

THESIS

Analysing Socially Engaged Art from an Individual Level:

Wochenklausur, Rebuild Foundation and Hong Kong House in Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale

Submitted by

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Abstract

Since the 1980s, there has been an increase in socially-engaged art (SEA) projects. In contrast to conventional, decorative, and expressive art, this kind of artwork usually aims at creating actual social changes. Scholars have suggested theories to explain how such changes are made possible on a macro level. However, none of these works aim at addressing the relationship between an individual experience and social impact. As a result, theoretical analyses of SEA's social impact often relegates individual participants involved in the project to the margins. This dissertation suggests the importance of addressing individual experiences so that their voices may not be subjected to "policing" by intellectual discourses.

In this dissertation, I first argue that in the discussion of the arts and social change, focusing on individual experience is not a new invention since there was a concern of individual sense before the 19th Century. I then argue that during the era of industrialisation, more theorists began to concern themselves with how the arts may influence abstract entities such as class and ideology instead of individuals. This trend continues until now to the debate of SEA. Theorists and practitioners of SEA nowadays rarely see unique individuals as subjects. However, there are also exceptional cases, such as Adrian Piper and Joseph Beuys. Since the former takes her reference from Kant and the latter echoes with Schiller, I argue that it is possible for us to return to the individual by learning from the German Idealists.

I then present 3 case studies: The Hong Kong House in Echigo Tsumari Art Field, the Rebuild Foundation, and the Wochenklausur. The first two case studies are done through an ethnographic approach. Through interviewing people involved in the projects, I show in the Hong Kong House study that by looking at individual experience in the communication process, it is possible to see communication as a complex process of which different participants have different intentions and desired outcomes. I also show how the presence of

the interpreter can have a significant change in the communication process. I end the chapter by asking a question: How does this nuanced communication process affect the art form of the artist Annie Wan presented in the Hong Kong House? In the second case study of the Rebuild Foundation, I show how listening to individual voices is different from the currently prevailing research methods and how the method I argue for can generate new perspectives. I highlight the importance of seeing individuals not only as entities which only exist in relation to the SEA project but also real people who have their own lives before, during and after experiencing the SEA artwork. I also ask if there is a way to illustrate the mechanism of change in this project to understand better how such change is possible. In the case study of Wochenklausur, I present an interview with the artist group, which discusses their strategy of creating social impact. From this interview, I review the framing of practices of Wochenklausur as examples of dialogical art. I ask: is it possible to reconsider the artist group's strategy from an individual-level thinking?

In Chapter 6, I attempt to answer the 3 questions I asked in the case studies. I argue that to answer these questions, one may reconceptualise “antagonism”, which has been theorised by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and integrated into the SEA debate by Claire Bishop. I explain that one cannot directly employ the concept theorised by these theorists because their versions of antagonism are not intended to be used for individual analysis. As a result, I attempt to redefine the concept so that it can be used to answer the three questions I raised. To redefine antagonism for individual-level analysis, I also rethink concepts including the subject and discourse. I show how, by applying the concept of individual-level antagonism, that the three questions lead us to three results: that how an interpreter works can have a significant impact on the outcome of SEA (the Hong Kong House); that it is possible to create social change even if SEA does not create antagonism (the Rebuild Foundation); and

that Wochenklausur creates social impact by creating an alternative reality which shows that changing the society is indeed possible. I conclude that it is both valid and instrumental to conduct an individual-level analysis for SEA research.

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I have not changed my Facebook profile picture once in my years as a PhD student. It is a photo of the 2016 Fishball Revolution in Hong Kong. It is a reminder to me that there are people who are in jail while I have the freedom to pursue my study. Every day I think about how my studies can contribute to my beloved country. Fight for freedom, stand with Hong Kong.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Disconnection Between Individual Experience and Social Change

A performance event titled “UFrogO invade Hong Kong House” (Or simply UFrogO), was held in an old school building on 24th February 2018 in Tsunan, Niigata, Japan.¹ In the building there was a meeting room. In the meeting room, a strangely dressed man was facing six ladies who lived nearby. The ladies had been told that they were going to meet an artist called “Frog King” from Hong Kong, without knowing what would happen next.

No one knew what would happen next. Not even the artist himself.

Before the event, Frog King and his team had placed many items on a table between the artist and the ladies. Those items included traditional snacks and small accessories from Hong Kong, and Chinese calligraphy prints by Frog King.

Frog King, with the help of translators, started to introduce himself:

“I want to make connections between Hong Kong and Tsunan people . . . I am a wild man. I am not polite like you. I use a primitive way to communicate with you.”

The ladies, sitting up straight, with their hands resting on their laps, nodded to the artist.

All of a sudden, Frog King shouted “Happy New Year!” and then started to throw the items on the table at the ladies. Throwing things at people is definitely not a polite way to communicate with strangers in Japan. The ladies, shocked by the artist’s act, were not sure how to react at first. However, as Frog King kept on throwing items at them, they started to react with laughter. In the 30-minute-encounter, the ladies kept on receiving gifts that they have mostly never seen. The ladies asked the artist team what those gifts were, but the team members were instructed by the artist not to answer in detail. (“They are just candies. They

¹ UFrogO is a part of the Hong Kong House project in Echigo Tsumari Art Field (ETAF) in Niigata, Japan.

are just art.”) The ladies also asked about the meaning of the words on the calligraphy prints, but all they got were ambiguous answers. (“Those are Chinese calligraphy, about food, about happiness.”)

After the event, the ladies said goodbye to the artist and moved to another room. They tasted and discussed the snacks. They said that they had just experienced “shock”.



Frog King (the one with a big hat in the middle) and his audience (credit: Tinshui Yeung)



Frog King and his audience (credit: Tinshui Yeung)

I was a member and a researcher of the artist team at the performance. I am interested in the classical question in the arts²: Can the arts change our world? Certainly, this question is too large to ask in UFrogO. Nevertheless, we may narrow it down by asking, “can UFrogO change the Tsunan community?” or “can UFrogO create social impact?”

Although this question is seemingly simple, it seems that it is difficult to be answered by employing currently available major theories of Socially Engaged Art (SEA), of which I refer to a collective of artistic practices with social emphasis.³ It is because, in this small scale

² Here I use “the arts” instead of art to express that I am not only interested in visual art in this question, but also other art forms such as literature and theatre.

³ These practices are sometimes called “Socially Engaged Practice”, “Social Practice”, “New Genre Public Art” etc. (e.g. Lacy, 1995; Kester, 2004; Finkelpearl, 2013; Jackson, 2011; Bishop, 2012; Thompson, 2012. See also Cartiere & Zebracki, 2016). The definition of “Socially Engaged Art” is a contested topic. In artist Pablo Helguera’s handbook *Education for Socially Engaged Art* (2011), SEA is defined as “a hybrid, multi-disciplinary activity that exists somewhere between art and non-art, and its state may be permanently unresolved. SEA depends on actual—not imagined or hypothetical—social action.” (pp.8) Curator Nato Thompson (2012) defines SEA as “cultural practices [which] indicate a new social order—ways of life that emphasise participation, challenge power, and span disciplines ranging from urban planning and community work to theater and the visual arts” (pp.19). In his book *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art From 1991-2011*, he includes projects such as “When Faith Moves Mountains” (Francis Alys, 2002), “They

project of which only a few participants are involved, it seems that it is important to look at the experience of the participants, and how this experience may be connected to the possibility of change. However, most of the SEA theories are not intended to be employed to discuss individual experience (Jacob, 2016; Bell, 2017). By individual, I do not mean only the audience or participants, but also means every single individual involved in an SEA project. These individuals include members of the inner public, outer public (Wodiczko, 2015), the staff, the artist, and even the interpreter between the artist and the engaged community (as I will discuss in Chapter 3). The list varies from project to project, but it is pretty easy to recognise: Whoever relates to the project can be considered as individuals. The lack of theories to understand the relationship between individuals and change can hinder our analysis of SEA projects, especially mini projects such as the UFrog.

From my observation, what is related to the lack of theories to study individual experience in SEA is the lack of concern of individual voices in SEA analysis. For example, as I will show in Chapter 4, one of the most well-known SEA projects, the Rebuild Foundation in Chicago, has tens of literature, but as far as I can find, none of them has ever tried to focus on the voice of the individuals. Instead, these research arguments are made mainly through employing sociological and cultural theories as well as formal analysis of the project as an artwork. There are various reasons behind this phenomenon. One of them is suggested by the curator Mary Jane Jacob, who wrote that Western culture “has long ago cast this way of knowing aside” (2016, pp.256). Another one is suggested by the sociologists Law, Ruppert & Savage (2011), who argue that critical theory has a “theoreticist orientation to knowledge” which resist empirical data such as individual voice (pp.3). One more reason, which is suggested by

Shoot Horses” (Phil Collins, 2004) and “Flood” (Haha, 1992-1995). I will not go into detail of the definition debate here. What I want to highlight is that, very often, creating change is a goal for socially engaged artists.

sociologist Mike Savage, is that an intellectual division of labour which dominated research and social thought was formed in the trend of rationalism VS romanticism in the 19th Century, that “scientific expertise” takes care of empirical inquiry, while humanities discuss ideological questions such as “the ultimate goals and values of life” (2013, pp.14).⁴ A detailed investigation of this phenomenon is out of the scope of this dissertation. What I want to show is that many researchers prefer theoretical debate instead of looking at actual experience of individuals in the field of SEA research.

