

## Amanda Katherine Rath

### Concerning the "work" of art

Cemeti has recently begun to rethink the potential contained in the concept of artist-as-researcher. I want to relate this to issues of documentation and inclusion in art historical and curatorial strategies of the so-called "extra-art" or "non-art-world" bits involved in art making processes.<sup>1</sup> These processes have their own, often hidden histories. Because of space constraints, I will deal (in a general manner) with processes in the production of "process-oriented art projects" that result in art-objects (i.e. installation art, three dimensional assemblage/found-object art) intended to be presented to the public.

Field notes 14 May 2002: *Went over to Mella's to see her new works-in-progress. Today she was assisted by Ami, a sister of Tri, if I'm not mistaken, who helps with the kids. The work is done over mundane conversations, through a series of interruptions as kids come home, visitors drop by... Using basic thread and needle, they devised a way of sewing together moth cocoons roughly the size of a walnut into shapes similar to the kerudung/ armor forms Mella has used in the last few years. The cocoons look precious gold color and filigree like surface of holes where the fibers don't meet. But it feels like the hide of an animal, thick enough to protect the internal processes of metamorphosis. The materials and the hand-made-ness of her work highlight the importance she places on process... It's time consuming, ambitious. One of her helpers modeled an unfinished piece. Looks like a cocoon itself, a woman-made one, mimicking many of the same visual characteristics of its small prototype.*

Nindityo's concept that an

artist is a researcher maintains that an artist's power to effect the world around them and mediate events is not so much in the things they make, but in the *how* they make them; a large part of the "work" of art is in the processes of its production. In this context, the notion of artist-as-researcher presents us an ideal: processes of making art should reveal rather than hide the artist's own power to translate/interpret from within a certain frame.

This has involved attempts to redeem the artist's previously devalued position of either-"makers of pretty-yet-useless-things", or as outside observers pointing moralizing fingers at (other) segments of society. This redemption partially entails the de-specialization of the artist-as-creator to the "more democratic" concept of the *tukang* whose work relies upon collaborative/collective processes.

Field notes 18 June 2002:  
*Thoughts after meeting with Nindit. Many of Cemeti's projects contemporary art practices (process-oriented practices) as existing in a state of apparent contradiction at the threshold between the art-world / non-art-world, process / product, art work / artifact, etc. And it is within this unsettled contradictory state that Cemeti's projects consistently question not only what art is, but also what art can do... However, based on just what is observable here in the Yogya art scene, (an observation shared among many here), behind the assertion of collectivity stands conflicts of culture, class, and ethnic identity and the struggle over who has the right to interpret who and what.*

It is in this social relationship of "collectivity" that the concept of artist-as-researcher also presents us

with another contingency. First let's not confuse between participation and collaboration, even though these two words are often used interchangeably as if these two concepts were the same thing. Although both participatory and collaborative efforts in the making of art can be considered "collective acts", they are not equally "democratic" (acquiring authority).

While a process-oriented art practice offers more balanced relations between artist and participant/viewer, real collaboration and the apparent autonomy given to a participant/viewer is often undermined by the persistent authority of the artist and institutions, who retain (hidden) control over the process, content and form. In varying degrees then, participatory processes can and often do suppress the artistic talents of the participants, while at the same time can bring us to new kinds of awareness. On the other hand, by allowing participants to contribute to the process, artwork, performance, etc., the processes of making art and the artworks become "collaborative" (more democratic) as these evolve through the contributions of collaborating participants. This isn't the utopian loss of artist-as-specialist suggested in the often used concept "anyone can be an artist". Although collaboration does not replace the artist possessing certain skills, it also does not suppress the artistic talents of others. It brings these together to negotiate terms as part of the process, representation, interpretation, etc.

