elena Polzer, Paz Ponce).

Agora Collective was interested in creating smaller economies. New collectives were hosted at Agora: Babes Bar, an Artist Run Bar, Ceramic Kingdom Collective, Burnt Sienna (a Drawing Cooperative), and more. Their collaborative programs focused on the space as: residency, academy, and public lab.

On micro-utopias,

“How is it possible to transform the world from scratch and rebuild a society which would be totally different? I think that is totally impossible and what artists are trying to do now is to create micro-utopias, neighbourhood utopias, like talking to your neighbour, just what’s happening when you shake hands with somebody. This is all super political when you think about it. That’s micro-politics.” – Bourriaud, 2002

Agora reached a transition period when they lost their Rollberg space due to disagreements with their corporate partner in 2018. The hosting foundation however negotiated to give them the basement of the same building. Through tremendous failures, Agora had help and empathy from many people. They rallied by calling a 1-year long working group Vision Meeting. As an artist-run organisation, their practice became the space.

They looked at the following internal structures:

- Financing: How to not always rely on public funding? How can we diversify our streams?
- Organisational model: How to stand the test of time? How to make a structure that is open enough to survive and be taken by others?
- Accessibility: How can an institution be structured around the needs of its community?
- Politics: Space and education are resources and acts of resistance.

“Having a space and running a space in Berlin is highly political. It’s an act of resistance, its preaching even.”

What are soft forms of creativity and creation?

How we pay attention to this idea of relationship?

How we build networks of care?

How can we become an institution of tomorrow?

On re-defining Agora,

Agora means

“now”

“assembly”

“market place”

Agora is different because they are structured on relationships and their art forms are generated from the discourse. The discourse is build by devising an architecture of encounters which fluctuates between different ways to:

- 1) Hospitality: spend time together
- 2) Artistic Research & Education: exchange knowledge
- 3) Ecology of Attention, Community & Sustainability: building networks of care



Image courtesy of Paz Ponce.

On Uferstudios,

Today, Agora Collective is in the process of moving to Uferstudios, a contemporary dance complex in northwest Berlin. They plan to connect to their new neighbourhood, re-create a community café, artist-run-bar, and to continue their work as a Centre for Collaborative Practices.



Image courtesy of Paz Ponce.

After an insightful lecture on the sublime failures of eight years as an artist-run project spaces / initiative, which is still, which is still an on-going negotiation party. *“Process Bar: The Curriculum - Challenging the conventions around self-development, productivity and high-performance”*, where we break into three groups through a question of self-identification: *Do you consider your development path as single entity or more intertwined with/ juxtaposed to / blended with a larger working entity/structure?*

Group 1: Independent Practitioners

Group 2: Collective Efforts

Group 3: International Collaborative Efforts



Some notes from the break out groups:

Cui shares in the Independent Practitioners group: "In Singapore so many institutions and state funded venues trying to increase their audience numbers do it through free programs. What that results in, is it turns the arts performance space into a gig space. One bad thing about that is that you spend most of your time preparing for gigs for a general tourist audience. You have less time to invest in developing new work."

Andrei is impressed with how things are articulated in Singapore. In the Philippines, it does not happen a lot. He feels artists would deeply benefit to have these conversations both locally and internationally. While Shawn shares about how strategies always need to be flexible. He finds it interesting that people in the current da:ns lab are also running spaces, whether nomadic or physical, with different degrees of institutionality.

Many people from the International Collaborative Efforts group share concerns over the international circulation of festivals – **How can there be conversations beyond navigating festivals, and more conversations on strategies and support?**