2. Why Is It Important to Concern Individual Experience?

I argue in this part that this disconnection between individual experience and social change in the field of SEA can be problematic.

Firstly, it is because we can lose many details if we neglect the experience of individuals. Society is formed by individuals. It implies that social change must involve individual change, be it the change of a powerful individual in the hierarchy, or the change of thoughts of members of the mass. Details of individual experience are especially relevant for social change enacted by art, because artistic experience is highly subjective. No matter how similar two people are in terms of social class and ideologies, it is common that their reception to an artwork is totally different. Many details will certainly be lost if we group all these individuals together as abstract entities like “audience” or the “proletariat”.⁵

Secondly, it is a matter of politics to concern individual experience. This point echoes with the concern of equality by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière. In 1969, he criticised the

⁴ Other possible reasons include that social science is less reluctant to discuss experience as it is more subjective than hard facts; and the preoccupation of instrumental impacts has marginalised the significance of individual experience (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016, pp.22).

⁵ Philosopher Thomas Nagel’s *What Is it Like to Be a Bat?* (1974) formulated the “subjective character of experience”, which claimed that “every subjective phenomenon is essentially connected with a single point of view” (pp.437). As a result, by looking at this “single point of view”, it is possible to obtain insight which is not reduced or muted by current discourses and theories.

general Marxist assumption that the intellectual ability of people is determined by their class (2011).⁶ For Rancière, this is problematic because it essentially labels certain negative characters to the working-class, while in fact those labels may not be true. This labelling problem can be further illustrated in Rancière's work *Proletarian Nights*⁷ (2012, originally published as *La Nuit des Proletaires* in 1981). This work is a study of the archive of workers movement. Rancière's original goal was to investigate the authentic working-class culture. This goal essentially assumes that there is a coherent working-class which owns a coherent culture. Nevertheless, in the end, what he encountered was that the culture of the workers are of great variety. In some cases, what they did was more similar to so-called the "bourgeois" culture rather than that of the working-class. Therefore Rancière wrote: "In many cases, we have a tendency to interpret as collective practice or class 'ethos' political statements which are in fact highly individualized. We attach too much importance to the collectivity of workers and not enough to its divisions" (1983, pp.10). For Rancière this is a political question because this collective understanding of workers involves the distribution of the sensible⁸, which is about who can be seen and heard. In this sense, ignoring individuals can mean politically policing their voices, leading to a problem concerning equality.

I argue that what Rancière worries more or less reflects what is happening now in the field of SEA analysis. In many arguments in SEA, individuals are usually considered as unspecified collectives (e.g. the participants, the artists, the audience) who are often seen as only exist in relation to the artwork, rather than real people who have their own lives and thoughts before encountering the SEA artwork, and their own experience of the artwork, and will continue

⁶ That is to say, the workers are assumed to be unable to understand the class struggle, therefore they have to be taught, or directed by intellectuals (mostly philosophers) in order to gain the possibility of revolution.

⁷ Formerly named as *Nights of Labor*.

⁸ In Rancière's word, "I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it" (2004, pp.22).

their life after leaving the artwork. But everyone does have her/his life, as one of the interviewees in my case study of Theaster Gates's Rebuild Foundation in Chapter 4 told me, "I am a fully formed adult. So the things that I am interested in, the goals that I have, were already there." There is a voice for each individual in SEA. However, this voice is often reduced in the arguments of sociological and critical debate.

The concern of personal sense and experience is not new in the discussion of arts and social change. As I will show in Chapter 2, it can be traced back to ancient Greece. In the 19th Century, more writers began to put more focus on abstract entities such as social class and ideologies, instead of the individuals. Recently, there is already a growing interest in the debate of the arts of returning to the individual. For example, Art historian Adair Rounthwaite wrote a book titled *Asking the Audience* (2017) dedicated to the idea that it is important to know specifically what the audience of participatory art thinks by asking them. "Without an archivally substantiated understanding of audience experience, we are left with a lopsided model of participatory art, one in which the art-critical frameworks that interpret it can be debated ad infinitum without achieving much insight into what is created in the process of its encounter with the world." (pp.13) Another example is a major research project called the Cultural Value Project (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016), ran by the Arts & Humanities Research Council in the U.K.. It also calls for returning to individual experience in the discussion of cultural values. "The project has sought to put the experience of individuals back at the heart of ideas about cultural value, arguing that it is only once we have started with individual experience that we can then work outwards, and understand the kinds of benefit that culture may have for society" (pp.5). In 2014, a report published by the Arts Council England also discussed how to measure "individual impact" through cultural experience (Carnwath & Brown, 2014). In the field of music, scholar Mia Nakamura has

argued for a paraphrasing from “power of music” to “the power of humans that use music” (2019, pp.129). Would it also be worth considering “the power of humans that experience SEA” instead of “the power of SEA”, to see what we can gain for this field of studies?

3. How to Make Individual Analysis Possible?

For the above reasons, in this dissertation my aim is to contribute to the possibility of individual-level analysis in the field of SEA. By individual-level analysis I mean building theories and arguments through considering subjects as unique individuals. Most of the time it means looking at the experience of the people. This experience does not only include the phenomenological experience of the artwork, but also the experience which is seemingly not related to the work, such as different life episodes and thoughts of the individuals. I will show how this method of research can be done in Chapter 3 and 4 as examples.

To apply an individual-level analysis, several changes in terms of theory and methodology are required.

3.1 Methodology

In terms of methodology, a change of research method is needed in the field of SEA. It is because for individual analysis, data collection is important. Depending on the problem of analysis, these datum include both qualitative and quantitative ones. Among the two, qualitative one is especially important, as it can capture more complex and nuanced experiences (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016). However, even though there is a growing volume of literature discussing cultural values of art projects by qualitative method (e.g. *ibid.*, pp.42), ethnographic and interview-based research is still rare in SEA studies.⁹ Interestingly, in Japan,

⁹ Most of the researchers and scholars prefer theoretical debate with little or no empirical studies. This phenomenon is reflected in the 2020 CAA (College Art Association) Conference, where art theorist

research which widely employs the method of participants interviews in the field of Art Project (or Japanese SEA)¹⁰ is relatively common (e.g. Saito, 2014; Kim, 2018). In this sense, I suggest that the global (Western) field of SEA may learn from Japan.

But is merely learning from Japanese research method enough? I contend that it is not. Although Japanese research methods widely employ ethnography and qualitative studies, I observe that many of these research projects lack theoretical rigour. For example, although terms such as “subject”, “discourse” and “antagonism” are usually employed in these works, it is usually unclear what they actually mean. Perhaps it is also because of the lack of theoretical framework of individual-level analysis that Japanese ethnographic research of SEA usually lacks the effort of generalisation. While it is true that ethnographic research is so contextually embedded that it is seemingly implausible to generalise, without a certain degree of conceptualisation, ethnography can become “illustrative or anecdotal” (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016, pp.141). These drawbacks undermine the power of Japanese research method of SEA to understand better how SEA may create change in society.

Panagiotis Kompatsiaris presented his paper titled *Biennial Ethnographies Against Biennialization: Place, Translocality and Global Forms* in a panel discussion. He proposed what he called “an ethnographic approach - site-specific and contextually sensitive - to study contemporary biennials”. I was an audience member in the discussion. Kompatsiaris received quite several critical feedbacks, such as whether this approach would undermine the study of textuality of the show, because it does not focus on the artwork. His proposal of an ethnographic method and the critical feedback from the audience somehow prove that this method is indeed rare.

¹⁰ In Japan, projects such as the Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale are called Art Projects (Kumakura, Kikuchi & Nagatsu, 2014) rather than SEA. Whether Art Project should be seen as a kind of SEA is a highly contested topic. Kumakura and “The Art Project Research Group” (2015) wrote that compared to SEA, Japanese Art Projects have less clear political messages and critical views. Japanese Art Projects also “lack of a clear objective among individual artworks and activities” (pp.4). Considering that the definition of SEA itself is already highly debatable, it seems impossible to judge further if Japanese Art Project is a kind of SEA. I have shown in another research that it is both politically and theoretically important to distinguish between the two (Yeung, 2019), but it is out of the scope of this dissertation to include the discussion here.

