

***da:ns* lab: This Woman's Work**  
Oct 4-7, 2018  
Esplanade—Theatres by the Bay



Sonja Jokiniemi in *Blab* | Photo by Tomas Uyttendaele

*da:ns lab* is an annual platform for dance practitioners to critically reflect on key issues surrounding their creative practice.

*da:ns lab* 2018 examines the female artist experience in contemporary performance. Three female independent artists Melati Suryodarmo, Dana Michel and Sonja Jokiniemi, whose artistic practices go beyond identity politics, will unpack their artistic research through lectures, workshops and studio performances in response to this year's theme. Their works serve as critical case studies to facilitate the discussions that the artists themselves will frame.

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### Curator Daniel Kok's Notes:

Gender bias persists evidently in the performing arts. Although female students outnumber male students by a wide margin in most institutions of study for dance, the ratio is reversed in the professional field where men dominate festival programmes and top directorial positions, while women take up most assistant positions. Accordingly, dance audiences are being presented overwhelmingly with works from a male perspective.

In 2016, acclaimed British choreographer Akram Khan, in responding to the lack of representation for female voices in dance, remarked that "We should be aware of it and see what is going wrong, but at the same time I don't want to say we should have more female choreographers for the sake of having more female choreographers." This caused a backlash, in which hundreds of artists spoke out against his off-colour, even sexist remarks.

The question is not just *if* a woman is seen, but also *how* a woman is seen. Laura Mulvey's seminal essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" written in 1975, asserted that the history of film and art is also a history of the objectification of women as visual spectacles for the voyeuristic and fetishistic pleasure of the Male Gaze. In recent years, various feminist thinkers have explored the female perspective as an alternative to the Male Gaze. Film and TV director Jill Solloway outlined her version of the Female Gaze in her 2016 keynote address at the Toronto International Film Festival. For Solloway, the Female Gaze cannot be formulated as merely the binary opposite of the Male. (It's not good enough that Lara Croft or Wonder Woman are heroines who get to save the day for a change!) Instead, Solloway prioritises the emotional, haptic and visceral qualities of the act of seeing or being seen, posing them as political aesthetic questions. Solloway's Feminism, which can be aligned with Queer Theory blurs notions of subjecthood and objecthood in a way that potentially demands a practicable appreciation of difference and mutual empathy.

Feminism then, is no longer a discourse limited to campaigning for egalitarianism or women overcoming the subaltern socio-political position that they have been historically placed. Feminist discourse today, extends to aesthetic as well as ethical questions on how members of a community engage each other, spend time together, and share a space.

The politics of visibility seen through the lenses of gender can be addressed by dance. Through dance, we can scrutinise not just how the female body can be differently represented, but also how the act of seeing can be put into question and reconfigured.

Based on this hypothesis, this year's *da:ns*lab studies the work of three female independent artists whose artistic practices go beyond identity politics and can provoke profound discussions on the female artist's experience in contemporary performance.

## Biographies

**Melati Suryodarmo** (b. 1969, Solo, Indonesia) is a visual artist currently based in Indonesia. She holds a degree in international relations from Universitas Padjadjaran Bandung (UNPAD), Indonesia and has studied under renowned Butoh dancer Anzu Furukawa and acclaimed performance artist Marina Abramovic in Germany, where Suryodarmo earned a degree in fine art and an MFA in performance art at the Braunschweig University of Art. Suryodarmo is known for her highly physical, time-based performances in which she uses her body as a theatrical canvas. She has performed widely all over the world, notably in the Venice Biennale International Festival of Contemporary Dance (2007), eBent festival (Barcelona, 2007), AccionMad! (Madrid, 2006), and Videobrasil International Electronic Art Festival (São Paulo, Brazil, 2005). Since 2007, she has organised the annual Performance Art Laboratory Project for the interdisciplinary arts institution Padepokan Lemah Putih in Solo, Indonesia.

[www.melatisuryodarmo.com](http://www.melatisuryodarmo.com)

**Dana Michel** (b. Ottawa, Canada) is a choreographer and live artist based in Montreal. In 2005, she graduated from the BFA program in Contemporary Dance at Concordia University in her late twenties. Prior to this, she was a marketing executive, competitive runner and football player. Her first extended length solo performance piece,

Yellow Towel, was featured on the "Top Five" and the "Top Ten" 2013 dance moments in the *Voir* newspaper (Montreal) and *Dance Current Magazine* (Canada) respectively. In 2014, she was awarded the newly created *ImPulstanz Award* (Vienna) in recognition for outstanding artistic accomplishments and was highlighted amongst notable female choreographers of the year by the *New York Times*. That same year concluded with Yellow Towel appearing on the *Time Out New York Magazine* "Top Ten Performances" list. Her most recent and critically-acclaimed solo, *Mercurial George*, was premiered at *Festival TransAmériques* (Montreal) in June 2016. Both pieces are currently on tour. In June 2017, Dana Michel was awarded the Silver Lion for Innovation in Dance by the Venice Biennale (Italy).

[www.dana-michel.com](http://www.dana-michel.com)

**Sonja Jokiniemi** (1983) is a choreographer, performer and self-taught visual artist based in Helsinki, Finland. She makes transdisciplinary work with research interests in thing ecologies, language and thinking structures, neuro and psychodiversity. She often works with objects, materials and drawings as collaborators on stage. Her participatory projects within the social sector and studies in Expressive arts therapy intertwine with her interest on stage that claims space for intimacy, sincerity and broadening ideas of norms. Jokiniemi graduated from *DAS Theatre* (previously *DasArts*) MA Degree programme in Performing Arts in Amsterdam 2013. Prior to this she has completed BA degree on Contemporary Dance at *Laban Centre* in London 2006 and taken part at *Daghdha Mentoring* programme in Limerick, Ireland. Jokiniemi's work has been supported by *STUK - House for Dance, Image & Sound*, *Zodiak - Centre for New Dance*, *Dampfzentrale Bern*, *Kiasma Theatre*, *Workspace Brussels*, *Moving in November festival*, *Veem House for Performance*, and *Regional Dance Centre of Eastern Finland*. Jokiniemi

has been awarded two grants by Arts Promotion Centre Finland (Taika): a one-year artist grant for 2017 and a three-year artist grant for 2018-20.

[www.sonjajokiniemi.com](http://www.sonjajokiniemi.com)

**Daniel Kok** studied BA (Honours) Fine Art & Critical Theory at Goldsmiths College. (London, 1997-2001), MA Solo/Dance/Authorship (SODA) at the Inter-University Centre for Dance (HZT, Berlin, 2012) and Advanced Performance and Scenography Studies (APASS, Brussels, 2014). In 2008, he received the Young Artist Award from National Arts Council (Singapore). His performances have been presented across Asia, Europe, Australia and North America, notably ImpulsTanz (Vienna), Festival/Tokyo and AsiaTOPA (Melbourne). In 2017, he was commissioned by the Singapore International Festival of the Arts (SIFA) to direct *MARK*, a massive dance-drawing for 9 dancers in different public spaces. His current work, *xhe* is a durational performance-installation that premieres at the Esplanade (Singapore) and at Performance Space (Sydney) (October 2018). Daniel is also the artistic director of Dance Nucleus, an independent dance space for artistic research, creative development and critical discourse.

[www.diskodanny.com](http://www.diskodanny.com)

[www.dancenucleus.com](http://www.dancenucleus.com)

Melati Suryodarmo presence in Singapore is supported by STPI. The participants from Indonesia attending *da:ns lab* is made possible with the support of KELOLA and Dance Nucleus. *da:ns lab* is made possible with the support from the National Arts Council, Singapore.

## Programme

*da:ns lab* 2018: This Womans Work is in its fourth year. The title 'This Womans Work' is inspired by a [1989 Kate Bush song](#), chosen by curator Daniel Kok. Daniel introduces the three artists and stating that: *"I don't think what we're going to discuss is chiefly, only about being women... It will be great not only to focus on gender politics and how it features in one's artistic practice, but rather to look at the socio-economic context of what we bring."*

In this archive, you will find descriptions, observations, and amplified points that movement practitioners and participants Chan Sze-Wei and Chloe Chotrani will be sharing from the *da:ns lab* 2018 to give you an idea of how the lab was experienced. The loose structure that was set for the four days, was as follows:

### Day one

10am – 1pm: Lecture presentation by Melati Suryadarmo

2pm – 5pm: Workshop by Dana Michel

7pm – 9pm: Performance by Sonja Jokiniemi

### Day two

10am – 1pm: Lecture presentation by Sonja Jokiniemi

2pm – 5pm: Workshop by Melati Suryadarmo

7pm – 9pm: Performance by Dana Michel

### Day three

10am – 1pm: Lecture presentation by Dana Michel

2pm – 5pm: Workshop by Sonja Jokiniemi

7pm – 9pm: Performance by Melati Suryadarmo

Day four

10am – 1pm: Open table discussion

2pm – 5pm: Group break out

7pm – 9pm: Performance by da:ns lab participants

Day one lecture/Melati Suryodamo,

*“It is very rare, to gather all women artists, especially in Southeast Asia.”*



Melati Suryodamo, image from artist's slides

*“It is very rare, to gather all women artists, especially in Southeast Asia.”* as Melati shared before she introduces herself, and goes on to talk about her periodical timeframe of her life and artistic practice.