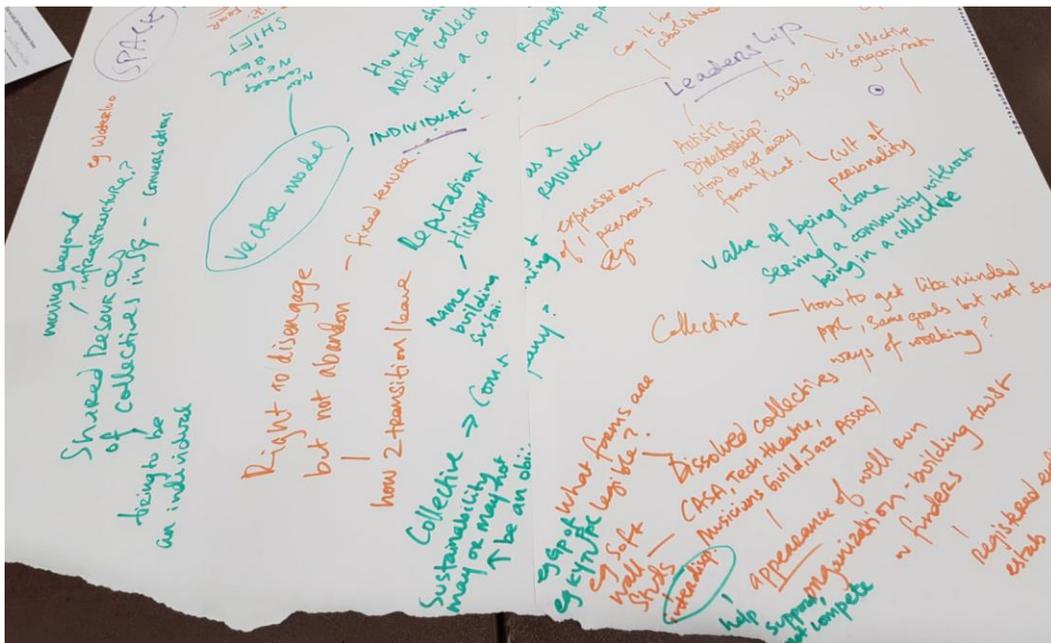
Some questions Paz prompts in relationship to space:

How can you monetize your space?

How can you start a new educational structure based on your practice?

How can your artistic practice be a context of learning and experimenting, in which you advance your research but you also have ways of surviving?

"It's more important to have questions than to find answers."



Chloe's thoughts on Day 4:

Paz's lecture focused on the details of what it means to run an artist organisation, humbly revealing its fragilities and insecurities. Remembering all the people that were in the room, cultural workers, festival directors, artists within different communities around the region. This was a large learning curve that was condensed into a morning lecture where we could follow the trajectory of the obstacles, joys, empathy, and meaning that came out of the process of Agora Collective, and still on-going. However, I do wonder how applicable their journey is in Berlin, compared to such the unique and alternative landscapes in Singapore, Taipei, Chennai, Manila, Shanghai, and Bangkok.

Because of archipelagic geography and less developed transport infrastructure in Southeast Asia, cultural mobility functions at higher stakes as compared to Europe. We have to fly often, which is affordable on a monetary level, but it comes at the high cost of CO₂ emissions. Returning to the conversation during Jacob's lecture on listening to land and to Martin's choice to be absent or rather, present through technology. Conversations during the group discussion touch on how we can focus more on long-term collaborations rather than producing for the art market are questions on systemic and strategic measures. How do we have more of these conversations and apply them in a working model? How can we have a deeper understanding of our landscape in Southeast Asia and allow ourselves to work with this land in a way that best serve both the people and the place?



A much needed collective massage chain on the last day of da:ns lab 2019.

On da:ns lab by Sze,

Da:ns lab has never failed to shake up my thoughts and practice since I first attended in 2016. The encounter with practices and questions of other artists from Singapore and beyond recontextualises my own work and kickstarts new ideas. This year, the “country” and “land” analogies were refreshing because we rarely talk about this here - highlighting this issue of global interest in art also highlighted a relative silence on these issues in local work. It came through that there are many underlying tensions and difficulties cultivating this avoidance in our local scene. During Jacob and Xiao Ke x Zi Han’s days, the aspect of toxic nationalism and essentialism emerged because that is very relevant to many Asian contexts including Singapore. Those tough topics produced a few uncomfortable moments in discussions. I found myself asking if this was this the most productive paradigm for discussions, as opposed to public space, or personal histories, or social organisation, or environment? Eventually, over the four days of workshops, the relevance of the many aspects of “land” got unpacked/exploded into a huge range of questions, many with mutual resonance across different contexts. In retrospect I wish that we had revisited the overarching theme towards the end of the lab, in such a manner as to allow digestion and reflection.