3.2 Philosophical Foundation

Therefore I argue that the second change which is necessary for an individual-level analysis, is on philosophical foundation. Currently prevailing theories are not intended to be used for individual-level analysis¹¹ because many of these theories do not ground the notion of subject to unique individuals. It is however not because their theories are fundamentally flawed, but rather a common characteristic in contemporary theories. In *Aesthetics and Subjectivity* (2003), philosopher Andrew Bowie has criticised much postmodern conceptualisation of subjectivity. For example, he noted that the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard equates reason with the domination of subjectivity without actually understanding that theorisation of the subject is far more complex in modern philosophy. While the “linguistic turn” criticises modern philosophy of subjectivity through emphasising the importance of language, Bowie wrote that this so-called “turn” has actually already happened in 1784, when some German Idealists argue that scientific abstraction and reason are dependent on historically-developed languages. As a result, Bowie argues that the assumption of many postmodern thinkers that the modern era is characterized by the subject’s domination of the object world, is not necessarily true. Therefore he argues that “it is a mistake for philosophy to relegate subjectivity to being merely a function of something else, such as language, ideology, history, or the unconscious.” (pp.8) This criticism precisely argues against many major theorists in the field of SEA. For example, as I will show in Chapter 6, for political philosophers Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, the subject is understood as a function of discourse and

¹¹ While the theories by Kester and Bishop contribute greatly to putting SEA into the art history and critical context, as well as explaining the possibility of change in a general sense, it is my contention that both are not applicable for explaining change on an individual-level. However, it does not mean that the insights they distil from their research lost its relevance. Many of their observations and analysis are in fact empirically true and valuable. Bishop and Kester successfully raises the awareness that it is problematic to accept uncritically to participatory art, especially the “political quietism” in many participatory practices (Bell, 2017, pp.81).

undecidability (Derrida, 1992). In this sense, antagonism which Laclau and Mouffe conceptualise does not refer to an individual, but a discourse. It means that it is theoretically inconsistent to say “s/he has antagonism”. These theoretical details are, however, usually not concerned or even dismissed by many scholars. Sometimes this dismissal can lead to questionable conclusions and unnecessary debate.¹² I argue that getting the analysis theoretically coherent is important. And to achieve this, a change of theoretical framework is necessary. What is important is a paradigm shift of thinking “how art can change a person (as a member of the society)”, instead of “how art can change the society”. To achieve this paradigm shift, it is essential to review and redefine the fundamental terms for SEA individual-level analysis. This will be done in Chapter 6.

It is the goal of this dissertation to contribute to individual-level analysis in SEA. While at the same time, this method needs not to be eliminative. Many of the currently available theoretical tools are compatible with this proposed method. I believe that by combining the concern of individuals and currently available theories, it is possible to expand our understanding of SEA.

4. Positioning the Research

This dissertation touches many fields of studies but is not bound by their conventions. It situates itself in the field of SEA studies, but explores the possibility of analysis through focusing on individuals, who as I have argued, usually marginalised. By focusing on individuals, the dissertation touches the field of audience studies of art (e.g. Pitts & Price, 2021), which discusses questions like “what value do the contemporary arts have for

¹² For example, Bishop once claimed that antagonism generates discomfort, a claim which is later attacked by many writers (see section 1.1 of Chapter 6). If one understands that antagonism in Laclau and Mouffe’s sense is not for a person, this claim cannot be true because a discourse cannot feel bad.

audiences” and “what experiences are they having of [the] work” (pp.4-5), but it also expands the discussion of this field since it rarely touches SEA, probably due to reasons like the “audience” is more difficult to define and the experience is more difficult to be captured empirically. Since this dissertation concerns the social impact of the arts, it touches the field of cultural policy and art management, but these fields mainly concern evaluation and outcome (e.g. Belfiore, 2002, Holden, 2006), while I am interested in developing an explanation for such an outcome. The dissertation is as a result an interdisciplinary one, but it should not be a surprise since SEA itself is already highly interdisciplinary.

5. Chapter Overviews

In this chapter (Chapter 1), I argue for the necessity of looking at individuals in SEA studies, and define the scope of work which is needed to investigate SEA by individual-level analysis. In Chapter 2, my main argument is that in the discussion of the arts and social change, it is both possible and valid to look at individual experience because it is not a new invention. I argue that there had been a concern for the individual before the 19th Century. I then argue that during the industrialisation, some theorists began to shift the discussion from focusing on individuals to entities such as class and ideology. This trend continues until now to the debate of SEA. I argue that major theories of SEA nowadays do not see unique individuals as subjects, although there are also exceptional cases, such as theories by Adrian Piper and Joseph Beuys. Since the former takes her reference from Kant and the latter has a strong relationship with Schiller, I argue that it is possible for us to return to the individual by learning from thinkers before the 19th Century.

In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, I present 2 SEA case studies by focusing on individual experience. My aim is to show that the complexity of an SEA project can be opened up by

looking at individuals involved in the project, through employing qualitative approaches such as ethnography and interview.

Chapter 3 is a case study of the Hong Kong House, a project run by Hong Kong art practitioners in the Echigo Tsumari Art Field, a Japanese Art Project in Niigata. In the 2019 edition of the Hong Kong House project, which is an exhibition titled “Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread” by Hong Kong artist Annie Wan, I interviewed various stakeholders including the artist, the interpreter, members of the community and staff of the Echigo Tsumari Art Field. I show how we can open up the complexity of the communication process, through describing the attitude of the locals towards the Hong Kong House, the intention and expectation of the interlocutors, and how the presence of the interpreter in this process affects the quality of communication. My aim of this chapter is to show that by looking at individual experience, we can obtain a better picture on the nuanced communication process in SEA projects.

Chapter 4 is a case study of the Rebuild Foundation by Theaster Gates in Greater Grand Crossing, Chicago. Same as the previous chapter, my aim of this chapter is to show how may we understand the dynamics in the project by looking at individual experience. While the Hong Kong House is a new project, the Rebuild Foundation is a well-known case which has been widely discussed. Therefore it is also the goal of this case study to show that considering individual experience can generate new perspectives even for well-researched cases. To achieve this goal, I look at the experience of different stakeholders of the project and listen to their voices, a research method which as far as I can see has not been taken up by other researchers before. From these voices, I discuss several points, such as the reception of the project by the local people, the importance of a “black space” for the participants, and the blurred distinction between producer/consumer of the project. I also show from this case that

it is important to look not only at how individuals experience the project, but also the lives of the individuals outside the project.

Chapter 5 is another case study, which is about the Austrian art collective Wochenklausur. While the two previous cases are studied by ethnographic methods, In this case, I only interview the artist group, investigating the strategy of the artist group rather than their result. Wochenklausur is most understood as an example of practitioners of dialogical art, which is theorised by the art critic Grant Kester (2004). However, in the interview the group said that Kester had misrepresented their art. I discuss the reason behind such a comment by analysing their works and Kester's claims. My aim of this case study is to show that what I mean by individual-level analysis is not only about interviewing people, but can also be seen as a change of thinking paradigm. To achieve this aim, I end the chapter by leaving a question: If Kester's dialogical aesthetic is not adequate to represent the strategy of the group, is it possible to represent their strategy from the perspective of individual-level analysis?

This question suggests a need for a philosophical framework for individual-level analysis. As a result, in Chapter 6 I attempt to create this framework. In this process of creation I also try to discuss how we can theorise the mechanism of change discussed in the case of Hong Kong House and that of the Rebuild Foundation. First, I argue that we can take the concept of "antagonism" as the starting point for this framework. However, we cannot use the definition of this concept by the art critic Claire Bishop (2004, 2012) and Laclau and Mouffe (2001), because their theories are not supposed to be applied to investigate individuals. As a result, I argue that there is a need to redefine this concept. I start my reworking from redefining the subject as a Kantian subject. Then I develop my idea of mind map and framing, replacing the notion of discourse in Laclau and Mouffe's paradigm. I also look at a concept in cognitive philosophy which is similar to antagonism: the recently developed concept of predictive

processing. I explain what it means by predictive processing. Although there is no literature which connects SEA and predictive processing at the moment, there are already papers discussing other art forms such as visual art, music and literature from the perspective of predictive processing. After this, I also rework the idea of “community” in order to connect individual change to social change. By this way, I argue that the framework illustrated in this dissertation may serve as a theoretical ground for us to analyse SEA from an individual-level. I also show how the 3 questions I draw from each of the cases can be answered by using this philosophical framework.

Chapter 7 is the conclusion. I conclude by claiming that it is valid to conduct an individual-level analysis for SEA research. The 3 case studies show empirically how this can be done, and Chapter 6 shows the possibility of an individual-based theoretical model. I also suggest some limitations and possibilities for future research in this chapter.

Chapter 2: A Historical Review

In this chapter, I provide a brief historical review on the role of individuals in the debate of arts and social change.¹³ Through this review, I intend to outline how individuals were the focus of artists and writers since ancient Greece, and how this focus shifted in the 19th Century. The aim of this chapter is to show that looking at individual experience in the arts is valid and possible.

1. Concern of Individual Experience Before the 19th Century

I first argue that personal experience had been important in the discussion of art and social impact in ancient times. Thinkers in ancient Greece discussed the social impact of the arts from the perspective of the audience as individuals. Plato is the one who first gives systematic and coherent arguments on the tendency of the arts to corrupt individual's "soul"¹⁴ (Plato, 1993, 606c). Similarly, Aristotle, the pupil of Plato, also looked at the social impact of the arts from an individual angle by concepts such as "catharsis" (1920).¹⁵ The concern of the

¹³ I write "the arts" instead of "visual art" or "fine art" for two reasons: Firstly, the importance of individual-level analysis does not limit to a specific art form; secondly, before the inception of the idea of "fine art" in the 18th Century, there were already many debates especially in the field of poetry and theatre, which should be included in this review. In fact, there was nothing as what we understand as "art" nowadays in ancient Greece.