Field notes 17 May 2002: *Went with Mella to [Kaliurang] in search of gold cocoons of the moth that lives in cashew- and advocado trees... We arrived at the house / workshop around 11 a.m.*



Listened while the young entrepreneur and his very pregnant wife explained how the rather large caterpillar *Attacus Atlas* spins their nests and emerges as a big earth colored moth (the size of a small bird)... The front of the house is a showroom filled with objects made from cocoons, as well as silk textiles. A group of young women sat in a small circle assembling gold cocoons into flower shapes to be sold as *kenangan*. Upon seeing us, their [the girls'] gossip turned into giggles and jokes about the *buleh*... We went back to *Yogya* with two kilos strapped to the motorbike's handle bars (each kilo filled a large rice sack). Interesting to see how *Mella* interacts with the people from whom she gets her materials. She is interested in the context of these materials, where they come from, how they are "usually" used, who is involved in the distribution of the materials. Much of this context of the materials is all but invisible in the context of both *Mella's* interest in identity and identity-markers, as well as the prejudices, social structures and codes behind images-that-identify.<sup>2</sup>

If the artist, the process, and their participants/collaborators are invisible, present only in their surrogate of the art work, we can't detect crucial factors in the collaborative or participatory effort which effected the artist's translation, i.e. their institutional biases, their negotiations with the collective network.<sup>3</sup> In short, we lose sight of the processes of production. Generally speaking, this is because what are most often included in exhibitions are not the processes of art production but the art-objects. The art object, performance, installation, etc., function as a condensed and highly edited synthesis of an artist's

experiences while "in the field" collecting data (i.e. found objects). Very often then, the artist's authority to interpret life and others for "us" is not really questioned.<sup>4</sup>

Many artists emphasize the collective aspects in their art practices that depend on a network of skills and knowledge. For his recent exhibitions *Nindityo Adipurnomo* documented this aspect and integrated it into the exhibition as a whole (e.g. *Helmet Your Art, Helmet Your Earth, Helmet Your Heart*). The question is the degree to which the process is participatory or collaborative.<sup>5</sup> It should be said that *Cemeti's* similar curatorial approach contributes to a broader reassessment of the relationship between art production and "real life", the study of how art really "works" through the transformation of its processes of production, and as existing in the threshold between the art and non-art world. For example, in *Yose's Komunitas Bunyi* and *Tisna Sanjaya's Sepak Bola dan Kesenian untuk Kedamaian*, the non-art-world participants were largely in control over the outcome of the "performance" and "art idea".

Crucial to recuperating the history of processes as markers to process-oriented art's socially transformative potential is the act of documentation, which is itself connected with problems of interpretation.<sup>6</sup> Such documentation can at least help ensure the continuation of contributions to a highly diverse, more democratic/collective symbolic space of global art history, rather than just participation in perpetuating canons. What would an art history be like that not only recuperated histories of the processes of the "modes of production", but also the biographies

of the found-objects and other fragments from life contained therein the crucial factors in the collaborative or participatory effort which effected the artist's translation?<sup>7</sup>

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#### (Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup>This article is based on a part of my dissertation (in progress) which is the result of field research (2000-2002). My research would not have been possible without the generous funding by the Fulbright Hays Research Fellowship, Fulbright Hays Pre-dissertation Field Research Fellowship, the Sage Graduate School (Cornell University) Fellowship, and a research/travel grant from the Dept. of the History of Art and Archaeology, Cornell University.

<sup>2</sup>[ ] implies something added after field work was completed.

<sup>3</sup> Performance art complicates this even further as it is both process and object. Most performances are participatory rather than collaborative as the audience is expected to "participate" within the frame of the artist's idea. Performance also leaves no traces of itself except in the form of its documentation.

<sup>4</sup> Although some artists in Indonesia critique their own power to interpret through their art work, in art discussions, seminars, and printed debates it is usually the institutionalized power of the art critic, curator, archive, and historian which is criticized.

<sup>5</sup> This is not to suggest that one is "better" than the other. It is to highlight the various degrees between the two positions of participating and collaborating, and to what extent the artists want to make it a part of their work or not.

<sup>6</sup> The document (i.e. photo) is also a surrogate body. This points again to another's power to represent others, to edit information.