This year’s attendance was by invitation only, which was effectively a curation of participation. I liked the distribution and networking with interesting artists and curators around the region and was amazed by the resources to fly certain people in. However as a compromise to not make this an elitist and exclusive network, which I am not comfortable with, I would suggest by invitation for a proportion, and open call for the remainder of participants. How can we assume that we know everyone who can make a good contribution? Chloe had a similar sense that the by-invitation-only strategy would be a disadvantage in the long run.

I noted the adoption of the academic convention of assigning a respondent to a presentation (or paper in academic contexts). I liked that it encouraged specific individuals with relevant experiences to engage more deeply with specific presentations and the bigger picture of the issues raised, perhaps finding out more background on the artists and their areas of interest beforehand and reading more deeply into the content. However the formalised nature of their identification and invitations for them to comment suggested again a hierarchy of knowledge, and I wonder if it is also possible to trust that the carefully curated group audience was already very engaged with the material offered.

The selection of artist presenters/facilitators was excellent and thought-provoking, but I believe that it would have been great to feature a local artist or locally connected artist (even if it is a local artist now based overseas) so that we can compare practices. Chloe expressed the hope for at least two regional artists featured to lead the workshops for future labs, to give more opportunity for strengthening local ties, and build networks for long term collaborations and conversations from Southeast Asia. She also missed the performance aspect of the 2018 programme, where invited artists performed an excerpt of their works, which she found to be a more visceral way of engagement and discussion.

I appreciate very much that the featured artists were given a brief to facilitate discussion among the participants and to open space for sharing about different practices and contexts, rather than presenting only about their own practice. I enjoyed this approach, with the artists’ practice as a foil allowing comparative experiences and practices among the participants to emerge. Though they intersect and are undoubtedly relevant to each other, I note that facilitation and engagement is in fact a separate skill from the ability to articulate one’s practice. We benefited greatly from having facilitators who were able to foster or provoke stimulating spaces for discussion - and bring us to “land”.

Facilitator and Curator Biographies

Facilitators:

Jacob Boehme

Jacob Boehme is a Melbourne born and based artist of Aboriginal heritage, from the Narangga (Yorke Peninsula) and Kurna (Adelaide Plains) nations of South Australia.

Jacob is the founding Creative Director of YIRRAMBOI First Nations Arts Festival 2017.

With a 20 year history working in Cultural Maintenance, Research & Revival of traditional dance with Elders and youth from urban to remote Indigenous communities across Australia, Jacob combines dance (Diploma in Dance, NAISDA 2000), puppetry (Masters in Puppetry, Victorian College of the Arts 2007), and playwriting (Masters in Writing for Performance, Victorian College of the Arts, 2014) to create multi-disciplinary theatre, dance and ceremony for stage, screen, large-scale public events and festivals.

An original member of Assitej International's 'Next Generation of Youth Theatre Leaders', Jacob is also a recipient of the Asialink Residency, working with Ishara Puppet Theatre Trust in Delhi, India, in 2010 and Alumni of the 2014 British Council's ACCELERATE Indigenous Leaders Program.

Other International Residencies include teaching traditional and contemporary Aboriginal dance at Teatteri ILMI O in Helsinki, Finland and the Schaxpir Festival Linz, Austria

Jacob's solo work Blood on the Dance Floor, produced in partnership with ILBIJERRI Theatre Company, is touring nationally and internationally in 2019.

<https://www.jacobboehme.com.au/>

Xiao Ke x Zi Han

The collaborative works between Xiao Ke and Zi Han involve photography, video, live art and installation that focus on personal body exploring the extreme of expression under the public context in China.

Having the purpose to realize the conceptual body performance in the urban public environment, it no less connects the personal life of the artists with the city where they live than pushing the performing art onto the street which engenders the opportunity to have contacts as much as possible with the public as well the interaction. By restoring the artists' ideas back into life, their collaboration is to fulfill the life process of the idea itself that what comes from life vanishes into life.

They founded iPANDA, independent performance artists network and development action, which focus on China's independent performance to build up the internal network and improve the development to go further to international field.