¹⁴ For Plato, there are two parts in the human soul: the rational part, which is superior, and the irrational part, which is inferior. Plato claimed that poetry and theatre can strongly provoke people to be more controlled by the latter part. Therefore, for him, the arts are corrupting.

¹⁵ In Aristotle's work *Poetics* (1920), he offers much discussion on the arts and society, mainly as counter-arguments against Plato's. It is also in this work that he invents the concept of "catharsis". (Hathaway, 1962, pp.206) It is unclear what exactly does he mean by "catharsis". However, one thing which can be certain is that it is a concept which is related to emotion of the spectator (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1999). By this way, Aristotle also looks at the possibility of change in the arts from an individual perspective. It is therefore not surprising that the idea of catharsis is later expanded in some fields which study individual change of mind such as psychology, psychoanalysis and cognitive philosophy (Hathaway, 1962, pp.207). Since then, achieving change through provoking individual emotion has been the central argument of writers including the philosopher Cicero (104-43 BC) (Berry, 2000, pp.115-16); statesman Michel de l'Hospital (1506-1573) (Petris, 2003, pp.691); thinker Francesco Robortello (1516-1567) (Hathaway, 1962, pp.219-20); and poet John Milton (1608-1674) (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008, pp.84).

audience as unique individuals in the discussion of arts and social change continues to the 18th Century.

I then argue that in the 18th Century, the discussion of impact of the arts from an individual-level developed further. A major contributor to this discussion is the philosopher Immanuel Kant, who has a comprehensive account on the subject¹⁶ and the subjective mind. Some may think that Kant has nothing to do with social change because he advocates the purposelessness of art¹⁷, but this is in fact a misunderstanding of Kant's thought (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008, pp.177). For Kant, art "is a way of presenting that is purposive on its own and that furthers, even though without a purpose, the culture of our mental powers to [facilitate] social communication." (Kant, 1987, pp.173, see also pp.78) It means that, on one hand, Kant thinks that art is for pleasure; but on the other, human beings cannot satisfy if we only take pleasure from art (Ibid., pp.196). To reach satisfaction, pleasure needs to be directed towards morality. (Ginsborg, 2019, para.8; Kester, 2004, pp.108). As a result, Kant connects the concept of individual pleasure and feeling to the ethics, thus making us able to think about social change. The connection between individual experience and social change can also be found in arguments by other major German philosophers at that time, such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel¹⁸ and Friedrich Schiller¹⁹.

¹⁶ Kant's idea of the self and the mind is influential to various academic fields, although they gain attention only after 200 years after its inception, in the 1960s and 70s (Brook, 2020, para.1). One of the reasons can be that the discussion of the subjective mind was not his main aim (Kant, 1929, pp.12). This is evidenced by the fact that his writings about the mind are "remarkably scattered and sketchy" (Brook, 2020, para.19).

¹⁷ In *Critique of Judgment* (1987), Kant claims that artistic experience does not subordinate to conceptual cognition. It is because aesthetic judgment is based on feelings, not on concepts, or "rules" which allow us to understand relations between representations. As a result, beauty is not something which can be rationally proved, and art has no purpose but to invoke a feeling of pleasure in an individual. Because of this argument, Kant is commonly coined as the origin of the notion of artistic autonomy (e.g. Bell-Villada, 1996, pp.20).

¹⁸ Hegel referred to the Aristotelian concept of catharsis to argue that the arts can move us to reflect on our sensations and emotions. However, it requires an additional moral standard, so that individuals can reflect on her/his passion rather than indulge in it. (Hammermeister, 2002, pp.94).

¹⁹ Schiller explains that when people are attracted to the form of art, they may accept the content without normal rational thinking. (Schiller, 2004, pp.57) This is not necessarily bad, because thanks to skipping rational thinking, by reflective contemplation a viewer may obtain knowledge which cannot be explained

In this part, I conclude that individual experience was a major concern in the discussion of arts and social change before the 19th Century.

2. Industrialisation and Marxism

I argue in this part that the emphasis on individual experience in the discussion of the arts and society has been shifting in the 19th Century.

One of the reasons for this shift is industrialisation. During the process of industrialisation, cities were growing fast. Many workers moved into the city. Their lifestyle, culture as well as the taste of cultural consumption shocked the people who have been living in the city since long ago. This shock soon became a threat to these people since they became the minority (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008, pp.131). As a result, the “cultured” people who dominate the discourse of the arts at the time try to denounce the city newcomers as uncultured or barbaric. This is reflected for example in English scholar Thomas Greenwood’s essay in 1888, titled *Museums and Art Galleries*, claiming that the museum has a positive influence on the character of the workers, so that they can avoid pursuing “lower craving which may at one time have held him bondage – that for intoxicant or vicious excitement of one description or another.” (pp.26) By this argument Greenwood differentiated the social impact of the arts to the upper class and that to lower class. English cultural critic Matthew Arnold, who thinks that England was brutalised by the newcomers at that time, further the distinction between the upper class and lower class through establishing the liberal-humanist notion of culture (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008, pp.133-4). For him, Culture (with a capital letter C), as a kind of intellectual aristocracy, can provide the source of authority to save the society from brutality

by rationality. For Schiller, it is in this way, that art can change one’s mind as well as the political. (Schiller, 2004, pp.25) Schiller has also contributed to the idea of Bildung. He argues that a degenerated individual is dominated by either reason or nature. Nevertheless, the aesthetic state creates a liberating balance (Schiller, 2004, pp.57).

(Bennett, 2005, pp.463–4). By this way, the arts are said to have a certain impact on the lower class as a whole (all the barbaric newcomers). This idea has effectively spread to the whole world, because the liberal-humanist notion of culture has then become the ideological basis of much of postwar cultural policy in Europe (Jordan & Weedon, 1995, pp.23), and then further evolved to be a discourse for the civilising mission of Europe in the colonies in the “undeveloped” parts of the world (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008, pp.141).²⁰ By this way, the function of arts is said to be relative to people who are grouped according to their social status.

I then argue that a body of thought that emerged during that time which tried to relocate discussion of the arts and social change away from the individual is Marxism, which reduces people to the class of the bourgeois and of the proletariat.²¹ According to the scholar Roger Taylor’s (1978) explanation, Marxism believes that creativity is human nature (pp.65-66), and the development of the society is from social creativity of which people act together. The problem as seen by Marx is that in this social creativity, not everyone participates equally (Marx & Engels, 1970, pp.64).²² The arts, as products of human society, are thus said to be associated only to a specific group of people (the bourgeois, or the ruling class), and its influence on society also varies from groups to groups, instead of individuals to individuals.²³ Similar to liberalist-humanism, Marxism is also strongly influential to the globe. In the 20th Century we can see that many thinkers are dominated by the thought that the social impact of

²⁰ This idea is, of course, criticised by most contemporary postcolonial studies (e.g. Viswanathan, 2015)

²¹ It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to have a full discussion of aesthetics in Marxism. The difficulty for a full explanation is that Marxism has been interpreted by various thinkers according to the society which they lived in (Taylor, 1978, pp.69-70).

²² The Marxist project is then a project which restores creativity equality to the society (Taylor, 1978, pp.66; see also Morris, 2007).

²³ Later critics like Laclau and Mouffe would argue that this Marxist social division of class is problematic. “. . . class opposition is incapable of dividing the totality of the social body into two antagonistic camps. . .” (2001, pp.151), but before this challenge from the so-called post-Marxism, the Marxist separation is very influential to generations of artists and scholars.

the arts can, and should be analysed by grouping the audience into classes. One of the examples is the discourse by the Hungarian Bauhaus artist László Moholy-Nagy, who argues that the sensitivity of the masses is killed because they “are filled with a petit-bourgeois ideology” (Moholy-Nagy, 2007, pp.116). For some other artists and writers, the Marxist narrative is so strong that they even believe that art should be abandoned as a whole because it is “polluted” by bourgeois ideology. An example is the Russian constructivism. The notion of art is rejected by many Constructivists because for them art “has been unable to give up aesthetics [of the bourgeois]” (Stepanova, 2007, pp.70-72, see also Gan, 2013). A similar stance was also taken later by the renowned Situationist International, who prefers “détournement of preexisting aesthetic elements” instead of art (Martin et al., 2007, pp.127; Knabb, 2006, pp.52). Other examples of creators taking a denial stance towards art include the US art collective Black Mask (Black Mask, 2007), and artists who worked on the renowned project Tucumán Arde²⁴ (The Avant-Garde Artists Group, 2007) in Argentina. These examples show how Marxist thoughts influence artists and writers to think about the social impact of the arts from a social class and ideology perspective.