-1969: Born in Solo, Indonesia. Parents both are dance artists, growing up in an environment of local artists struggling.

- 1988: Studied International Politics in Bandung, Indonesia. Heavily involved in political activism, demonstrating on the streets against the regime, participated in dangerous underground movements.

- 1994: Moved to Germany without any plans, wanted to study politics, but ended up in the arts by meeting Butoh master Anza Furukawa whom taught her performance art. Which led to her studies in Hochschule fuer Bildende Kuenste, Braunschweig, Germany; having had the chance to be a student of the pioneer of performance artist, Marina Abramovic.

### **On otherness,**

During her studies in Germany, she faced culture shock, particularly with nudity. In Indonesia, nudity would be forbidden. She explored sexuality, erotic's, watching films that wouldn't exist in Indonesia. How then does she continue making work from her cultural context within this Western liberalized landscape in Berlin?

Facing a very latent sense of discrimination of 'otherness' was heavily present. For Melati, she made a statement of '*no, I am not representing Indonesia, this cultural identity is a burden, actually*'. The mental construction by being brought up in Indonesia as told to always 'represent' her cultural identity made her criticize these national strategies that exposed the exotics, values that are used to only please and feed the other.

With that said, remembering the 350 years of colonial history of the Dutch, and remembering our ancestors, that we once were perceived as a 'lower human' compared to the Dutch.

The appropriation of culture that is carried today in post-colonial society: How then do we present ourselves? How do we present our culture in the global context? This includes—How do we culturally perceive women?

Melati shares that in her work *"I think that I am independent of all of this. What if I don't belong to all of this? The substance of nothingness is very important to me, it is not empty."*

*"My work is very simple, it is how I experience life, without exposing the experience itself."*

### **On nothingness,**

*"Nothingness can appear from near death experiences.*

*Nothingness is the experience of birthing my daughter.*

*Nothingness is when I divorced, leaving my abusive husband.*

*Nothingness is also when you don't have money, when you have nothing to eat, only your body.*

*I am very close to myself, I am close to my breathe, because my breathe gives me my life.*

*My work is very simple, it is how I experience life, without exposing the experience itself. As people in society, sometimes we don't want to expose our private experiences. I try to find the language in my*

*performance, to avoid a narration. I'd rather learn a more poetic approach, to leave my body in time, and space."*

### **On criticizing culture,**

As Melati learned performance art from the traditional Japanese form Butoh; it is very internal, but also political. For Butoh practitioners, they do not call Butoh as dance. Butoh is important to understand how we deal with our insight, Butoh is a visual form of meditation. Butoh inspired Melati to understand how the body becomes political. Butoh appeared during World War II and criticized Western culture. Which brought Melati to ask— *What can I criticize about my own Indonesian culture?*

*"Butoh is a visual form of meditation. Butoh inspired me to understand how the body becomes political."*

Realizing, there is so much that she doesn't agree with, which then she made a list of all that she doesn't agree with her Indonesian culture, from domesticity, to freedom of speech. As well as, looking at German life in the 90s. in Germany too, especially in the conservative villages, there were several problems of domestic life for women. Mothers whom were waiting for children in the school to come out, was actually worse than Indonesia.

*"These experiences influenced the way I work, the way I speak with the teachers, the way I asked for a place for my daughter to get*

*afternoon care. First of all, I am Asian, second, I am an artist. It was very difficult to put yourself in this conservative society"*

### **On being an artist and a mother,**

Working with Butoh master Anza Furukawa and later on as a student, working with Marina Abramovic, both very strong female figures shaped the way she thought about women as artist and inevitably, thinking about gender equality. In an indirect way, there was a strong presence of feminism. There were questions of societies attitude towards women, the place of female artists, and these were applied consciously in her projects.

As a student of Marina, Melati insisted on bringing her daughter to class. Marina was infamous for believing that you had to choose between a family and a career as an artist. Melati and a fellow friend of hers both had children; she brought her baby to class and she said: *"I will bring my baby to class, because I have no money for a baby sitter"*. Marina responded by saying that as long as it doesn't disrupt the class. Other professors too started to allow Melati to bring her baby to school. She was the first person who started to bring her baby into the school, and other friends followed. During some of Melati's performances, Marina caringly took care of Melati's baby.

### **On performance art,**

Melati then shares her body of works from 1998-2016, in which I have only chosen a selected few to include in this archive.

- 1998: Der Sekendentraum (*Having a dream in one second*), World Haus TV, Weimar, Germany

This work was done when Melati just gave birth. These were clothes she collected in Germany since 1994 every weekend in flea markets to buy cheap clothing, obsessively trying to be accepted into society and seek for identity.

300 pieces of clothing; a symbolic action to construct, and destroy life.



Der Sekundentraum, Melati Suryodamo, image from artist's slides

A one hour performance where she starts folding all of the clothing, then starting wear each piece of clothing, leading towards a sense of

claustrophobia, pressure from the layers of clothes, until she literally cannot move anymore.

- 2000: Exergie – Butter Dance, Hebbel Theatre, Berlin

How do we use the body at its minimum condition? Melati reduced ideas until it was condensed into only, dancing on butter. Fear was the motivation of this work. Questioning her existence—Where shall I go, after this?

The economic situation in Europe was poor during this period. Marina Abramovic challenged her students to create a work only using 10EUR. It wasn't about having money, but also about anticipating the economic situation. Especially as performance artist using the body; rather than complaining about no money for production or choreography, but *“you have your body”*, you actually don't need much, you can do enough with your body.

*“You have your body”*



Exergie – Butter Dance, Melati Suryodamo, image from artist's slides

*“Why was I so worried to express myself in this outfit in Germany?”*

The actions in this piece symbolize the transgression against the prejudice towards Asian women married to German men, the prejudice of Taiwanese, Filipino, or Asian women. *“I do respect women who have the courage to change no matter what.”*

The twenty-minute soundtrack is from Makkasar in South Sulawesi; a ceremonial dance that is being played for seven days, nonstop; the ceremony is hosted by a transgender shaman in Sulawesi.

*“The aim of making this work is to get up.”*

*“The aim of making this work is to get up. You can fail, but you do it anyway. You seldom expose how to get up when you fail.”*

This was performed over 21 times in different cultural environments. Men would laugh, while women take it seriously.

- 2001: Lullaby for the Ancestors, LOT Theatre, Braunchweig

In this piece, Melati focused on both the traditional performance, and the contemporary performance. Inspired by the Tarang Kepang from East Java, created by a shaman artist where they used objects in rituals such as—woven bamboo in the form of a horse that criticized the king whom controlled society during that time.

The performance used elements of trance, torture, anecdote, and demonic symbols. Melati combined these elements and took the challenge to make a clean performance out of this messy ritual.

She then narrowed it down to only three elements, first putting her head in a bucket of water, then she walked to crack a whip repeatedly, then to walk the horse around the stage. Using simplicity and repetition. The sound of the whip ruptured the atmosphere, so she took the time to learn how to use large leather Western whip, which produced a stronger cracking.



Lullaby for the Ancestors, Melati Suryodamo, image from artist's slides

Traditionally, this dance is done by men. The choice of the dress and her appearance with high heels was a statement of protest, after hundreds of years there was no difference in this tradition, other than seeing pretty girls dancing on the horse for tourists.

Chloe Chotrani – Did you do fieldwork to study the shamans' dance?

Melati – No, I grew up around these trance rituals, observing it as a child. In the 70s, I would witness trance people eating glass bulbs, sometimes these men were whipped, they have these large masks with peacock feathers and would do trance dances. This carried on until I grew up and left big questions 30 years later. *It was scary to see people bleeding, and because children were small, they were put in front. If I never left Indonesia, I wouldn't feel that it was shocking. It changed my perspective on children, culture, education. Only recently I thought to myself, that was actually scary.*

## *“Art is my spiritual process”*

The thing with performance art is that, you decide on a repetitive action for a long period. Thus, Melati prepares her body and work by constructing her thoughts of giving her work to the public. *“As soon as my work is shown to the public, I don’t own it. I reserve all obsessiveness of being seen, of understanding, of meaning, of all inner obsession. With this, art is also my spiritual process. To share your work for the public, is not to control their minds. Let people interpret with their own mind and feeling”*

### **On daily practice,**

*Susan Sentler – What is your daily practice?*

Melati - What constitutes Melati’s daily practice is meditation. Which is not only a practice of meditating, but also to experience life events in these moments. Daily practice as a means of how one deals with life, the life of your relations, and the life of moving constellations.

## *“Performance art for me is the art of doing.”*

The research that Melati practices is not necessarily scientific, it can come from a surprising life event, or irrationality, or to see news of fundamentalists taking children into suicidal bombs, people throwing rubbish in the river next to her studio, to see the destruction of nature in replacement of a housing unit, to experience changes.

- 2007: I love you

A durational piece for five hours, carrying a sheet of tempered glass, taking place in an all red space, Melati is saying “I love you” repeatedly, and moving the glass. This work is based on her observation, research, and thoughts on how languages functions, and a reduction of meaning, the fragility and function of repeating a mantra.