<sup>7</sup> "In doing the biography of a thing, one would ask similar questions to those one would ask of people: What, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in its 'status' (as thing, trash, art, etc.) and in the period and culture, and how are these possibilities realized? Where does the 'thing' come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized [stages] or periods in the thing's 'life' and what are the cultural markers for them?"



What happens when the thing is taken out of phase in its normal use?" Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 68.

This approach is especially pertinent regarding the strategic redemption of the low, the discarded, and the imperfect, as part of many artists and art space's strategies of a social overturning. For a discussion concerning the aesthetics strategies behind the use of "trash" in the artwork of artists working in poorer countries, see Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, "Narrativizing Visual Culture: Toward Polycentric Aesthetics," in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzeoff (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

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## Gridthiya Jaeb Gaweewong

On Indonesian alternative spaces:  
a far perspective from Thailand

15 years of maintaining a private art space is a long time in the art world. It is amazing how Nindit and Mella juggle their time between managing an art space, raising their children and maintaining careers as international artists. With the help of friends and colleagues, Cemeti has grown from an alternative art space to include an art foundation. It has become an *institution* in itself which has inspired other fledgling artist-run spaces around the country to forge their own "alternatives to Cemeti". How did Cemeti do it? And why? What kind of motivation sustains them? In the art field, like other fields, only the strongest survive. Over the course of the last 15 years, Cemeti has demonstrated their staying power in the midst of political, economic and social turbulence.

My first hand experience with Indonesian artists and curators began in 1996 with Arahmaiani's arrival as a performance artist in residency in Bangkok, with the BBB project (Bangkok, Berlin, Bandung), and as a guest of Dr. Apinan Poshyananda at Chulalongkorn University. That was an exciting year for the art and culture scene in Bangkok, although one of the worst years for Thailand's economy. It was the time of the Tomyamkung Syndrome, one of the starting points of the Southeast Asian economic crash. Nonetheless, we were successful in widening the scope of the arts in the public field as a way of redefining the notion of the public. Many of the activities intervened with public spaces. For example, Navin made a taxi cab into a roaming art gallery in which passengers were exposed to artworks while they rode through the streets to their destinations. About *Café/About*

Studio wove itself into the fabric of Chinatown's seedy areas, while Tadu Art Gallery was erected on Royal City Avenue, right next door to night clubs and bars (now on the move, and looking for a new venue). Arahmaiani was a key organizing member of the Huaykwang Mega City project, an ad-hoc artists' initiative which temporarily took over certain urban ruins in Bangkok. This one night event made an impact on the art scene. It brought together both young and established artists who then exhibited their works in public spaces. It allowed them to do something off-the-wall, and re-created a true sense of an alternative art space. This experience was a good reminder for artists that we share similar problems and can find solutions by working together in finding alternative methods that serve our own various contexts.

Two years later in Japan, Rizki Zaelani and I spent a lot of time together as we shared the same adviser, Shimizu Toshio, a former artistic director of Art Tower Mito, in Ibaraki. Shimizu organized workshops about curatorial practice in Thailand and Indonesia through the sponsorship of the Japan Foundation. Participating curators from Thailand and Indonesia were invited to Japan. I joined the Indonesian team: Nindit, Rifki, Asikin, Ningsih, Indra, Yudhi, Wayan Sika, Wati and Rizki.

It was interesting for me to learn about the Indonesian art scene and curatorial practices. Although the workshop was brief, I got a sense of the scene enough to know that we all shared similar problems concerning the lack of a viable art infrastructure, and a lack of professionalism and public support for the arts. At that time, there were not so many galleries promoting

so-called "experimental art" as much as Cemeti did. In the catalogue of Fukuoka Triennale, Shimizu in pointing to similarities among the workshop participants stated that "these young curators did not possess a strong interest in building a large museum, or constructing a massive international contemporary art exhibition, but rather had greater interest in deepening communication through art."<sup>1</sup>