I claim that after the beginning of industrialisation and the birth of Marxism, more artists and writers discuss how the arts may achieve social change through intervention to ideologies, rather than individual thoughts. For some artists and writers, sometimes the ideology of which the arts intend to change is inscribed in language and daily life. One example is the Berlin Dada. The founder of the group, Richard Huelsenbeck, wrote in 1920 that (Berlin) Dada should find an adversary, which is the “German spirit”, or the German dominant

²⁴ The Tucumán Arde (translated "Tucumán is Burning") as a series of art events. It was held in Buenos Aires and Rosario, Argentina in 1968. The project addressed the living and working conditions under military dictator Juan Carlos Onganía. Participated artists included María Teresa Gramuglio, Nicolás Rosa, Juan Pablo Renzi, León Ferrari, Roberto Jacoby, Norberto Puzzolo, and Graciela Camevale (Di Liscia, 2018).

ideology, which is inscribed in everyday language (Huelsenbeck, 2007, pp.63-65). In this sense, the arts are seen to make an impact on the abstract language system, instead of unique individuals. Another example is philosopher Theodor Adorno, who argues that high art is important because it can break away from the reproduction of capitalistic ideology by popular culture (e.g. Adorno, 1978, 1991). What is shared by these arguments is that people are not seen as individuals who have their own thoughts and lives. Rather, their understanding of the world is determined by certain generalised ideologies. As a result, when artists and writers discuss how the arts can create social impact, they concern less on its impact on individuals, and more on its impact on abstract entities such as ideology and social class.

3. Individual Experience in SEA Studies

The discussion of arts and social change continues in the post-war era. The audience is still mostly considered as groups determined by class and other factors, rather than unique individuals. A typical example is the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who put “classification of subjects” as a category higher than the subjects themselves in his theorisation of taste. In his book *Distinction* (1984, originally published as *La Distinction* in 1979), which is seen as one of the most influential Marxist arguments on the relationship between taste and social class, Bourdieu claimed that “[s]ocial subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar” (1984, pp.6). In this theorisation the sensibility of individuals is reduced to a function of classifications, a concept which can be said totally different from that of Kant (as shown in section 1 of this chapter). As Rancière argued: “Pierre Bourdieu wants to show that the social reality of exercising the judgment of taste is the exact opposite of the Kantian theory . . . He thus will apply himself to show that taste is one where Kant divides it

and, conversely, that it is divided in two where Kant makes it common to all.” (2003, pp.198).

This example shows how contemporary theories like those by Bourdieu are different from theories before the 19th Century.

I argue that it is from this trend of concerning abstract entities such as social class, that prevailing theories of SEA nowadays also concern not much on personal experience of the audience. For example, art curator Nicolas Bourriaud argues that relational art can create change because they can invent “new assemblages” in our world (2002, pp.43) and can construct “concrete spaces”. “Through little services rendered, the artists fill in the cracks in the social bond” (pp.36). It is unclear how he understands individual experience in this theorisation. Another two major theorists, Grant Kester and Claire Bishop, also discuss social change without focusing on individual experience. The former grounded his theory to Habermasian philosophy, which rejects the notion of “self-consciousness” and “subjectivity” (Freundlieb, 2000), and the latter borrow the notion of subjectivity theorised by Laclau and Mouffe, who also sees the subject as functions of entities such as discourse and subconsciousness (I will further discuss this point in Chapter 6). It is for this reason that scholar David M. Bell pointed out that both Kester and Bishop lack engagement to those who collaborated and participated in the projects they analysed (2017, pp.75; pp.79). The lack of concern of individual experience can also be seen in other typical arguments in SEA, such as those by art critic Davis (2013), who accuses that SEA is reproductions of neoliberal values²⁵, and those by art historian Miwon Kwon, who claims that SEA can “exacerbate uneven power relations, remarginalise (even colonise) already disenfranchised groups, depoliticize and

²⁵ His essay *A Critique of Social Practice Art* (2013) stated that “[w]hat appears at one juncture to be radically opposed to the values of art under capitalism often later appears to have represented a development intrinsic to its future development, for the simple reason that without changing the underlying fact of capitalism, you cannot prevent innovations in art from eventually being given a capitalist articulation.” (para.19)

remythify the artistic process, and finally further the separation of art and life . . .” (2002, pp.7) The role of individual experience is rarely discussed by these writers. As a result, I conclude that most of the prevailing theories discuss SEA in terms of ideological articulation, power relation, discourse and identity, rather than what happens to individuals involved in the projects.

However, while the above arguments mainly come from cultural theories and art history, there are also another group of arguments on the social impact of the arts which widely employ empirical methodologies, such as social-scientific methods like questionnaires, formal interviews and focus discussion groups. (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008, pp.100-102). If I intend to claim that prevailing theories of SEA do not concern individuals, it is also important to look at these theories.

First of all, I briefly describe these theories. A good example is a study titled *Use or Ornament?* conducted in 1997, which claims that participation in the arts can give as much as 50 benefits to the society²⁶ (Matarasso, 1997, “Summary”). Its analysis is based on a series of predefined indicators, such as looking at the change in “expenditure on repairing vandalism” to see if an art project makes the life of a community better (pp.103). Another example is the study “Gifts of the Muse” (McCarthy et al., 2004), which illustrates the instrumental benefits of the arts to issues such as health, economy and community development by referring to literature which employ methods such as questionnaires and social science experiments. One of the main reasons for the emergence of this type of theory is the domination of neoliberalism in the 1980s. Under this ideology, the relationship between the arts and

²⁶ Unsurprisingly, the research does not claim that it is objective. “[O]bjectivity . . . is almost impossible to attain even in clinical drug trials, and an inappropriate aspiration in evaluation of social policy. (Matarasso, 1997, pp.1) In fact, this kind of studies are often criticised for taking an “defensive instrumentalism” approach (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016, pp.17), which sounds like advocacy rather than relatively objective research (e.g. Belfiore & Bennett, 2008, pp.10).

socioeconomics was brought into focus, giving birth to a new debate on the benefit of art to the society, especially in terms of economy (Myerscough et al., 1988). Furthermore, with the discourse of “TINA” (There Is No Alternative), more collaborations are seen between governments, business and the arts. The domination of neoliberalism leads to the consequence that the public sector was more and more asked to behave and be evaluated as a business. Evidence-based policymaking became a trend in many governments of Western countries. Together with rising political conservatism in the US in the 80s (Lacy, 1995, pp.29), art management and artists are asked to demonstrate that they are able to fulfil preset objectives (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008, pp.7). As a result, many studies responded to this request by arguing that the arts can benefit society, not by talking about cultural theories and art history, but by using hard facts.

Given that these studies employ means such as interviews and questionnaires, they do, to a certain extent, concern the voice of unique audiences. However, I argue that this concern often has little intention to explain how individual experience can lead to the found social change. Most of these studies are only interested in the outcome, instead of theoretically looking at how this outcome results. However, even knowing that certain SEA projects can transform a community, does not mean that we can theoretically explain how this transformation happens. This difference of “knowing the outcome” and “knowing the process” is also illustrated in other literature which discuss the impact of the arts, such as one by Nakamura, who regards the process of change by music as a “black box” (2019, pp.127)²⁷, and one by art writers McCarthy et al. (2004), who argue that conceptual theories about how benefits are generated are “largely ignored by empirical studies” (p.xii).

²⁷ Nakamura wrote: “Although most scholars acknowledge that music has some influence on our feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, exactly how musical experience can be a resource for improving quality of life still remains unclear”.

I argue that it is because of this lack of conceptual theories that this kind of research usually faces the difficulty of “linking micro-level effects on individuals to the macro-level of communities” (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016, pp.81). To link the two, one may generalise the former through “abductive reasoning whereby the researcher argues from an instance or case to the circumstances or hypothesis that might explain it” from qualitative analysis (Power & Gendron, 2015, pp.158). However, this process of generalisation usually requires a rigorous conceptual framework, which is what is lacking. In Chapter 6, I will attempt to fill this gap with the philosophical framework I propose, showing how findings from the case studies in Chapter 3-5 can be generalised by using the proposed concepts, so that a link between “micro-level” and “macro-level” can become possible.

4. Two Exceptional Cases: Beuys and Piper

In the above, I have illustrated how individual voice and experience lacks attention in contemporary theories of arts and social change. There are, however, rare exceptional cases, such as Joseph Beuys and Adrian Piper. They both understand the impact of their work on society through looking at the experience of the individual. As I will illustrate below, what is common between these two cases is that they both theorise their work by returning to German idealist concepts. I argue that these two cases further support my argument that it is possible to return our focus to the individuals, and we may do this through reviewing how German idealists define the subject, which is what I will do in Chapter 6.