Does language represent everything? Probably also because of language, you are misunderstood easily. This works speaks about that.



I love you, Melati Suryodamo, image from artist’s slides

Glass as a simple object that reflects fragility, our fragile soul, our fragile language. “I love you” is something that is universally understood. Through a repetitive mantra, you reach a level beyond consciousness, where meaning is shifted into another place. By repeating “I love you” for five hours, each expression is different, taking care of the glass is also how we deal with our fragility, and how we deal with love.

- 2009: Passionate Pilgrim

Produced and funded by the government of Belgium; Melati humorously shared that finally share can create work with more material, going beyond 10EUR. This work is five hours, working with 100 mirrors.

This research was on domestic workers, on the preparations for domestic workers in Korea, Saudi, Taiwan, Singapore, and many other countries. Mostly female laborers are predominantly from Indonesia and the Philippines. There are schools in their own countries to train them to be house-maids.

While Melati was in Taiwan, she met an Indonesian lady on the East coast of Taiwan. She spoke Bahasa and she asked Melati for help, she asked Melati to take her away from here, because she was not supposed to be working in that village. The lady was asked to take care of that grandmother, to be the shopkeeper, and they confiscated her passport so she would have no choice. During that time, Melati felt helpless. This encounter inspired Melati to reflect a larger perspective of how Indonesia (and the Philippines) treats female workers. Melati passed on the contact of this lady to activists in Indonesia.

- 2012: I am a Ghost in my Own Houses

Melati grinds charcoal for 12 hours. This piece was also performed in Singapore. This was done based on the homeless people. She observed in the night, asking people where are the homeless. Homelessness as close to understanding death. There are life events that made Melati think of floating thoughts and soul, a spirit that has no substance, as

empty. *“In the social fight, we are dealing with the spirit of the dead.”* She shared— *“What are we if we are alive? What are we if we are dead? It is about these existential mechanisms that give us values of functions in this life.”*

Charcoal as an object or material that passes through death. Death of our domestic life, death of desire, death in many layers. Grinding charcoal into power, a soft form of power, creating the smallest element of death; which then becomes a source of energy, again. Which is also how one re-lives after death. There are many complex layers of the work, put into a single action. I start at 9:00am in the morning and stop at 9:00pm in the evening.

*“There are many complex layers of the work, put into a single action.”*



I am a ghost in my own house, Melati Suryodamo, image from artist's slides

**On feminism,**

*“Feminism is not about how you make a feminist work, it is not about how you show women suffering, or any gendered context onto the stage. Rather, it is how you live in it.”*

Feminism is not about how you make a feminist work, it is not about how you show women suffering, or any gendered context onto the stage. Rather, it is how you live in it. Feminism now a day is not about yelling for your rights, but it is about action that can enter as many sections, in-between sections is just as important. Performance art is considered an in-between genre, it is not performing arts, it is not fine art.

*“The jokes that objectify women and female dancers on the public media—this must be fought with, collectively.”*

Melati is highly aware of the misuse, objectification and harassment particularly of the dancers in her hometown Solo, Indonesia by male directors and choreographers. The jokes that objectify women and female dancers on the public media—this must be fought with, collectively.

The arts environment is still dominated by the male, it is still a soft macho focus. It is bad that it continues to be a male perspective that dominates. There is a spirit that we need to keep, platform is important, especially cross-cultural sharing, to be exposed to varied practices and movements. Do we know what we fight for? Are we capable?

*“Using an element of life to make art is a present for our collective spirits.”*

Even though we don't think about gender, it affects everything. Our task today as artists that use the body... our body is full of statement. Are we tired of that? How do we put our statement in the right place, and the right time? Let's learn together.

**On working with dance and dancers,**

Melati mentioned that she is going back to dance to engage more with her community in Solo. She is interested in examining the use of the body in different mediums.

*Susan Sentler –The 50s approach of visual artists appropriating dance and dance labour is problematic.*

Melati - There is more awareness in the West that artists who contribute labour in collaboration process and should be acknowledged. In Solo you don't talk about collaborators. Even choreographers forget to mention dancers, musicians. It's all about me me me. A lot of things need step by step improvement: a minimum wage, a monthly standard – there are some attempts for more open administration in Indonesia.

*“My understanding of collaboration with dancers is to borrow someone’s body.”*

*Sonia Kwek – How did you decide to shift to work w dancers in pieces such as Sisyphus?*

Melati - *Since 2011 I also borrow dancers’ bodies to become the realization of my thoughts.* I have been thinking about how to combine the practice of performance art and dancers’ bodies. There is some translation of what is choreography with the concept of performance art. For *Sisyphus* we examined the act of possession. I did research with shamans, dancing with spirits. With the dancers we examined if spirit was really inside body or our own spirit that allowed us to be more free of our body. I also wanted to know do we remember movement that we do in trance/possession. Traditional dance respects the body so much because dance is not a show but part of ritual. Court dance is more objectifying.

My work is very boring for most Indonesian dance viewers. Some dancers say “Oh, Melati’s doing choreography now?”

### **Reflections by Chloe,**

The informality, laughter, and discussion between the participants and Melati made the lecture-performance so accessible and enjoyable. Most especially, having someone come from this region, it was insightful for us to have someone understand their place in the world of performance art from a Southeast Asian context.

It was important to have her in this da:ns lab, to receive a rooted and local perspective, where we too can relate and learn strategies and perspectives on having a critical approach that is both intimate and distant of our cultural placement, conditions, and how they may reflect in our artistic practice.

I found that there was a beautiful parallel moment, when Melati took care of Sze-Wei’s baby, whom joined us during most of the da:ns lab. I felt, this moment reflected the growth and change in the arts industry, on how it is now accepted for motherhood and a career in the arts to co-exist. Her baby was an important presence, because it echoed in the space for all the women there, that this life is possible for us. We can make art, and we can make babies too, at the same time if we’d like.

**Day two lecture/Sonja Jokiniemi,**



Blab by Sonja Jokiniemi, photo by Simo Karisalo

**On alternative modes of expression,**

Sonja's lecture began sitting in a circle on the studio floor. Each participant was invited to give a non-verbal gestural introduction to themselves. She also referred to the previous evening's performance sharing, where she had introduced elements from her works *Blab*, *Rrr* and *Hmm* in performance and video clips.

Alternative modes of expression and learning are central to her work. Sonja works with this in an experiential way, in community based work, as well as performance solo and group works. She is interested in

how we can claim space for sharing of subjectivities but also the validation of different modes of expression. When working with people with special needs (e.g. autism, mental health), it is important that the diagnosis does not define the person, but instead raises the potentiality of different perceptions.

*“Mainstream society has a strong emphasis on conceptual thinking, verbal expression, lingual abilities, social intelligence, how we should understand each other's codes and respond in coherent manner. Though research on acknowledging diversity has broadened, there's a*



*lot of exclusion, especially in what is considered valid knowledge.”*

sHmm by Sonja Jokiniemi

Reference to cultural theorist Erin Manning’s writing on Autistic perception, and how autistics tend to perceive experience as chunks instead of differentiating subject and object.

Realizing that she was already exploring this in her work, attempting to explore the world before one had the definition of it.

Some concepts that have become important for in the course of the project *Caring for Stories*, a collaboration in Belgium with a social scientist Dr Leni Van Goidsenhoven and participants from the autistic spectrum.

**Intra-action** – what emerges in meeting (things and people, people and people, groups), to bring to light knowledge that is forming in an encounter.

**Multimodality** – merging of verbal and non-verbal communication.

**Intermediality** – storytelling combining different media.

*Hmm (2015)* relates to my need and my desire to go towards working landscapes that I feel some affiliation to.

*“It is also my need to be in a working environment that I can understand, where I*

*don’t have so much difficulty understanding the social roles. So that it’s not only the other with a more visible diagnosis that might be analysed.”*

**On sensorial logic,**

Multi sensorial objects in my work have a “sensoric” logic. For *Blab*, the hair, chains, slime came from her looking and imagining what needed to be felt to make sense in a way of opening up potentiality of associations.

*“In a masculine dominated society, that way of understanding the world is highly criticized as nonsensical. I have been trying to claim this space as not nonsense. To say it’s nonsense negates those people and their way of understanding that not belong to the neuronormative. A world based on a construct of neuronormativity excludes a lot of knowledges.”*

*Hasyimah Harith – Would you have responded differently to the neuro-normativity of performative spaces if you were male?*

Sonja – There is a masculine construction of rational and conceptual thinking and self-presentation that has to do with efficiency and hiding vulnerability. I also try to think in between the binary. Insecurity, vulnerability, incapability are seen as negative traits in neoliberal society. Aware that this is a generalization – observe that the theatrical stage has become very violent and tends to show body as something strong physically. It's not easy to expose bodies that have "faults", especially in dance.... So I don't know if it's a healthy thing to go into the world of the stage.

### **On community dance, and new materialist choreographic practice,**

Sonja looks at community dance projects as knowledge sharing, instead of going in as an artist and doing something for a community. This is slightly different from artistic work. The emphasis is on healing, with art as tool to express oneself and find different topics. Whereas as artist, it's about being surrounded by a question.