Even though we, as the younger generation of artists and curators, were interested in the concept of "communication through art", we failed to fully address the relation of "connection and communication." The usual reason given was our mutual problem of the restraint of time and money. Although Indonesian and Thai artists and curators always rub shoulders in major art shows, communication among ourselves was long in developing and relied heavily on the mediation of these international and regional art events, as well as through other curators. We can see this beginning in exhibitions such as the *Queensland Asia Pacific Triennial*, *Fukuoka Triennial*, *Havana Biennale*, *Cities on the Move*, *Gwangju Biennale*, and the regional shows like *Asian Modernism, Tradition/Tension* and the recent project *Under Construction*. *Under Construction* was supposed to provide a space for collaborative work among artists from the region, but this did not happen in practice. An exceptional collaborative project was between the Thai curator Apinan Poshyananda, and the Indonesian artist Heri Dono whose works were exhibited at the Japan Foundation Forum (1999). I wonder if such an extraordinary case would be possible again.



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What's the difference between running an alternative space in the U.S., or Indonesia, or Thailand? There is quite a big difference because unlike in the First World where alternative art spaces emerged during the 1960s, alternative spaces in the Third World are often the only art spaces. The reasons for the need of alternative spaces in Asia might therefore be different from the West. In a Southeast Asian context, alternative spaces were not developed out of an anti-institution political stance, but rather because of the lack of art spaces in general. But what happened when the alternative became the "new mainstream" and when the alternative spaces became "the establishment"? What happened to the rest?

It was interesting to see how the transfer of cultural power resembled political and economical power. The rise of alternative art spaces in Indonesia, for example, were the direct and indirect result of Dutch funding agencies such as Rijksacademie. Nindit went to that school in the mid 1980's and returned to Yogyakarta to initiate the artist run space, Cemeti Art House. Ade Dermawan and his friends received seed money from the Rijksacademie to start their cooperative Ruang Rupa in Jakarta, and became actively involved in the Rijksacademie funded RAIN network, a South-South hemisphere collaboration project among the Rijks alumni. The recently established art space Fabriek in Bandung, conceptualized by Softwan and supervised by Asmudjo Irianto, as also funded by a foreign organization, in this case the Japan Foundation. Fabriek is part of the larger international initiative *Under Construction*, which

like RAIN, both serves local need for their own art space and forms part of an international network.

As dubious as the motives behind funding by these two countries may prove to be, the Netherlands and Japan still play quite an important role as art patrons to the Indonesian art scene. Similarly, American foundations have recently begun pouring funding into the Mekong region (to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam). To some extent artistic and cultural development gain an advantage from this kind of "sin money" from the previous colonizers in developing their countries. Somebody once said that "no money is clean," but should we be more dignified or should we just let go? This question of complicity is always in our minds from an administrative standpoint. However, for those of us who live in a situation where there is no internal infrastructure, can we afford to raise this kind of ethical question? Or simply should we live with it or die? *Seems like we have no alternative!*

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**(Footnotes)**

<sup>1</sup> Shimizu Toshio, Communication for the sake of the Arts of Asia, Catalogue, Fukuoka Triennale, 1999, p. 283

The question of art institution's relevance is becoming increasingly crucial and urgent today. In our age, art equates art event. If the artwork is to be effectively presented, it needs to be part of an art event. We are now living in a society of communication. Spectacle is the form. The spectacle, or the event, is the very horizon and the bottom line of "reality." To hold an event, the institution is an indispensable physical condition. More importantly, it is also the ideological foundation. What kind of institution should be created is now the crucial question. This is because the institution is the central element in the power system, or mechanism, that defines the notion and the boundary of art itself. "Where do you show your work?" has become a more telling question than "What kind of work do you make?"