I first discuss Joseph Beuys. Many of his projects are political, and have the aim of creating social change (Jordan, 2017, pp.2). What is Beuys’ theory behind this change? A recent study by art historian Cara M. Jordan (2017) claimed that his philosophy was based on that of philosopher Rudolf Steiner and Schiller (pp.43). Rudolf Steiner’s main work in philosophy is

what he called Anthroposophy, which is based on the idea that man exists between the sensory and the metaphysical, and a higher level of extrasensory knowledge can only be accessed through imagination, inspiration, and intuition (Ibid., pp.42). This importance of imagination echoes with Schiller, who wrote that by what he calls the “play-drive”, or the cultivation of the imagination, an individual could reconcile his desires with his or her moral duties, unify her/his subjective experience with social laws, thus contribute to the improvement of the society (Ibid., pp.41). Following these ideas, Beuys conceived an opposition between rational thought (crystalline principle, in Beuys term) and intuitive thought (organic principle), and the latter has the power to shape or balance the former. Furthermore, intuition was conceived as the key to creativity. In this way, thought regarded as the origin of creativity could liberate the individual, and on a wider scale influence how society is shaped. It is for this reason that Beuys stress on encouraging creativity for every individual (Ibid., pp.44). From this idea, Beuys developed the theory of “social sculpture” (Ibid., pp.8).²⁸ This theorisation shows that Beuys considers social change from an individual-level, and he does this by taking reference from German idealist thoughts.

I move to the discussion on Adrian Piper. In 1981, the artist/philosopher published an article titled *Ideology, Confrontation and Political Self-Awareness* (2007), which offers a detailed description of the mechanism between subjective experience and social change. Inspired by the Kantian theory of the self (Piper, 2013a, 2013b), Piper contends that each of us in the world has our own beliefs which we do not question. These beliefs can be true or false, and it is “difficult to ascertain because we can only confirm or disconfirm their beliefs under examination concerning other beliefs, which themselves require examination” (2007, pp.243).

²⁸ Moreover, as Steiner connected the notion of extrasensory knowledge in Anthroposophy to the spiritual, Beuys also believes that creative process can allow everyone to reach a spiritual consciousness, so that the society can recover from the 2nd world war (Jordan, 2017, pp.44-46).

She defines “ideology” as the set of false beliefs that the subject has personal investment maintaining. For her, ideology is pernicious. One of the reasons is the mechanism it uses to protect the “truthness” of itself, which sometimes makes a subject fail to consider counterevidence. Piper wrote that in the general case when a subject experiences counterevidence, the doubt will entail self-examination, which will lead to self-awareness, thus the potential to change the ideology. However, not all self-awareness can lead to this change. It depends on factors such as the scale and the deepness of that experience, the strength of the belief in that ideology, as well as how deep the subject wants to engage with it. There are various ways for an agent to defend one’s ideology (such as the “False-Identity Mechanism”, which a subject perceives the ideology as always true objective facts rather than beliefs). Piper sees all these mechanisms of defence as “illusion[s] of omniscience”. What art can do is to attack this illusion of omniscience, so that ideology can be confronted and questioned. She described her means to do it as “confrontation of the sinner with the evidence of the sin”, i.e. exposing the many ways of denial of counter-argument by a subject.²⁹ Piper did not expand much in this theorisation, since the most important subject for her is the self, ethics and rationality (Piper, 2013a, 2013b), but her theory supports the idea that it is valid to discuss theoretically how artistic practice can create change in the society from an individual-level, and furthermore, this task can be done by returning to the Kantian subject. By reviewing these two exceptional cases, I argue that it is possible to return our focus to the individuals in the discussion of the arts and social change, and we may do this through going back to the German Idealist’s understanding of the subject as a unique individual. I will discuss this point further in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

²⁹ Piper even added a limitation to her tactics, saying that the success of this tactic increases with the specificity of the confrontation, but since she cannot know the specificity of each audience, she can only indicate general issues that have specific references in her own experience.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have sketched a historical background of how individuals are considered in the theoretical debate of arts and social change. I argue that individual experience, sense and affect, has been the focus of many artists and writers before the 19th Century. Since industrialisation and the rise of Marxism, more writers and artists are concerned about how the arts may affect abstract entities like ideology or language system. However, rare cases such as Joseph Beuys' and Adrian Piper's theory still think social change from subjective experience. Their references to German Idealism suggests that we may gain inspiration from the Idealists, if we hope to return our focus to individual experience.

In Chapter 6, I will discuss how to theoretically understand the relationship between individual experience and social change in SEA. However, before explaining the theories, I will first introduce 3 case studies.

Chapter 3: Hong Kong House in Echigo Tsumari Art Field

From this chapter, I begin to look into cases of SEA. I try to look at the individual experience in these cases, and show how the complexity of each project can be revealed through listening to the voices of individuals. Qualitative approaches such as ethnography and interview will be employed. These 3 chapters will mainly be descriptive, presenting the thoughts and experiences of people involved. The theoretical analysis of each case will be shown in Chapter 6.

In this chapter, I first consider a case in Asia, i.e. the Hong Kong House (HKH), a project run by Hong Kong art practitioners in the Echigo Tsumari Art Field (ETAF), an SEA project in Niigata, Japan. I look at the communication process between the artist team and the locals in this study. Instead of employing existing theories such as Kester's dialogical aesthetic (2004), I look at individuals involved in the communication process, looking at how interlocutors feel and think when they communicate. By this way, I show that looking at individual experience can give us a possibility of looking at an SEA project from different perspectives.



Hong Kong House (credit: Tinshui Yeung)

1. Background

In this part, I first explain the background. The HKH is an ongoing project. At the time when I am writing, it has finished its 2018 and 2019 editions. It belongs to the ETAF, which is run by the NPO Echigo Tsumari Satoyama Collaborative Organisation (ETSCO) and is one of Japan's largest Art Projects (Kumakura, Kikuchi & Nagatsu, 2014, pp.294-295). The main project of ETAF is the Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale (ETAT), which is held every three years since 2000. In the 2018 edition³⁰, 378 works are distributed across the area. The project is conceived by the now vice chief director of ETSCO, Fram Kitagawa, chairman of Art Front Gallery ("NPO Echigo Tsumari Satoyama," n.d.).

This project has clear social goals. According to the official website (Ibid.), postwar Japan saw a period of high economic growth and migration of rural population to urban areas,

³⁰ It was held from 29th July to 17th September, 2018 (51 days).

aggravating regional population ageing and other social problems. Echigo Tsumari area, a part of Niigata prefecture, suffers from these problems. What makes the situation more serious is that there is heavy snow in Winter every year. Many houses and schools in the area are abandoned due to population fall. There are also fields without farmers. It is the motive of ETAF to activate the region and ameliorate these problems. The goal of Echigo Tsumari can be summarised as follows:

- 1) To connect men and nature;
- 2) to explore the inheritance and development of regional culture;
- 3) to discover regional values and charms; and
- 4) to revitalise agriculture and rural areas.



The snowy Echigo Tsumari area (credit: Tinsui Yeung)

I move to the description of the HKH project. It was launched in the ETAT's 2018 edition in the town of Tsunan, Niigata, which is part of the area of the festival. HKH is presented by the

Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), a government department of Hong Kong, and is organised by Art Promotion Office (APO), an office under LCSD (Art Promotion Office, 2019, pp.16). Every year the HKH invites Hong Kong art practitioners to practice on-site. Practitioners of the project can be separated into two categories: Visual artists and collaborators. The former was generally regarded as the “main show”. Artists were selected through an open call³¹. Collaborators are invited by the APO.

2. Research Question

In this chapter I explore the HKH as an example of art practice by international artists. International artists are now ubiquitous in ETAF. For example, in the 2018 edition, 44 countries participated in the festival (Daichi no Geijutsusai, 2019, pp.1) Among the 137 artist individuals and groups who created new works, 69 of them are from overseas (“List of Participants”, 2018). ETAF is not a unique case. Many other Art Projects in Japan also invite overseas artists to participate. The phenomenon is reflected by the names of many Art Projects, which bear the term “international”, or “kokusai” (国際), in Japanese.³² It can be said that international artists’ participation is a trend in Japanese Art Projects.

Many of these Art Projects see “exchange” as their core mission.³³ I argue that there are many aspects which require special attention in international cultural exchange through Art

³¹ The jurors were Fram Kitagawa, Lesley Lau, Yanyan Lo (Curator of APO) and “Museum Expert Advisers” of the LCSD.

³² Examples are seemingly inexhaustible: Setouchi kokusai geijutsusai [Art Setouchi], Saitama kokusai geijutsusai [ART Sightama], Sanriku kokusai geijutsusai [Sanriku International Arts Festival], Kita Arupusu kokusai geijutsusai [Northern Alps Art Festival], itoshima kokusai geijutsusai [Itoshima Arts Farm]...

³³ For instance, one of the goal for the Setouchi Triennale Executive Committee is to “increase population who participated in exchange” (Setouchi Triennale Executive Committee, n.d.); The ART Sightama aims at “creating various exchange” (Saitama city, 2018); the Sanriku International Arts Festival does not only aim at exchange, one of its main organiser is actually the The Japan Foundation Asia Center, of which the Japanese name “kokusai koryu kikin” bears the term “koryu” (exchange). (Sanriku kokusai geijutsusai, n.d.)

Projects. One of the issues is language. Language is an essential part of exchange. Given that many foreign people from overseas speak very little or no Japanese, it can be hypothesised that at least part of the exchange process is affected. I argue that artists, curators and art management need to take this into consideration. However, as far as I can see, there is little or no research related to this issue. It is hoped that this case study can contribute to the understanding of the communication process in SEA of which two or more languages are involved.