#### *Without an alphabet/TU (2015)*

*Without an alphabet* was a one-year process of working with 4 young autistic adults in duos and as a group. It was a quest for subjective languages; how to speak without a common vocabulary. My collaborator in the performance *TU*, Veera Kivela's only vocab was "yes" and "swim". But Veera responded and understood speech well. They started from a table conversation, and I might mirror her. No structure, spending time with each other and listening to each other.

Now she views her work from the perspective of new materialist choreographic practices. But at the time others called *TU* "autistic object theatre".

*"I asked why it was problematized even on the stage. The stage is supposed to be available for alternative forms of expression but it is very much normativised. When something feels non-communicative – an un-useful discourse – we easily perceive things we don't understand as non-communicative."*

Sonja was interested to see how she could engage with a language (of her autistic collaborators) that she felt very affiliated to, and how to find a collaboration through this kind of language exchange.

*Shanice Stanislaus – How do you create a knowledge sharing space with someone who might not know or trust you?*

Sonja – For *Without an alphabet* I started spending time in the residential community centre to first introduce myself and my questions, and did daily activities with Veera for one month. Then I asked one day if she would like to come to studio, and then later asked her about going into the theatre. I had mainly improvisatory sessions with her. With each participant it was different - with another, we tended to debate, for example conversations about counting. Nobody was ever forced to come to work with me. It was their own choice, as they were all young adults. With Veera it was quite clear that she enjoyed us doing things in front of people but with the others it wouldn't have been nice for them. It's important for me to find

collaborators who want to work with me. You can't just impose ideas on people, it's not how I like to work.

With *Caring for stories*, I am working in a housing association for people with mental health conditions. The framework had more aspect of art for health care. I used to be more against that approach but now I see it's a complex landscape to operate in. You can shift this from within. You can work against art as service, which is not always expected by people who take part but by the funders who expect something to show that this was useful and beneficial. This is very much in the language with which such work is spoken about.

*“As artist I feel very much the need to not speak of artistic work as art service.”*

In *Caring for stories*, we attempt to create an equal learning environment. I didn't go as a specialist. Participants and each of us are all specialists. I try not to go into habit of teaching, which is not always easy with people with cognitive difficulties where sometimes there are things you need to teach to go somewhere else. But I realise that I also sometimes need teaching or someone needs to say to me you're not focusing on the right thing. I think of this as guiding, not something negative or constitutive of a hierarchical relationship. If we consider that we all have some sensitivities, points that we are not strong in, then it is in those points that the other can strengthen or guide us and that doesn't need to lead to way we communicate in general. E.g. if I need to change a diaper, that didn't change the way we worked artistically together. He wouldn't become a more needy person to me and we would still communicate the same way.

*Susan Sentler – It would be very beneficial to share your practices, e.g. for Candoco dance company (UK), to shift their approach to disability.*

*Chan Sze-Wei – Did the performance of TU consist of new material each time?*

*Aparna Nambiar – How did you guide Veera?*

Sonja – With Veera it was a score that we knew. I might do that differently now. Back then I didn't have enough trust in the chaotic and felt the need to score things. We worked with material generated from our conversations, which I scored into a sequence of sections. Now I would give just 2 hours and invite people to come to our interaction instead of framing it as a kind of piece.

*Faye Lim – Do you have sense of Veera's point of view of what the format was or her experience of the duration?*

*Sonia Kwek – Would you sustain the collaborative relationship with Veera? I find it hard to work with communities because I feel that I exploit them because I move on but in their lives it's an absence.*

Sonja – For me too the end of a project is never the end. I don't know how Veera felt. In terms of session lengths it was clear when she wanted to stop, because she would put her shoes on. Some things were easy to read if we were having the same feeling. When I first went to the community centre, I was told that everybody needs a lot of structure. But with Veera she was always very calm even when I was lost. The tendency for overcarefulness from the healthcare approach didn't seem necessary. I grew very attached to Veera. Her father was also a part of the process and gave input on how he saw her responding.

He saw me mirroring her unique language and was touched to realise that I was validating her language. He felt some strength from that.

I consider the collaboration as a non-hierarchical position. Saying that I would go to exploit is saying I have the power to exploit - but I don't think I do. If I meet someone and am genuinely interested in what they are expressing and they are obviously agreeing to work with me, it's a common understanding even if it's not in the form that we know. We need to say in advance that this will start and end, and be clear about the duration of project. Sometimes it's also good to break things and not stay too long. Our meeting is like an infiltration, and we each bring something of our own. Isn't that the same in the world in general where we don't have the chance to build long term relationships.



TU by Sonja Jokiniemi and Veera Kivelä, photo by Tomi Paasonen

### **On dance and disability,**

Sonja's has a new creation with Maija Karhunen (a wheelchair user who is an influential curator of an online dance critique website) that will be premiered at the Kiasma Museum. She has written an article on disabled body in dance. Can a disabled body ever be considered neutral on stage, and is that meaningful? This question is important to how she perceives her body onstage. She doesn't try to attempt towards neutrality, or that she could be a template of many possibilities. There's always a certain person onstage. Rather than making work that deals with the question of disability. It's just two people performing a work about hybridity, a mothering cocoon (not just female mothering, not gender specific).

Sonja made archive paintings of trans female, hybrid female figures with extensions, tentacles. How she imagines herself, something to do with religious images iconography of mixed beings, influenced by Donna Haraway's cyborg manifesto.

*Melati Suryodamo – I understand why people are very sensitive about exploitation when it comes to working with the disabled. But what if we see them as equals. Collective support gives attention to another side of our world that most people have forgotten exists. This is not about taking pity on others but about understanding the world of individuals that have been pushed away and treated meanly in history. We are lacking knowledge to understand their world but Art can be the bridge to encourage public/society's understanding. I saw many projects in Germany and the UK involving disabled that were seen as social projects. Nowadays it's getting better that these people have the right to*

*express their presence, that we start to understand their experience and build dialogue and trust. This takes time even when the collaborator is a sibling. The world needs exposure to such work. The question is where to show it. What does it mean if the work is shown only for disabled audiences?*

*Susan Sentler – Jerome Bel was criticised a lot for Disabled Theatre. I recall Charlotte Derbyshire of Candoco countering “Don’t think that [the actors] don’t have decision making. They can control their desires.” Candoco was adamant to have mixed cast for The Show Must Go On (that Susan participated in). I never learned so much in my life as when working with them. Our rehearsal director had to slow down and look at the work with different eyes. For Jerome it was one of the best renditions of the work because of the versatility of the cast.*

*Shanice – What are your personal and professional challenges when you work with a community, as someone who comes from a neuronormative world?*

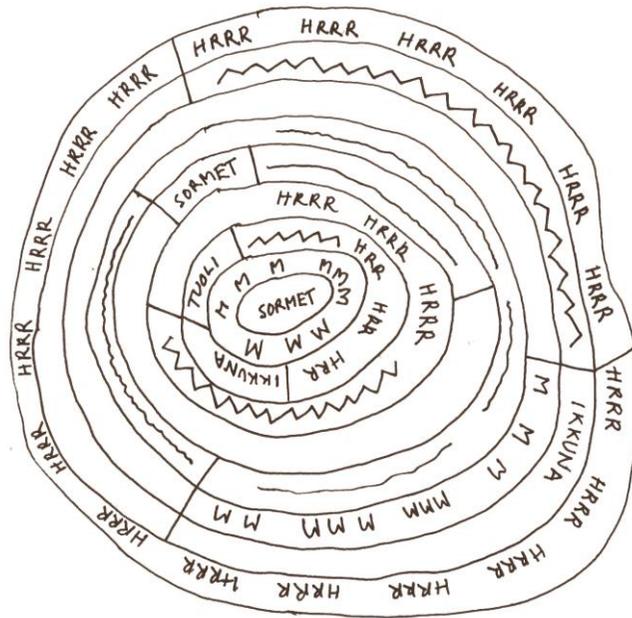
*Sonja – The challenge of how to categorize this kind of work – as an artist and for funding. This is challenging since all of my work speaks against categorization and planned definition, and proposes alternative spaces for diverse imaginations. I try not to categorize my work in the disability art sector. We need to be sensitive, aware that we don’t know everyone’s sensibilities. Not everything is visible. If I can train my mind - it can be useful to name conditions – but I don’t stay with labels. A person is many things. Autism is a condition not an illness. It is the whole person but not everything they can give in this world is under the diagnostic label. I don’t consider myself as being too different, and I don’t need a diagnosis for me.*

*Hasyimah Harith – I appreciate your strategy in responding to disability. Choosing conversation instead of ignorance, dedicating enough time for the work. This is another way to find ourselves.*

*Melati – With regards to new materialism – there is a reason and history for violence of stage. The socio-political requirements to detach the body from the context. Dematerialisation was the basis for using live performance in art. It’s even more brutal to detach the idea of performativity by separating the presence of the body from dialogue with objects. In your showing yesterday, you were like the object but what is this dialogue of you and the object? This is like a fetish to sense something from material and grow with it. In the 90s, there were so many ideas about fetishism and different ways of perceiving the world and connection with material. How u built a relationship with Veera, and with objects, is very sensitive and special. People who have a fetish with objects show a desire and obsession but for your work I see more a dialogue with objects*

*Sonja – I wouldn’t exclude sensuality/fetish but it’s not how I define the relation I’m working on. In choreographic field, from the 2000s there was discourse of choreographing the in between. I consider these affective relations. I’m also interested in what emerges if sexuality is also part of this.*

## On books and drawing,



PA A. Drawing by Sonja Jokiniemi.