The question of the global versus the local is now the central issue in artistic and cultural debates. However, the global and the local are not separate entities positioned to fight against each other. Instead, they are two sides of the same coin. They are mutually binding and stimulate each other, creating a continuously changing and increasingly open world. There is no global without the local. The two are deeply interwoven and from their merging new differences arise. In this process of producing new localities the global is constantly being reformulated as a "summary" of the multitude of singular new localities. No place in the world today is immune from this turbulent movement. It makes our lives much more exciting, and of course, challenging. Art and cultural activities are driving forces of this formidable transformation, and they typically

embody all the advantages and all the problems of this global-local negotiation. Every event should result in the production of new localities in the context of globalisation. Cultural differences and diversities are produced by positioning the event directly in the local context. Discourse on cultural differences especially those of non-Westerners and their equal right to exist in and influence the global scene seems to be the commonly accepted new virtue. The production of new localities in order to make them significant in the modern world, or to generate different modernities, is the very root and aim of the actions of artists, from different parts of the world, participating in the "global scene."

Further, it internally challenges and alters the established definition and boundary of art itself because it tends to be (1) multi-transdisciplinary, (2) multi-transcultural, and (3) a merging of art and real life to generate new distinctions between private and public spaces. This generates new paradigms of art language, which is by nature immaterial, fluid, flexible, ephemeral, and constantly changing. These paradigms echo the current geopolitical situation in which the Empire exists in a virtual but real, fluid, and omnipresent network, in a shifting in-between space that thrives on the hybridity and conflicts of cultures and identities. This should be capable of carrying out efficient strategies of critique, resistance, and transgression against the hegemonic power of the Empire. However, the mainstream "global art world," or the dominant art institutions, still remain in the high-modernist tradition of the white cube and post-minimalist, post-conceptualist

forms. This "transcendent" physicality constitutes a hegemonic ideology and practice paradigm. This centralized power controls the definition, the boundary, of contemporary art and propagates it across the world as if it were the "universal truth," the only legitimate way, of "global" art.

Against such a background, resistance to this hegemony becomes necessary and urgent, especially in places where new local identities are facing the pressure of globalising power. This resistance naturally generates and articulates new forms of action and organization fundamentally different from those of the establishment. In fact, a great number of initiatives already have been launched and promoted, and they strongly emphasize the philosophy of "Do-It-Yourself." Indeed, DIY communities and self-organizations are the main source of sustainability, the main force in the revival and continued development of today's post-planning cities. The creation and development of alternative art spaces is a perfect example. Hakim Bey's Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ) shifts constantly between the existing centre and the periphery, creating a kind of "emptiness" that subverts the established order. T.A.Z., according to Hakim Bey, is "a certain kind of 'free enclave' resisting to the mainstream, State power structure. It's 'an essay ('attempt'), a suggestion, almost a poetic fancy" that encourages "uprising", or, "insurrection" against the State power. It is situated beyond all kinds of established forms of organization and acts like guerrilla uprising. "The TAZ is like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of



imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, *before* the State can crush it." It is invisible, always shifting, "a microcosm of that 'anarchist dream' of a free culture." "The TAZ is an encampment of guerrilla ontologist: strike and run away." "The TAZ has a temporary but actual location in time and a temporary but actual location in space. But clearly it must also have 'location' in the Web..." In the end, "The TAZ is somewhere. It lies at the intersection of many forces, like some pagan power spot at the junction of mysterious ley-lines, visible to the adept in seemingly unrelated bits of terrain, landscape, flows of air, water, animals." It can bring about ultimate liberation "on the condition that we already know ourselves as free beings."

This approach resonates with the current global economic system, which is moving toward a new perspective that focuses on productivity rather than the production of objects. Driven by the development of new technologies, conventional modes of production and consumption have been altered and substituted by new paradigms. In different locales around the world, new autonomous zones of economic activities are being established that resist and at the same time contribute to the globalisation of dominant modes of production. These zones become an oppositional yet actively participatory force against the domination of state and global economic superpowers. Self-organizations such as international NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) are now counterparts to the established bureaucratic order, in which trans-national and global corporations push for the disintegration of national and continental borders and