Hong Kong art practitioner James Lam communicating with a local farmer (credit: Tinsui Yeung)

The research questions are then: What is the communication like in the HKH project? How do practitioners realise it? What kind of factor would affect this communication process? What kind of dynamics and complexity can we open up when we look at the individuals involved in detail?

3. Literature Review

HKH is a new project. There is currently no research related to this work. However, for the ETAF, research is plenty. Recent one includes that of Hsiao (2020), which discusses how “art-oriented re-utilisation and conversion” (converting and reusing old facilities for artistic purpose) is employed. Cai et al. (2020) discuss its positive impacts on sustainable tourism, economics as well as the population of Niigata. Borggreen and Platz (2020) attempt to expand the notion of artistic autonomy in the West by discussing the ETAF. Other major researches include Sawamura (2014)’s edited book *Āto wa Chīki o Kaeta ka: Echigo Tsumāri Daichi no Geijutsusai no 13 Nen : 2000 - 2012* [Has art changed the region? Thirteen years of Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale 2000-2012], which is dedicated solely to discuss the social impact of the festival, from perspectives ranging from economy to ideological change.

As far as I know, there is no research which discusses in detail the process of art-making by artists with foreign backgrounds. However, there are some research works which discuss the role of language interpretation in art. One of the related literature of this topic is Heather Connelly’s doctoral thesis *Speaking through the Voice of Another: How Can Art Practice be Used to Provoke New Ways of Thinking about the Transformations and Transitions that Happen in Linguistic Translation?* (2015). The literature helps us to understand the complexity of interpretation in Art Projects. Connelly’s argument is that in the process of interpretation, the way the interpreter sees the cultural context directly influences the way s/he understands the original and produces the interpreted message. She makes this argument by applying Roland Barthes’ concepts (1986) to distinguish between “text” and “Text”. The former refers to the linguistic units or words that are translated, while the latter refers to the meanings associated with the text. For Barthes, the Text can never be understood

independently, since its meaning always depends on other Texts. In this sense, the author has no control over the Text. It is due to this reason that Barthes famously announced the “death of the author”. On the other hand, since the reader of a text always has experience reading other texts, and the meaning of those texts always influence the meaning of the text he is reading, the reader can actually determine (at least for himself) the Text he is reading. As a result, together with the “death of the author”, there is also “the birth of the reader”. In this sense, it can be said that the interpreter, being a reader of the original and the author of the target language, is “born and died” at the same time. Connelly wrote: “The issues of value, status and power are . . . further complicated and amplified in translation, as not only is there a decision being made about who and what should be translated but also how this should be translated, by and for whom . . . All of these decisions are made in part by the translator’s personal experiences, training and so forth, but also dictated by contractual obligations . . . he or she is operating” (pp.54).

Another literature which is also worth mentioning here is the *Bilingual Aesthetic* (2004) by the language and literature scholar Doris Sommer. Although this book does not focus on contemporary art production, it is instrumental in opening up our thinking about language difference. For Sommer, being bilingual, or being unfamiliar with one language, can be fun and productive. It is because the difference between the two language systems can generate new meanings which challenge the assumption of a single language. As a result, it can be said that in an SEA project of which two or more languages are involved in the communication process, it is possible to yield an extraordinary creative outcome, which results from the difference between the language systems.³⁴

³⁴ Sommer’s arguments in this book are of great relevance to my theorisation in Chapter 6. She takes reference from the formalist Victor Shklovsky, who found that literature and visual art are common in the sense that both art forms employ “surprise” of the audience as the source of their aesthetic (pp.29-30). This “surprise” refers to the difference between two language systems, such as the “faux amis” as described in



Local resident in the Echigo Tsumari area bringing tourists around (credit: Tinsui Yeung)

4. Methodology

In this chapter, I focus on the practice of HKH in 2019. Data were collected through interviews and on-site fieldwork. Related documents are also collected. These include booklets of the show, the open call for proposals, and critiques and news reports about the show.

18 people were interviewed. The time and location are shown in the bracket.

The Hong Kong Team

Lesley Lau + Sinkiu Lee, curatorial team head and assistant (2019 Feb, by phone)

French (e.g. “lecture” means “lecture” in English but “reading” in French). This concept echoes with our prediction model (see Chapter 6) because it can be understood as a situation where there exists a prediction error (antagonism) in one’s cognitive system but nevertheless it can still be considered as correct in another system of language. This explanation echoes with the “divergent thinking” mentioned by Sommer (pp.4), which means that questions are assumed to have multiple answers instead of one. As a result, we can say that the productivity of bilingualism is also the product of antagonism.

Annie Wan, artist of HKH 2019 (2019 Aug, Tsunan)

Kaho Ng, interpreter and driver employed by the artist (2019 Aug, by phone)

Local Residence

Interviewee A, a staff of a local cafe (2019 Aug, Tsunan)

Interviewee D, a local resident from America (2019 Aug, Tsunan)

Interviewee E, a local resident who was visited by the artist (2019 Aug, Tsunan)

Interviewee H, a local resident whose story was portrayed in the exhibition (2019 Aug, Tsunan)

Interviewee K, a local resident whose story was portrayed in the exhibition (2019 Aug, Tsunan)

Interviewee N, a local resident who lives next to the HKH (2019 Aug, Tsunan)

Interviewee S, a local resident whose story was portrayed in the exhibition (2019 Aug, Tsunan)

Interviewee AA, AB, AC, AD, AE, anonymous locals who have visited and/or participated in HKH programmes (2019 Feb to Aug, Tsunan)

ETAT Staff

Tadahiro Asai, an executive staff who takes care of HKH and the nearby Echigo Tsumari Clove Theatre³⁵ (2019 Aug, Tsunan)

Fram Kitagawa, the general director of the ETAT (2019 Aug, Tsunan)

On-site fieldwork is mainly conducted from 5th August to 13th August 2019. During this period I stayed in the Echigo Tsumari Kamigo Clove Theatre with the Hong Kong team. Formal and informal conversations with different stakeholders are conducted during the

³⁵ Echigo Tsumari Clove Theatre is an art facility managed by the ETAF which includes a hostel for artist and production team residency. Since its location is just about 100m away from the HKH, it was the base of the Hong Kong team before and during the exhibition period. It was originally the campus of former Kamigo Middle School.

process. I have also observed the final stage of the production of the exhibition, as well as the opening of it.

Below I describe the project and the communication process.

5. The Artwork

In 2019, the main show is a solo exhibition titled “Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread”, by Hong Kong artist Annie Wan. Wan³⁶ is an artist in Hong Kong and an assistant professor of the Academy of Visual Arts of the Hong Kong Baptist University. The exhibition consists of 3 parts: (a) a set of ceramic works; (b) six stories presented by photos, text and a ceramic piece; and (c) a set of documentation photos. Part (a) consists of about 100 objects. All of them are dyed in different colours and are arranged on a table to form a rainbow gradient. The form of the objects can be seen originated from food from the local and Hong Kong. The six stories are personal stories of local people. They are arranged to be shown on a wall. Below shows one of the examples:

Mrs Tanaka, who is passionate about traditional cuisine, believes that the same cuisine can give rise to different tastes depending on the living environment and local culture. For instance, the “ambo” bun in Tsunan, and buns elsewhere such as those called “abo” in the Akiyamago region and “ambu” in Tokamachishi, are slightly different because of the different ratio of rice flour and glutinous rice flour used in different regions; the stickiness may vary and the fillings may also be slightly different.

Mrs Tanaka is passionate about the study of cuisine, and often participates in exchange programmes concerning food culture. She thinks Tsunan’s food culture is

³⁶ Wan obtained her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees from the Fine Arts Department of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. She was the award winner of the Hong Kong Art Biennial and 2018 Artist of the Year (Visual Arts) awarded by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council.

from the culture of the snow country. As they need to last through a snowy Winter, the people of Tsunan have devised many ways to preserve food ingredients. Pickled vegetables are one specialty of Tsunan.

Mrs. Tanaka is especially fond of radish and has devised many ways to prepare and cook this ingredient. Besides, she knows how to cook a little-known traditional food – a New Year food where crushed walnut is used as filling for burdock. She remembers how to do it as she had to help her family to hollow out the burdock. This food is made only once a year, and she is particularly energised at the thought of the family sitting round and cooking together.

When cooked, the burdock will be sliced and placed in the New Year platter. Usually odd-numbered ingredients are used for New Year fare as even numbers remind one of Shikuhakku (four hardships and eight hardships). Odd-numbered ingredients often feature radish, burdock, carrot, freeze-dried tofu, yam, kelp and konjac.

Part (c) is a set of 21 photos which are taken by Wan herself. All of the photos are black and white. They are the documentation of Wan's communication process with the locals.



“Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread” (credit: Tinsui Yeung)



“Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread” (credit: Tinsui Yeung)

6. The Production Process

The APO published an open call of the HKH project (“Hong Kong House”, n.d.) on 26th July 2019 (The Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 2018). Wan was invited to submit a proposal by the APO. At first, she submitted one which is about creating some ceramic objects and then giving them to the locals. She said that she submitted the original one without really knowing what is actually going on in Tsunan.