Books *RRRRR* and *PA A*, which were a written/verbal scoring of conversations, comprising unfinished texts, soundings, and visual scores.

Her drawing practice has different functions. Sometimes Sonja starts with drawing first, and the drawing feeds the performance by being present or inspiring the embodied material. Sometimes the drawing is

an after reflection like in book. Sometimes a choreographic practice (in *Oh no*) with pens as a protagonist in miniature world.

*Chan Sze-Wei – is drawing a practice u share w collaborators?*

Yes. Usually with few colours to keep it minimal. Now with *Caring for stories* there's a lot of colourful paintings.

*Chan Sze-Wei – How are the books circulated?*

*Susan – Did you produce the books as an object?*

Sonja – I distribute the books at shows, in the social service sector and other contexts where I would speak about it. In this way the book based on *TU* went beyond the four performances. I tried to make a book that has very little words. It's a reading score in the way you would read a short text. I wanted to bring up the question of what languages are valid to put in a book, to be recognised as "text".

## On her role as female maker,

Hybridity and fluidity in sexual identity and gender roles and how she perceives human interaction. With regard to ideas of normality, she would like to think outside of categories. As a female in society you are in a different position, and in some countries, one could understand that there are fights to be fought urgently.



Oh No by Sonja Jokiniemi, photo by Thomas Lenden

### On fetish,

*“There is sexual imagery in my work. But I wouldn’t say that the work is only about sexuality.”*

*Chong Gua Khee – I saw vulnerability and violence in your presentation yesterday.*

Sonja – There is violence, but with a different dynamic. In Finnish dance scene, I see tendency towards works that deal with empathy in a singular colour. Why would vulnerability look in a certain way? Why couldn’t it entail violence? A threatened animal acts violently. Socially I see this in socialist state in Finland and right wing nationalist government cutting social security for people in need. I see more

violence on the street. There is an expression of anger that doesn’t come from a mean place, but from hopelessness. In psychological climate there is so much colour and so many reasons. We tend to simplify in theatre psychology. In my work there is a lot of violence, I can’t tell exactly why. It’s an inner logic or impulse that appears and I keep it because I feel that it should also be able to manifest. I don’t believe in monotone voicing about harmony. I don’t know what that means. Attempts to harmony, tranquility and common understanding negate resistance and rebellion. Providing spaces of different expression in my workshops. I suffer from soft facism and I don’t want to encourage that.

*Susan Sentler – What is your daily practice?*

Sonja – Drawing is a regular practice for me, daily when I can focus on one creation. I have also done regular psychotherapy – a personal process allowed me to process multi-colouredness. That internal landscapes are never black and white or singular. Complexity of experience. That’s why I like to speak from personal experience. I don’t display others’ stories or fade my person behind a generic language. (Foetus image)

*Dana Michel – What are the roots of your involvement with performance?*

Sonja – As a child, I trained in French horn and piano and performed in orchestras. I recall them as terrifying. Music is in my performance work in use of voice, breath. I discovered new dance and improvisation when 16, then discovered I have a body and can do stuff with it. Then I decided to become a choreographer. I went to London to study dance at Laban. My practice has shifted from dance work to hybrid performance. But I still consider my practice choreographic practice. I was always

drawing since childhood. Expressing myself as a solitary child. It's a way for me to understand what's going on for me inside but also how I map out the world. The MA at DAS built my confidence and ability to speak about what I do, in the language that I like to use.

*Aparna Nambiar – How do you see yourself as a creator with regard to use of objects? In your creating a world – I saw a creative role, which is still hierarchical in my association.*

Sonja – I haven't considered it through hierarchy of power relations. *Blab* has my way of making sense through choreographic practice but those works have room for you to make interpretations that might not be the same as mine. Some people felt very anxious, others felt celebratory. The emotional scale of audience was very wide. We are bringing something but it can mean something different to me, performer and viewer. *Blab* is a 3D moving painting. For me it's fine that viewer gets immersed in one element. It's not about a hierarchy of watching. My work is not participatory. My role is not same as yours but not hierarchical.

*Chong Gua Khee – There is a focus on conversation and dialogue in your practice. Do you consider dialogue with audience?*

Sonja – Not really. I have been interested in creating universes where the audience comes as visitors, free to come and go. As a performer, I barely see individual audience. I am so focused on things that are there. The theatrical technique of projecting through gaze to audience - I have cut this out from my practice for a long time. I don't enjoy watching an actor trying to project something to me. I want to make the choice to look where I want.

I wonder if I could look at audience in next work. Could I? It's conceptual as well as personal.

*Chloe Chotrani – I love your idea of a knowledge sharing space, accessing a language you can't understand. Knowledge can look different ways and have different colours, shapes, pacing's. I associate this with accessing the subconscious realm.*

### **Reflections by Sze-Wei,**

Sonja's sharing of her work and process impressed me deeply. The deceptively simple and playful elements of her performance sharing were also characterized by an intense focus and a sense of internal logic – which became clear when she articulated them in her lecture and workshop. There was amazing clarity in how her philosophy of decentering neuronormativity and its modes of expression underpins all of her work. Her work clearly stems from her sense of compassion, and an awareness of how constructs convenient to the majority oppress other narratives and other ways of being. I found myself wishing that policy makers and arts organisations that work with special needs communities were able to hear Sonja's lecture, because this seems quite different from most approaches to community art at this time in Singapore and could be a useful set of ideas to encounter. As an artist her process and expression of her ideas is intuitive and playful while also careful, measured and well-articulated – combinations that are new to me.

Day three lecture/Dana Michel,

*“It’s kind of like a clarity potion—chaos”*



*Mercurial George, by Dana Michel, screenshot from teaser*

Dana shifts from talking about making her slides, to why she is here, to suddenly standing from her seat to talk a walk. Being around Dana, you will often notice, her sudden change of options, in real time, with frequent variations. She starts with, “I am going to figure it out, with you.” With a sense of humor, nervousness, and excitement. She shares her story.

Age 0: Born and raised in the suburbs of Ottawa, Canada, with her ancestry from the Caribbean.

Ages 0-4: She calls this phase ‘Fortress of Alone’, where she enjoyed simply, being alone. With quite a gap between her siblings, she was often by herself, which she thoroughly enjoyed. Often times, making solo work, aside from the fact that it is economical, Dana finds being alone cozy.

Ages 4-11: Constant outside looking in sensation, a perpetual feeling of life as a constant dream, of maybe one day she will wake up. Which reflects also, the way she works today, of this detachment and re-creation of selves and lives. Allowing herself to be the material that she can hold, and decide when to attach or detach.

**On welcoming gender queer,**

Growing up, she was known as a tomboy. Then, there were no term queer, there weren’t words we have today, as a tomboy. Today, in the past couple of years hearing the term gender queer has been really welcoming. Relating to this term, but also relating to the term: woman. *“The outside world’s definition of women doesn’t seem to include me. The term gender queer, does.”*

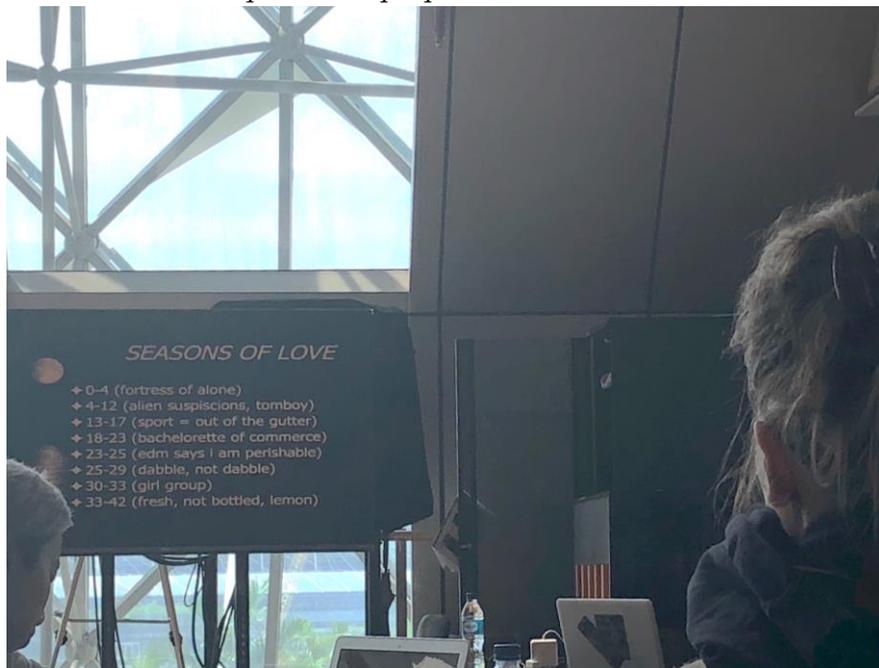
Ages 13-17: She played sports, mostly touch football, until she started dancing. Helping Dana with confidence, not to feel like an outcast in high school.