for the dissolution of state sovereignty. Under the imperial mantle of the new global economic-political power structure, the immediate challenge is how to preserve freedom of speech, to encourage critique, and to promote different modes of living and thinking. Anti-globalisation movements incarnated by the protests in Seattle, Genoa and currently in Johannesburg on the occasions of international conferences on economic development, ecological crisis, AIDS and other globally urgent issues are the most spectacular events of this kind of struggle while more down-to-earth, everyday actions are being carried out by NGO's across the world. These claims and struggles for economic and political transformation have a direct cultural consequence: it reveals the necessity of searching for and creating alternatives to the established cultural institution. This is particularly obvious when the economic and social tensions become explosive. Latin American countries have been suffering from regular economic and social crises in the last decade due to the imposition of ultra-liberal policies by the mainstream global economic institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). The current collapse of Argentina's economy is the most dramatic symptom of the crisis. Today, 60% of Argentinians are living below the line of poverty. To survive, highly interestingly, they organise themselves to develop a parallel and alternative economic exchange system, the "Trueque" (barter). "Trueque Clubs" are being formed across the country in which people are exchanging consumer goods and services with tickets of "creditos" instead of the official currency that only very few can have access to.

This is becoming unexpectedly successful in terms of social solidarity. As a resistance model, it is no doubt an inspiring example for us to think about economic, social and even cultural alternatives facing the pressure of globalisation. Even more interesting and inspiring is that some artists have already imagined and explored this alternative possibility in their projects before the Argentina crisis in order to re-endow art with its social engagement. The Colombian-Spanish group "Cambalache Collective" (with "unfixed" members like Carolina Caycedo, Adriana Garcia and Federico Guzman), in their "Museo de la Calle (the Street Museum)", started from Bogota in 1998 and active in many different cities in the world today, propose to the public to exchange their objects as the centre of their "installation/performance". This promotes "the idea of non-monetary exchange and barter as economic and cultural activities parallel to the mainstream...It also allows us to question the nature of social and human relationships in today's context dominated by money and market." The Danish artist Jens Haaning, for his exhibition in Friart, Fribourg, Switzerland, last year, imported consumer goods from neighbouring countries where the taxes were much lower than in Switzerland and sold them at the original prices. The public can buy the same goods at a significantly lower prices than the normal prices in Switzerland. This clearly defies the legal system dictated by the monetary policy of the country. Equally concerned with the question of economic inequality, the Thai artist Surasi Kusolwong has been setting up markets of plastic goods imported from Thailand in European



art institutions. The public can buy these goods, "imported" as art objects, at the "Minimal price" with great joy...in the meantime, questions of cultural differences, economic inequalities, social solidarity and global-local conflict, etc. are clearly brought up. These artists respond to the continuous social crisis of political-economic struggles, bringing to the fore conflicts between the concepts-strategies of immediacy/multiplicity and the stability of established norms. They have proposed new solutions to the global-capitalist problem. Similar to the above-mentioned examples, at the 2002 *Gwangju Biennale*, the Mexico City-based artist-run gallery and working group Kurimanzutto realized a wonderful project that is extremely relevant to the non-western economic and social context. Ironically calling their piece "Friendly Capitalism", they set up a space with a blue carpet and a photocopy machine inside the exhibition hall. They made photocopies of the official Biennale catalogue and sold them to the public at a much lower price. By miming the piracy of information products, something largely welcomed by the local public as a means of access to information and new technologies, Kurimanzutto hit upon a fundamental problem in the logic of capitalist systems of production and communication. In fact, piracy and other alternative economic activities are the most efficient, and very often, the only available means for people from the non-West to access technological and economic progress