<http://xiaokexzihan.com/>

Paz Ponce

Paz Ponce (Cádiz, 1985, Spain) is a Berlin-based independent curator, writer and researcher actively involved in alternative education and cultural cooperation between Asia, Europe and Latin America. With a background in art history (Universidad Complutense, Madrid / Freie Universität, Berlin), she researches on the collective context in which art is produced and mediated, with a special focus on self-organization and the culture of cooperativism, departing from the Arendtian notion of “the common interest” (Welt-Bezug). Her practice is oriented towards the development of co-creation formats in a collaborative and networked environment in Berlin and abroad, via archival research and exhibition projects, art in residency programs and learning platforms open to the participation of artists and communities. She understands her curatorial role as an active mediation of thought-processes derived from the experience of encountering art. She is an associative member of: Calipsofacto Curators (Madrid, 2010), berlinerpool arts network (2013), Agora Collective (2016), Club Real artist collective (2017), Kap Hoorn (2018), and lecturer at Node Center for Curatorial Studies in Berlin. She is co-director of Agora Collective e.V. Berlin-based Center for Collaborative practices, together with Sheena McGrandles, where she coordinates AFFECT Residency program for Collaborative Arts in Berlin (s.2014), and founded ¡n[s]urgênc!as: Berlin-based platform for socially conscious artistic practices & activist positions from Latin America. She has curated and participated in projects at NON Gallery, Galerie Wedding, Entretempo Gallery, Agora Collective in Berlin, Cinema Lumardhi (Prizren, Kosovo), ZK/U Berlin, 48 Neukölln, B-Tours Festival (Tel Aviv/Berlin), 13 Havana Biennial (Havana), Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam (Havana).

<http://www.pazponce.com/>

Martin Schick

Martin Schick is an independent performance and performance maker, choreographer, curator and author, born in Switzerland, living in Berlin and in a cottage in the swiss alps. Educated at a private Ballet School at the High School of Arts in Bern on the subject Performance, he worked for 2 years as an actor for state theater, television and the cinema. Since 2009 he realizes his own scenic plays in the independent dance and theater environment, treating the theater as a place of permanent transformation, looking out for the awkward, impure and uneven, aiming to interfere with conventions in the theater and in everyday life. He lately tends to a more general practice and less representational position as for example by curating, developing new formats, selling art, exhibition projects, writing, teaching and researching.

<https://www.martinschick.com/>

Curator:

Daniel Kok

Daniel Kok studied BA (Honours) Fine Art & Critical Theory at Goldsmiths College (London), MA Solo/Dance/Authorship (SODA) at the Inter-University Centre for Dance (HZT, Berlin) and Advanced Performance and Scenography Studies (APASS, Brussels). In 2008, he received the Young Artist Award from National Arts Council (Singapore). His performance works have been presented across Asia, Australia, Europe, and North America, notably the Venice Biennale, Maxim Gorki Theater (Berlin), ImpulsTanz (Vienna), Festival/Tokyo, AsiaTOPA (Melbourne) and the Esplanade (Singapore). In his current work, "Hundreds & Thousands", he collaborates with Luke George (Melbourne) and a series of potted plants to listen to each other, breathe together, and collectively inhabit an activated interstitial space. Daniel is the artistic director of Dance Nucleus (Singapore), an agency for the development of critical practice in contemporary performance in Asia.

<http://www.diskodanny.com/>

<http://www.dancenucleus.com/>

Participants

(The brief biographies here are self-introductions that were made on Day 1 of the programme. Not all participants were present on that day. A full list of participants is below.)

Soultari Amin Farid - I am an Arts Educator, Researcher, Choreographer. I am “Constitutionally indigenous”. I come from the Malay Minangkabau culture, a matrilineal line. I am pursuing a PhD in Dance and I am a Joint Artistic Director of Bhumi Collective.

Preethi Athreya - I am a Chennai-based dancer and choreographer and co-founder of Basement 21 collective.

Fezhah Maznan - I work for the Esplanade as a producer for theatre.

Andrei Pamintuan - I am from Poblacion, Makati. I run an independent artist-run space called the Pineapple Lab and I am the Festival Director for the Fringe Manila Festival.

Han Xuemei - I am a theatre director, performance maker and facilitator. Currently, I am a resident artist at Drama Box, a company interested in socially engaged participatory practice.

Nabilah Said - I am a playwright, poet, basically anything to do with writing. I am also the editor of ArtsEquator.