Ages 18-23: Business school, studied marketing and resource management. *“My parent did not leave islands for me to become an artist, that’s for damn sure.”* There was no way that was going to happen.

Ages 23-35: Electronic dance music, Dana started raving, and when she moved to Montreal. Quickly realizing, she wasn't doing what she wanted to do. And, found a contemporary dance department, by mistake.

*“It is important for me to form intimate relationship with the people I work with”*

Ages 25-29: Contemporary dance school, which was meant to be a dabble and meant to go back to what she was doing in marketing. Ended up working with a group of women, the first time she could deeply relate to a group of women. *“It is important for me to form intimate relationship with the people I work with, I need to know what*



*I am dealing with, I need to know what you look like when you cry... I don't know.”* At the same time, feeling a sense of limitation on what she could create.

Ages 30-32: Fresh, not bottled lemon.

**On being an artist,**

Working in art, live art, as always expanding. An increasing willingness and interest in making videos, thinking of photography, writing, more and more. *“The reason why I am working in the arts, making art or calling myself an artist is because it seems like the simplest way to invest in the world. At this point, if I am not engaged with the arts, I cannot see point of being alive would be. In the arts, I have a space to take a step back and potentially contribute through a thoughtful self”*

*“At this point, if I am not engaged with the arts, I cannot see point of being alive would be. In the arts, I have a space to take a step back and potentially contribute through a thoughtful self”*

**On soca music,**

Music that Dana grew up with, from the Carribean that started in the 70s. Soca revolves around small themes, not changing much... The rhythm is fast, often talking about partying, sexuality, and commonly using the same vocabulary. But, somehow, it is constantly changing, refreshing, and exciting. Yet, there are such basic principles. Somehow, limited means in production, makes it very expansive. Perhaps, also,

relating to how Dana lives, not necessarily trying, but rather what happens naturally, and what feels best.

**On being many things in performance,**

Psychology? Herb-ology? Stand-up comedy? Poetry? Cinematography? Monk? Rock? By working in live performance art, it the best way for one to be doing all of these things.

**On not understanding,**

*“Sometimes, I make choices I don’t understand in the moment. But, more often than not, they tend to make sense later on.”*

**On her relationship to gender,**

*“I have a vulva and I have muscles and I can cry over a piece of garbage looking just so and I feel better in the men’s section and I cried once when my sister tried to put make up on me and I trust babies more than any other entities”*

It raises questions, speaking of ‘woman’s work’ can be actually, problematic.

Building a power fortress, babe boobs, and later, post-partum body. Starting from an impulse in the studio to simply, take off her top. *“I can’t seem to make a performance without my breasts being free, I think this is interesting to talk about.”* Which came about from questioning why men were allowed to be topless and women were not. Dana continued to express that being topless, this daring freedom, gave her clearer ways of communication, with multiple repercussions. Also, leading towards revealing more and more brown flesh.



**On making art and making babies,**

Dana’s first evening length work, and as she was making this piece, she became pregnant seven months in the piece. As she premiered, her son was five months old. Her breasts were full of milk, and a round belly full of stretch marks. In a small activist way, Dana started holding space for the visibility of post-partum bodies. This is another thing that we

don't see, often, in performance and in the world. *"All of these issues we have with the body, stem from the fact that we don't see them."*

*"This moment in my life was really, wild."* Dana officially started working this piece was when she was going through a paradigm shift at the age of thirty-five, diving head first into a full-time artist career. In the midst of this, getting pregnant seeped and contributed to the work.

*"It was a beautiful negotiation, making my first evening-length work, while becoming a mother."* Dana's piece, experience, and story emphasized the importance of making space for Motherhood in art.

*Chan Sze-Wei – How do you make work after Yellow Towel? After all those circumstances that generated this important work? How do you make work after that?*

Dana Michel – I was quite certain, I wouldn't. I felt that I had nothing else to say. In fact, even performing Yellow Towel, I didn't really understand the circumstances. In general, I need a lot of time between processes, I can't eat too fast, and I can't make too fast. That was it, time and a lot of reflection... I'd like to stand up for other modes of being, making, and communicating.

*"I'd like to stand up for other modes of being, making, and communicating."*

*Melati Suryodarmo – What makes me interested in your work since we met in Berlin, and after your performance and documentation... Since I've been growing in the performance art scene, the scene is not necessarily in the museum or gallery, but also not in the frame of*

*festival of theatre and dance. It is in the independent networking that is more grassroots and underground. I have a bit of hope, my vocabulary of understanding your work is trained by this environment. If I switch then, if I were more involved in dance and theatre scene, how then would I see this? It becomes again a space that is intertwining, I wonder if our knowledge also intertwines.*



Yellow Towel, by Dana Michel, screenshot from *teaser*

*Anlin Loh – Just a quick response to what you (Melati) were asking earlier; How do you look at a work from your own practice? I wanted to throw in that my practice came in from theatre, and watching the lectures across the board, it widens the entire scope of possibilities quite a lot. Even in the different issues of economy, space, new modalities of working; that being in such a space these four days to absorb and to listen, especially in the workshops it actually reminds me of more classical workshop modalities, but from a very different angle, and the different responses to it. I felt that, the availability of such spaces, the*

*third space, the infinite space, allows people to bring in something, to receive something. Especially, when you come from different backgrounds. I am already having ideas on how this work can inform my process.*

*Melati Suryodarmo – It goes beyond dance, beyond the strictness of the institution. I love it when things merge, and there is chaos.*

Dana Michel – I recognize there are things I have in common with performance art, things in common with dance, things in common with visual art. This in-between-ness is really important. It feels like the most fertile place for me. I find it fascinating how close the forms art, yet how far away at the same time.

*“This in-between-ness is really important. It feels like the most fertile place for me.”*

*Daniel Kok – Actually, a similar question came up for me. The word ‘hybrid’ was used many times. I am excited by the thought. What then is the way we articulate the socio-cultural function of an artist, of art? In Sonja’s case, it’s not art therapy, but there is a bit of that, it’s not social work, but there is a bit of that. There is also discussion about not wanting to keep it defined. I am wondering if we already have been in a post-genre situation for quite a while. What I want to then ask is—How do the institutions, platforms, ecology, economics, structures—How are they able to host what is happening? This kind of cross fertilization and melting. It is exciting to work with artists that connect with different sectors of communities. But, the existing frameworks actually cannot host these kinds of practices.*

Dana Michel – It is the same as other questions we are asking. How do we create spaces for other gender definitions? It is always so much easier for things to be clean cut. How do we allow society to be more flexible? And, even messy. We have got to practice being messy, as a whole. This is what we actually need the most.

*“How do we allow society to be more flexible? And, even messy.”*

**Reflection by Sze-Wei,**

I really enjoyed Dana’s organic, quite anarchic approach to making and to association of ideas. But what I was most moved by was her integration of the personal into her art practice – particularly the choice to become a mother, and the changes that came about in her body and her life. Alongside Melati’s sharing of her own activism in bringing her baby to art school in Germany, this topic resonated deeply for many other participants as well.

I was thrilled when facilitator/organizer Daniel agreed to my request to have my own three-month old baby with me every afternoon of da:ns lab. I took this as an experiment with my desire to integrate motherhood and art practice. Instinctively I flinched every time baby might have been seen as disruptive to the focus of the workshops. Instead, there was so much warmth and enthusiasm from the facilitators, workshop leaders and other participants. Many offered to share in the caregiving (or baby-playing) to allow me to participate more fully in the workshops. Others shared about their own families. Several younger artists thanked me for bringing my baby along. I took it that his presence and the stories that he prompted gave many of us

more courage to assert that motherhood need not be a barrier to being an artist.

### **Workshops,**

Before closing the circle with day four, here is a preview of the workshops that were held which consisted of performative exercises which included meditation, writing, reflection, and collaborative presentations.

### **In Dana's workshop,**

The participants were invited to introduce themselves through both movement and speaking about their yesterday, for one to three minutes. Later on, Dana proposed specific 'Inspector Gadget' related questions, and she divided the class into groups. Each group was assigned one of the questions as a starting point for a collaboration to create a short piece, later to be shared.