To explore the issues of economic exchange, cultural difference and hybridity in contemporary art, one must first and foremost consider the need to create alternative contexts,

namely institutions, for art activity. Asia-Pacific provides a dynamic example of this transition in terms of integrating itself in the globalisation process and reinventing different modernities. The unprecedented speed of modernization and democratisation of society in this region has led to self-discovery and to a search for autonomous modes of living, thinking, and expression that stand in contrast to conservative and hegemonic political systems and social values. There are enthusiastic and fervent demands to put contemporary art from this region on the global map. This is achieved through two intimately linked directives: the creation of new infrastructures and conditions inside the region for the activities, and the exportation of these activities outside the region, especially in renowned "international arenas" such as major biennials and museums. This encourages the artists living in the region to develop new strategies, the most significant tendency being the creation and propagation of self-organized alternative spaces run by the art community. Some individual artists like Judy Freya Sibayan from the Philippines and Tsuyoshi Ozawa have been developing their "global networks" of nomad "institutions" such as "Scapular Galleries" and "Nasubi Galleries" to provide alternative spaces for the art world to manifest their imaginations and creativities beyond the established system. Other artists, working in more collective and communitarian manners, organise themselves together to set up self-organisations and exhibition spaces, etc. These organizations are extremely diverse, responding to the specific cultural, economic, and political

conditions of their own localities and identifying the very need to be different. This new movement, from the very beginning, was born from the process of artists engaging themselves in the creation of new urban spaces and life styles in light of the impact of urban expansion, the most essential aspect of Asia-Pacific's modernization. Almost all self-organized artists' groups and spaces emerge in cities and evolve in their negotiations for particular positions in the urban life. They are often physically small, flexible, and continuously adapting to the conditions driven by urban development. Alternative spaces such as IT Park (Taipei), Para-site (Hong Kong), Project 304 (Bangkok), Loft (Beijing), About Café (Bangkok), Big Sky Mind (Manila), Plastic Kinetic Worms (Singapore), Loop (Seoul), Pool (Seoul), Cemeti Art House (Yogyakarta), and Ruangrupa (Jakarta) are located in the historic centers of their cities and effectively influence the surrounding communities. Other groups such as Big Tail Elephants (Guangzhou), U-kabat (Bangkok), APA (Kuala Lumpur), and Forum A (Seoul), being more "immaterial," practice urban-guerrilla strategies by occupying temporary spaces in their cities. They all, however, share an interest in new technologies and related cultural strategies as active reactions to the demands of the epoch. Numerous alternative spaces and groups have focused on such a direction. Videotage (Hong Kong) and Movelfund (Manila) are influential bases for experimental video and film production and organizers of multimedia festivals. Project 304 presents the biannual *Bangkok Experimental Film Festival*. In the meantime, a new generation is



actively forging the new Asian youth culture and new forms of expression, which are deeply rooted in the culture of consumption (advertising, etc.) yet highly critical of this “raw reality.” The complex, often contradictory, relations between artists and their social conditions, especially the institutional infrastructure, have led these artists to an understanding of the need to develop different visions and methods of contemporary art creation. This further pushes them to promote different ways of defining contemporary art.

For various reasons, ranging from personal to economic, from social-political to strategic, these alternative spaces are constantly appearing, evolving, and disappearing, and ultimately transform themselves into different modes of practice. This is precisely the essence of the new paradigm of “institution”: always moving, flexible, changing, and reinventing itself. These spaces have also formed a trans-regional network to exchange their experiences and to reinforce their common power base. Meetings and conferences among the various groups in Asian cities are regularly organized. Information, experiences, and visions are published, exchanged, and distributed. Many of these groups have also established wider, transcontinental collaborations with artist-run organizations in Europe, North and South America, and elsewhere. The Project 1 of 2002 *Gwangju Biennale* is perhaps the most important summit for such networking so far. It manifested the immense potential power of this new paradigm of art infrastructures and action modes. This new paradigm has of artists. In turn, it is deeply informing and transforming both the notion of art

and the practices of artists. New languages and issues are hence created and experimented with. This further influences the global scene. If there is an irresistible drive to present truly global contemporary creations in international events beyond the traditional Western paradigm the most crucial shift that we should make is first to learn how to present such a paradigm mutation. We need veritable new initiatives and alternatives. It is the time for them.

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