Chan Sze-Wei - Trained as a dancer, now I make “stuff” for theatre, interactive performance, video and film. Currently working on a documentary about queer communities around voguers in Southeast Asia. Facilitate the Working Group for Dancers’ Advocacy in Singapore and the networks Singapore Interdependent Dance, Independent Dance Southeast Asia and Contact Improvisation Southeast Asia.

Kao Yi-Kai - I run a space called Thinkers Theatre in Taipei, I am from Taipei. I am a curator of Tua Tiu Tiann International Arts Festival. I work often for independent artists as a producer-curator.

Chong Gua Khee - I am an independent theatre practitioner. I mainly direct/create, but I also facilitate and dramaturg as well. My interest lies in conversational practices -- how we think about conversation in and across different mediums and forms -- but also how we can collectively reimagine the conditions in which we work/create so structures support the work instead of people just ‘trying their best’ within a structure.

Corrie Tan- I am a writer, researcher and a recovering performance critic. I am pursuing a PhD & researching embodied and embedded practices in criticism. I also practice dramaturgy.

Hasyimah Harith - I am a choreographer, project manager, company manager, multi-hats in Singapore. Now, I am interested in how to have collective wisdom from Malay dance training, to respond to certain issues that are being silenced.

Sekar Putri Handayani - I am from Solo, Indonesia and I am an independent production manager, arts manager, and independent producer. Now I am working with Otniel Tasman and he is concerned with gender issues. I am also working as producer and dramaturg for Iwan (Wan Harun Ismail) from Pekanbaru, Sumatra, working on the topic of violence and trauma. I also work with Indonesian Dance Festival, specially in charge for the project with Eun Me Ahn, a choreographer from Korea.

Paz Ponce - I am from Spain but I live in Berlin 8 years now. There I co-run this artist space called Agora Collective. As a space we are always mutating, often shifting spaces, which is a struggle in Berlin. In this mutating nomadic life we have different structures. I am a "process curator" which is a word I invented because I couldn't find my place in the arts. I work with process and I always start with the question "What do we have in common?"

Dapheny Chen - I am an independent dance practitioner. I am interested in architecture and socio-political ideologies. In practice working with the social questions on how we speak. I'm also part of the Dance Nucleus team.

Norhaizad Adam - I'm a performer, choreographer, interested in myself, what does it mean to be myself as a Malay person in Singapore. I belong to the dance company P71SMA where I'm the Artistic Director. I also belong to Syimah, my wife. Haha.

Henry Tan - I am an artist curator. I run Tentacles Art Space in Bangkok where we offer residencies, exhibitions and workshops. I am interested in systems of control, constitution of health and mind, the Belt and Road Initiative and Pearl. I create installations and performative activities exploring different questions on geopolitics.

Chloe Chotrani - I am a movement artist, writer, gardener, yogini with recent trauma sensitive training. My ancestry from my maternal side is Filipina and paternal is Indian, and I am also Singaporean. I am interested on how one can go beyond cultural boundaries yet staying rooted on ancestry and memory. Right now, I am curious about the experience of ceremony work with psychotropic medicines and its relationship to my performance work.

Daniel Kok - I am an independent choreographer. I describe what I do as looking at the politics of spectatorship and audienceship, looking at the cultural condition of looking at something. I also look after Dance Nucleus.

Chan Hsin Yee - I work with Dance Nucleus, where I'm in charge of the Facebook page. I'm just out of university. I am more interested in learning outside of institutions. I was also a research assistant for the Asian Shakespeare Archive.

Hoo Kuan Cien - People know me as KC. I'm a producer and arts manager, I work independently. I have been part of production agency Culturelink and now part of the Dance Nucleus team, I run the programs. My core interest is in interdisciplinary work. I am passionate in activating the independent scene with the Producers SG group, which is a platform for independent artists and producers in Singapore.

Mok Cui Yin - I am an independent producer. I work across disciplines with independent artists, institutions, and companies. My background is in anthropology. In general the questions from anthropology filter into my practice and conversations with artists I collaborate with, or artists I have become friends with. I started coming to Dance Nucleus more as an audience member to learn about the practice of dance. I am also involved in social action and advocacy which informs how I collaborate and work with people.