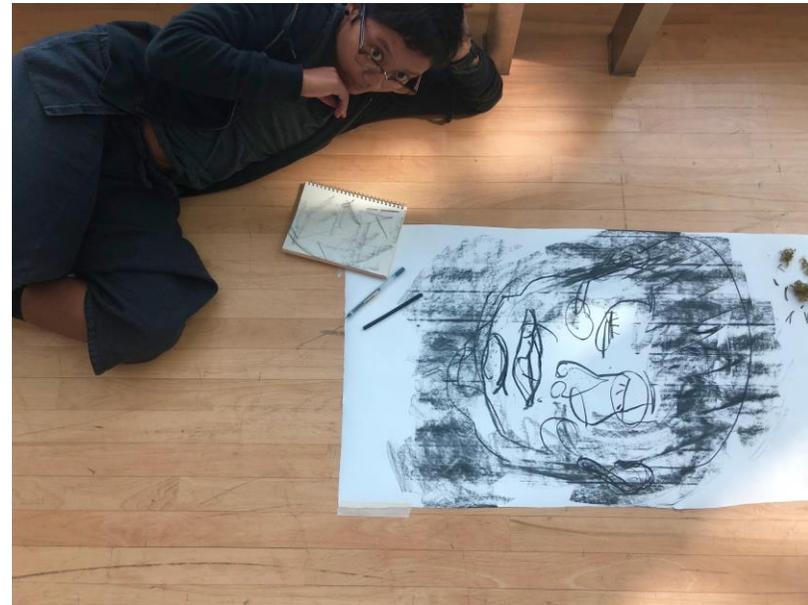


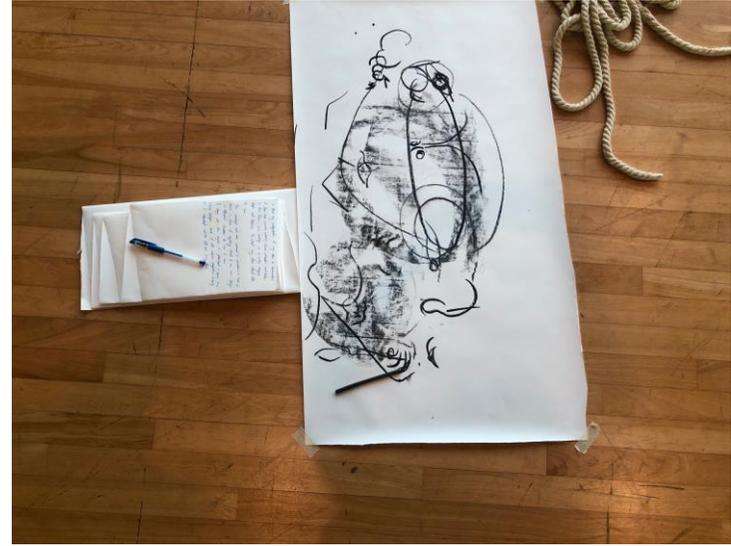
### **In Melati's workshop,**

Meditative exercises were done lying on the floor, with Melati guiding and directing the participants on awareness, sensation, and rest. After meditation, there was a free writing exercise for a few minutes. Melati then invited seven volunteers to write three keywords from their written reflection, based on those words, the group chose whom they would like to work with for the next exercise. The rest of the session was dedicated to devising a short performance based on the text created, and a series of informal sharing's of performance making.

### **In Sonja's workshop,**

The participants worked in trios, with two people giving a touch stimulus to a receiver whom was lying on the ground. The receiver responds with a movement interpretation of the touch. Later on, developing into larger stimulations, and a dance, of sorts. The second half was more dedicated to exploring, playing and developing a relationship with materials and objects, keeping the principles of touch (texture, quality, etc). Lastly, there was a self-portrait exercise, where the participants would feel their faces and draw their portrait on the paper, with their eyes closed. Later on, these portraits and relationship to object led itself into a short presentation by each individual.





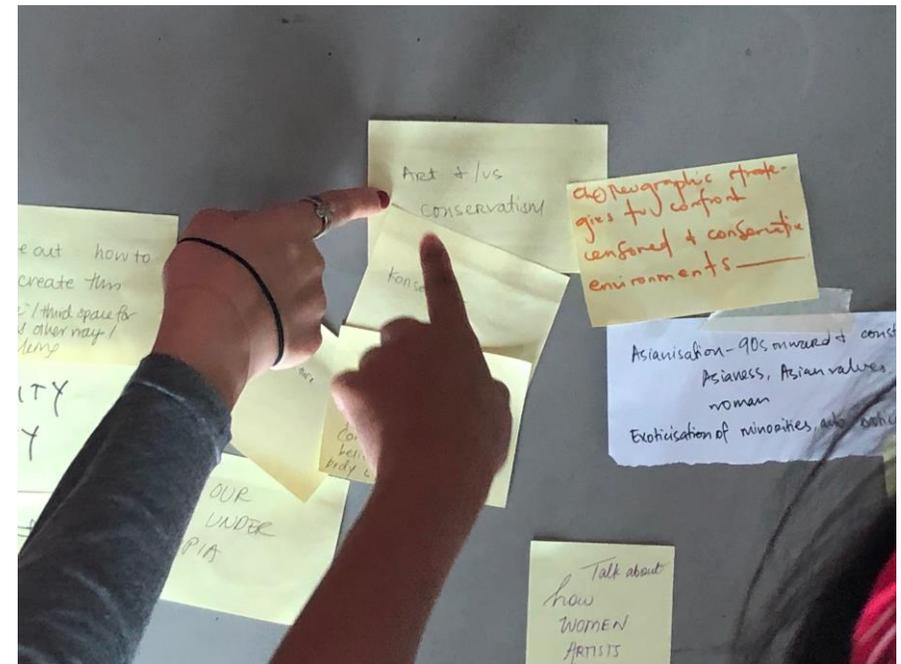
## Day four/Discussions and presentation,

This fourth day of the programme is a new addition for this edition of dans lab. Curator/facilitator Daniel Kok explained that it was included to open a time and space for participants and facilitators to reflect together on and assimilate the past days' experience. In the first day's introduction, he mentioned that the fourth day would be when "we don't know what's going to happen".

At the start of the day, Daniel framed the day in terms of the urgency of feminist approaches in the context of the #metoo movement, and alarming tendencies towards far-right positions and defensiveness of white male privilege in global politics. He emphasized that this is no longer only a question for women today.

Daniel as facilitator proposed a morning of discussion about all the different issues that had come up during the previous 3 days' programme. The afternoon was proposed to be working or rehearsal time for participants to split into smaller groups in an "Open Conference" format to go deeper into selected ideas from the morning's discussion, and to develop presentations or proposals to be shared with invited audience members in the evening in a "Pasar Malam" (night market).

The morning saw a lively discussion, with participants identifying many issues that concerned them as artists and as women artists, that had emerged for them in the past three days. With Daniel as a scribe, the group populated an extensive "map" of ideas.



Prof Jane Roun

how to tk back  
witchery, shamanism  
\* female monsters  
pleasure vs pain  
↳ exp in a female way

ANCESTRY

Go through ALL ē  
stereotypes / bg  
a woman

trad vs mod  
↳ what r we trying to  
protect?  
(r we protectg  
men?)

Verticality vs horizontality

diagonal ?  
spirals ? curves ?

interest / discuss 2  
material, conceptual in wk  
• artists  
• female  
• feminist

Work, labour  
↕  
domesticity

diffce but  
feminism &  
femininity

W?

HOW TO BRING  
MEN INTO THE ROOM?

softness vs  
anger

- expectations on  
a serious woman

role of internet??

women workers  
from Indo in  
HK, SG...  
(no males)

- socio-econ<sup>c</sup> qps  
re female labour

♀ female artists  
who r not here,  
recogt ē imp<sup>t</sup> wk  
# 'ey hv done

- gather ideas  
from 'eir exp<sup>e</sup>

- no unittg discuss<sup>v</sup>  
frmwks to discuss  
female exp<sup>e</sup> in  
global context

What is ē local perspecty?

gender-neutral stories in SEA  
local contextual  
Conversat<sup>n</sup>

how we work  
as women

- is there a diff way of wkg.
- the way I mk choices

life stages  
class diffce  
emotion'l support

violence in ē way we wk  
(eg: space, audit<sup>n</sup>)

- restrict = \*

space to fig out  
what r other ways  
of wkg, bg.

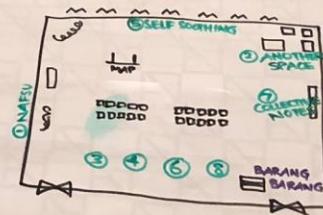
- is 'ere an empty, 3rd  
Space where we can neg.

# PASAR MALAM

7:30      7:45      8:00      8:15      8:30      8:45      9:00

- ① NAFSU  
THE PLEASURE MUSEUM (VENUE: LEFT WALL) 60mins
- ② ANOTHER SPACE  
Participatory Gallery Walk with Explanation  
(venue: corner with piano) 60mins
- ③ CONSERVATISM  
A conservative choreography (centre of studio) 5mins
- ④ PERSONAL STORIES  
Dance (centre of studio) 10mins
- ⑤ SELF-SOOTHING  
Performance (Glass windows) 15mins
- ⑥ SOFT POWER  
Performance Lecture with audience interaction  
(centre of studio) 20mins
- ⑦ COLLECTIVE NOTES  
Notes from discussions (right wall) 60mins
- ⑧ CLOSING THOUGHTS  
Chit-chat (centre of studio) 30mins

## MAP TO PASAR MALAM



At the end of the morning, there were intense discussions on how to move forward. The initial proposal for an “Open Conference” format with a series of parallel sessions was discussed at length, with questions about whether a format adopted from a Western context was best suited to the interests of this group.