Faith Tan - I'm with the Esplanade as head of dance and theatre. I programme da:ns festival. I have been working closely with Daniel since the creation of da:ns lab to create this space. I felt that the dance scene needed a time-out space to reflect on practice and critical issues because people in Singapore are always busy with what they need to do. I've worked at the Esplanade for 16-17 years. I'm passionate about developing the dance scene here and carving out spaces for conversations that are important, and outside the mainstream and what is expected.

Daniel Yeung - I'm from Hong Kong. I'm an independent dancer, choreographer, and curator. I am in Singapore attending M1 Contact Festival because I run the festival Hong Kong Dance Exchange, which an exchange program with 7 other festivals in Asia. I only heard about this event last night and I am here out of curiosity and interest.

Shaifulbahri Mohd - I'm a producer and educator, interested in developing and mentoring younger producers especially in theatre, and dance. Although, I'm new to dance. I run and co-direct Bhumi collective with (Soultari) Amin (Farid). I am working with artists interested in deconstruction, disruption and decolonisation in contexts they are working with. I want to create more opportunities for Singapore and regional artists to have collaborations and look beyond shores.

Zhou Zi Han - I am from Shanghai. I am an artist and a dancer. I collaborate with a dancer, and married her, XiaoKe. For my current project now, we did a DNA test. Both my parents from China. We did not know anything about ancestry or blood. After the DNA test, I found out I had 8% Korean blood. I am looking forward to looking deeper into DNA.

Foo Yun Ying (YY) - I'm a dance maker and educator, and producer for the site specific Dance In Situ series.

Ma Yanling - I am generally an arts manager at Centre42, where we develop independent theatre work and documentation. Because of that I have been detached from my first love which is movement and dance, I've been a performer for many years, until recently. I can't wait to move

Andy Lo - I'm from Hong Kong, a producer of Hong Kong Dance Exchange. I work with independent artists in Hong Kong.

Shawn Chua Ming Ren - I'm a performance researcher and performance maker. I am interested in dramaturgies of game design. In response to the question of ancestry as well, I am interested in queering forms of legacies and kinships.

Xiao Ke - My DNA test showed that I'm 50% North Han and 48% South Han. The other 2% is from the Tonders (Russian/Japanese) nomadic tribe. I live in ShangHai, I was born in Yunnan, Kunming, which is connected to Thailand and Myanmar. There are 26 ethnic tribes in Yunnan, but my blood isn't from there. I was born there because my grandparents moved there after World War II. Chinese people always move. I was a dancer for a long time since I was 6 years old. I trained in traditional Chinese dance, then moved to contemporary dance. Now I feel that it's hard for my body to dance. How I have understood dance has been quite a luxury for me. Now I am trying to find new ways to understand what is dance.

Eng Kai Er - I dance and make performance, I am also a cat and a sofa. I don't really identify with traditional markers for race. I'm without knowledge of where I came from and without a strong desire to know. My cultural identity is fluid and fits whatever container I'm in, by choice and circumstance.

Jereh Leung - I'm figuring out how to tap into my DNA memories of film and ballet through the usage of soundscapes and scenography.

Loo Zihan - I'm from Singapore. My practice is in performance and study of performance, and thinking about performance.

Full list of participants:

1. Chan Sze Wei
2. Chloe Chotrani
3. Eng Kai Er
4. Loo Zihan
5. Melissa Quek
6. Susan Sentler
7. Han Xuemei
8. Norhaizad Adam
9. Hasyimah Harith
10. Sultari Amin Farid
11. Bernice Lee
12. Chong Gua Khee
13. Fezhah Maznan
14. Ma Yanling
15. Nabilah Said
16. Shaifulbahri Mohd
17. Foo Yun Ying
18. Shawn Chua Ming Ren
19. Jessica Lam
20. Preethi Athreya
21. Henry Tan
22. Sekar Putri Handayani
23. Andrei Pamintuan
24. Kao Yi-Kai
25. Corrie Tan
26. Aparna Nambiar
27. Jereh Leung
28. Shireen Abdullah
29. Sharon Koh

Organizing team:

Daniel Kok, Mok Cui Yin, Dapheny Chua, Hoo Kuan Chen, Faith Tan, Chan Hsin Yee

Documentarians:

Chan Sze-Wei, Chloe Chotrani

Where not otherwise credited, photos are by the documentation team.