Some participants expressed preferences not to work with a goal- and product-oriented process, or to attempt to define and concretise proposals too early. One participant suggested that discourses oriented toward efficiency and productivity may tend to squander the “flow” (e.g. non-linear development of ideas) of women. The proposal for a “Pasar Malam” format for the evening was questioned with regard to its potentially competitive and capitalist overtones. Some participants expressed a desire to continue the open conversation.

The group eventually accepted a proposal to break for lunch before returning to the discussion. After some time in a continued open discussion, the group agreed to a proposal to move on. Daniel offered an alternative process for keywords from the morning’s discussion to be written on post-it notes, and the group entered an exercise of spatially organizing and re-organising related clusters of ideas on the studio floor.

Resulting clusters of ideas spun off into group discussions and preparations towards the evening presentation, with each group generating a presentation of some kind.



The evening presentation was shared with an audience of friends and invited guests, and concluded with a dialogue and reflections by participants. The evening ended with a pizza party, exchanges of contact details and farewell hugs.

## Empathy + care

Social vs symbolic capital  
post-genre  
hybridity + inter-mediality  
desire + agency  
in-betweenness  
stillness  
temporality, durationality  
new materialism  
listening (beyond speaking)  
becoming, transitions  
potentiality of associations  
excluded knowledge(s)  
non-sense, uselessness

How do we ~~add~~ navigate  
uncomfortable issues/qns/topics  
(sexual assaults, ethics) as female  
artists  
protecting yr body

how to host ~~is~~ **NON-VERBAL**  
how to host ~~is~~ our language?

dominant  
discourse,  
colonial?, urban?  
diff. languages erased  
- lost concepts

vs  
eg. shamanic  
culture  
culture  $\rightsquigarrow$  art  
rational mod<sup>m</sup>  
( $\Delta$  to lang. of capital<sup>m</sup>)  
DISLOCATION

"smaller" vs  
kingdom

what happens  
if Melati  
performs in a  
small village?

The Everyday as skill

- what is the work \ the performative body  
- where is "messy" work hosted?  
 $\rightarrow$  what can't be easily  
valued

abilism, ability  
what is not-ability?

How to translate  
all these views  
so that we can be  
HEARD by those in  
pos<sup>n</sup> of power?

navigating cons

(... in muslim culture)  
 $\rightarrow$  rape?  
expectat<sup>ns</sup> on women  
 $\rightarrow$  conservat<sup>v</sup> religious  
influence

**Participants in da:ns lab 2018,**

**Anthea Seah**

Athelyna Swee

**Ayu Permata Sari**

Tan Bee Hung

Bernice Lee

Caroline Chin

Chan Sze-Wei

Chiew Peishan

Chloe Chotrani

Chong Gua Khee

Christina Chan

Dapheny Chen

**Denise Dolendo**

Eng Kai Er

Faye Lim

Felicia Lim

Gita Hastarika

Hasyimah Harith

Jonit On

Loh An Lin

Maybelle Lek

**Melissa Quek**

**Nirmala Seshadri**

Pat Toh

Petra Vossenber

Rachel Nip

Regine Phua

Retno Sulistyorini

Shanice Stanislaus

**Shermaine Heng**

Sonia Kwek

Susan Sentler

Tanya Amador

Syimah Sabtu

Valerie Lim

**Wiing Liu**

Yola Yulfianti

**Cally Spooner**

**Maggie Regale**

**Jesper List Thomsen**

Aparna Nambiar

**Brief biographies by some of the participants for da:ns lab,**

Chan Sze-Wei is a dance-maker, film-maker, writer and sometimes trouble-maker.

Felicia Lim practices dance and yoga. She loves them both!

Hasyimah Harith is interested in skin, deep breathing and chocolate.

Chong Gua Khee is a practitioner of theatre and life, and is perpetually curious about conversations (literal and abstract), encounters and the things that lie between and amongst.

Chloe Chotrani is a movement artist, writer and your local plant lady or gardener.

Anlin is a (theatre) producer, practitioner and artist.

Aparna Nambiar is a dance lover, not by choice.

Shanice Stanislaus is a clown, Zumba instructor, dance theatre practitioner and a lover of life.

Rachel Nip is a dancer, actor and choreographer who recently moved back to Singapore from San Francisco where she has been involved in community theatre and dance.

Yola Yulfianti, ya I'm Yola, I always try to make...some work. This year suddenly I'm bored with creative process that I've been doing and always do. Like technology, ya before my dance work always involve

multimedia, make dance film and also installation video. Now, I come back to my own body, start again from beginner. (flower doodle) Bernice Lee creates, performs, improvises, writes about dance. Currently she is practicing what she calls "ghosting". She works with children and their families as co-director for Rolyoly Family. She cares a lot about inequality and deals with it in her body.

Syimah Sabtu is interested to explore in the compound of an individual body. She dances. Exploring and developing her choreography methods and ideas. Interested in dance film.

Sonia Kwek is a performer, performance-maker, facilitator. Sonia likes to play and create. Collaboration and collisions (conflicts?) make her excited. Sonia is interested in the politics of the female body, the performativity of eroticism, desire vs corporeality. Sonia cannot choose between cats and dogs and loves both.

Susan Sentler is a dance/maker artist working as choreographer, teacher, researcher, director, dramaturge and performer. Her practice is multidisciplinary, anchored by a honed somatic relationship to image.

Patricia Toh is a body-based performer and performance-maker.

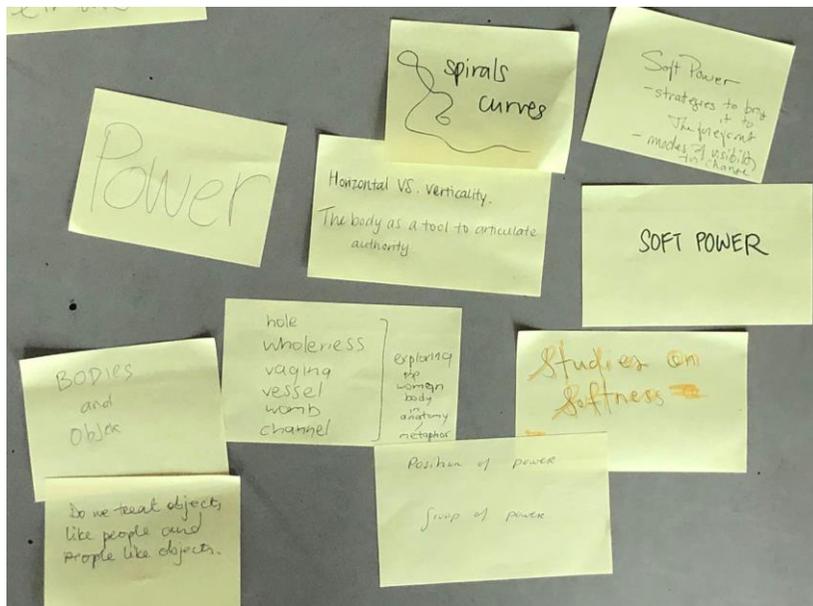
Tan Bee Hung is a dancer, choreographer, animal lover. Believes that human are natural movers and working to bring dance closer to the people and life.

Maybelle Lek is a dancer, performer, creator, teacher and collaborator. She wiggles locally and overseas, and calls it 'dance'. She thoroughly enjoys cross-disciplinary collaborations and is constantly seeking exciting challenges to try and discover her artistic voice.

Caroline Chin performs and makes performances and other things that have to do with love and humanity.

Eng Kai Er makes performances, likes to dance, and works alone too much (both by choice and by circumstance).

Tanya Michele Amador is an art curator and writer, currently writing her Master's thesis on performance art. She's passionate about artists and helping them to succeed, as well as contributing to meaningful discourse about the arts and art history in Southeast Asia.



Documented by,

**Chloe Chotrani** (1992) is movement artist based in Singapore. She is a dancer for local companies Chowk and P7:1SMA, and is an associate artist with Dance Nucleus. She holds a Post-Graduate sDiploma in Asian Art from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. She has travelled and learned dance forms and philosophies in West Africa, New York, and Southeast Asia. As a writer, she occasionally reviews dance performances for regional arts publication Arts Equator. Interdependently, her artistic practice is rooted on the *studies on softness*, which she explores as a way of life. When she is not dancing or writing, she is tending to plants in her food garden, and immersed in nature.

<https://chloechotrani.com>

**Chan Sze-Wei** (1980) blends conceptual, interactive, improvisatory and cross-cultural approaches for theatres, public spaces, video installation and film. Her work is intimate and personal, reaching for social issues, identity and gender. She has performed with contemporary dance and theatre productions in Asia and Europe and her work has been shown in Singapore, London, Kuala Lumpur, Solo, Taipei, Zagreb and Laos, as well as dance film festivals in the USA and Brazil. Her creative practice is grounded in a somatic approach focused on perception, sensation and the organic knowledge of the human body, its immediacy and its responses. She is also an advocate for the rights and sustainable careers of dancers in Singapore, and the development of artistic networks and exchange in Southeast Asia. She holds a Diploma in Dance from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and an M.A. in Contemporary Dance from London Contemporary Dance School.

<http://oddpuppies.com>





Photo of Chan Sze-Wei, with her baby



Installation of a vagina, by the participants