After being selected to present artworks in 2019, Wan was informed that she could freely edit her proposal. Since she was not informed about the details of the project by the APO, she approached APO directly for basic information such as the characteristics of Tsunan.

After that, she went to HKH for site visits a few times. The first visit was in November 2017, followed by the second one during the "Echigo Tsumari Art Field Winter"³⁷ in February 2018. The third one was in August 2018 during the period of the ETAT.

In Wan’s first site visit, her initial idea was to do a project similar to her work in Gwangju Biennale 2016, titled “Every Day A Rainbow”. The work consisted of a kiosk located outside the exhibition hall. In the kiosk she arranged local goods she bought in rainbow colour. She also created ceramic copies of these goods, giving them to the shops where she bought the goods. The ceramic copies were put together with real goods in the real shop during the exhibition period.

³⁷ “Echigo Tsumari Art Field Winter” is an annual event in ETAF. Old and new artworks are exhibited during the period.



“Every Day A Rainbow”, 2016. Goods collected from local shops are arranged in rainbow colour

(credit: Standnews Hong Kong)



“Every Day A Rainbow”, 2016. Wan created ceramic copies for the goods she collected from local shops, and then put them back to the original rack. (credit: Standnews Hong Kong)

Kitagawa was positive about this idea. Wan then conducted a search for possible shops in Tsunan. However, at last she did not realise the plan due to the limitation of the HKH space. She was instructed by the APO that even though she exhibits her works outside the venue, the venue of HKH should not be left blank. She thought that it was too difficult to handle both the venue and a space outside and connect them together, so she gave up the idea. Wan’s second idea was to do a project related to food. She said that she always likes cooking because she likes the relaxing feeling when she cooks. She used to be able to enjoy this feeling when she created ceramic works, but the feeling disappeared after ceramics became her career. However, this feeling can still be found in cooking. At the same time, she also felt uncertain about using food to create artwork because she had always been focusing on ceramics as a media. She was not sure if the notion of “food” fits her original path as a ceramics artist. Although she later developed her artwork from this idea, this query to herself is still not resolved.

From March to April 2019, Wan took her residency in HKH. Wan had no exact idea of what she was going to do during the residency. However, she knew that she must confirm her idea due to time limitation. In order to communicate with the locals, she has personally invited Ng, who can speak Japanese, to join this project. Ng himself is an artist and he used to be a student of Wan in Hong Kong. In this project, he acted as a “partner” of Wan, mainly responsible for interpretation and driving. He can speak Japanese because he has studied in Japan for his master degree. This is his first time working in a project which heavily involves communication in Japanese, although he has worked as a freelance interpreter before for a news agency in Hong Kong.

Wan got in touch with Tadahiro Asai before she went to Tsunan. Asai is the staff from ETSCO who manages the HKH project. In his words, his job in HKH is to execute the idea of the APO. The HKH project was his first task working for the ETSCO.³⁸ Asai learnt that Wan would stay five weeks in the area. He also learnt that Wan wanted to visit the locals' home. He thought that it was inappropriate for Wan to visit directly because the locals did not know her. He thought that Wan should hold a party. He thought that, only after introducing herself to the locals, can Wan request a visit to their home. He told Wan about this before her arrival. Wan agreed and brought some snacks from Hong Kong to Tsunan for this party.

This party was in many ways a surprise for Wan. First, she thought that snacks from Hong Kong would be good enough to serve the party. However, Asai suggested that she should prepare food herself instead of serving readymade food. Wan accepted this idea and spent about three days preparing Hong Kong food. At last, about 20 locals came. She did a presentation about her artworks and the HKH project. Ng played an important role in this event because he was able to talk to many people and even obtain contact information from many participants. Wan said: "I can never know these people without him". These people later became the locals whom Wan met. Some locals whom Wan met further introduced others to her. Some other visited locals are introduced by Ng's own network. Although the party was effective in building relationships between the artist and the locals, during the creation process, this kind of party was only carried out once.

After the party, some locals brought small gifts such as pickles to Wan. Asai mentioned that at a time the fridge was full of pickles so Wan had to refuse to accept more. Asai also asked the

³⁸ Asai graduated from the design department of a university. He has also studied abroad in Shanghai for 4 years. After that, he worked for 5 years in a sport equipment company because he likes nature and outdoor sports. After that, he went to India volunteering for nine months and then returned to Japan. In Japan, he first worked in the tourism industry in Nagano. After that, he was recommended by his friend, who works for the Art Front Gallery, to join the ETSCO as a staff. He became a full time staff member in ETSCO from June 2019.

locals to introduce Tsunan food to Wan. Wan, together with Ng who drove her around and interpreted for her, thus managed to visit several families and shops in Tsunan, observing the locals' attitude towards food as well as learning how to prepare them. Most of the cases, Wan prepared some questions for the interview before the visits.

Wan was able to confirm the form of the exhibition from this series of interviews and visits. She picked six personal stories from them to be shown in the venue. She also wrote the text in Chinese herself. The texts are later translated by the others to English and Japanese.

To conclude this part, the production process shows that the communication process in this project is not heavily curated and planned before the project began. The judges of the open call seem to have chosen Wan not because she has suggested a project which involves nice communication. Wan also thought little about how she should talk to the community and how she should create her work. It is however, Asai the staff and Ng the interpreter, who plays an important role in creating this process of communication. What is common for the two people is that they are both more familiar with Japanese language and culture. Asai's suggestion of hosting a party turned out to be helpful in building the connection between the artist and the locals. As I will continue to describe later, many locals think that food party is a good way to communicate, especially with people who cannot speak Japanese.

7. Wan's Concept

According to an article written by the assistant curator, Iris Kwong (Art Promotion Office, 2019, pp.7), the title of the exhibition is "taken from the Lord's Prayer and is similar in meaning to *itadakimasu*, the Japanese words of gratitude that are spoken before meals." For Kwong, since the prayer expresses gratitude to God for granting food, it is "imbued with the notions of humility and appreciation for small graces", which are also shared by the people in

Tsunan. In the same article, Kwong further stated that Wan explored on how to shorten the distance between the public and contemporary art through ceramics.

Wan's work has always been ceramic moulding. Her master graduation thesis is titled *Longing and Rediscovery: Reflections on "Moulding"* (1999). In the thesis she focused solely on the technique and form of moulding. Her solo exhibition in 2019, titled "Rediscovery" ("Nei nang yat ngan", 2019) was about moulding: moulding bitter melon, grapefruit, slippers; another solo exhibition of Wan in 2018 titled "Zaan Bak Fo" was also about moulding (Tsang, 2017): moulding pepper, bottles of oyster sauce, boxes of eggs.

However, this time, Wan stated that there are two new attempts in terms of art form, i.e. emphasising on narration, and putting different media (photography, text and ceramics) together. Wan said that it is because she wanted to express in this exhibition the story of the people. Moreover, she said that this time she reflected less on the media of ceramics. "I just trust it and let it do its own job." She said that these changes came from the need of the stories she wanted to express in this show. It would be "too deliberate" if she only used ceramics to tell the stories. "If you want to express the emotion only, you can use a [ceramic] object. However, since this time I want to express the details more, I have to use some other way", so that "the stories can be expressed more clearly." Since what Annie wanted to express was shown by the combined result of all 3 medias, she stressed that these 3 parts are inseparable. That is why no caption was given for a single piece of object.³⁹

In this part, I would like to highlight the change of Wan's art form. She said that she has new attempts this time because she wants to express more about the stories than emotion.

³⁹ Wan also said that she included ceramics pieces of Hong Kong food in the show because they are made prior to this project. She showed them this time because she did not have enough time to make enough artworks of food from Tsunan. She also talked about the content of the stories. She said that her original idea was to show the story from Hong Kong. She even asked people around her in Hong Kong for their stories related to food. However, after she went to Tsunan, she abandoned the idea due to two reasons: that the stories from Hong Kong did not match; and the space is too small to put stories from both sides.

However, what makes her have this intention? This question will be answered in the latter part of this dissertation.



Annie Wan (credit: Tinsui Yeung)

8. Local's Attitude towards the Hong Kong House

From this section, I illustrate the voice of the stakeholders by grouping the content of their interviews into themes. First, I will describe the local's attitude towards the Hong Kong House. Generally speaking, most of the local members I interviewed claimed that about half of the local people were positive to the HKH. What are the reasons behind positive and negative attitudes?

8.1 Positive

Why do some of the locals have a positive attitude towards the Hong Kong House? People seem to appreciate the “people” more than the “art”. Interviewee H, a cakeshop owner in Tsunan who moved there 23 years ago because her husband said he wanted to grow crops, said that she anticipated the HKH before it was launched since she could make new friends. Interviewee E, a Soba restaurant owner in Tsunan and a regular part-time staff in Kamigo Clove Theatre was positive to HKH because she thought that the project could bring many foreign people to the area, stimulating the kids in Tsunan. She thought that the project is good to the elderly too, as “their life is basically the same every day. If people come from outside, they can change the mood of the elderly.”

8.2 Negative

On the other hand, there are also people who are negative, suspicious to or uninterested in the project. Many members of the community admitted to me that they have very little connections with the HKH, or the whole ETAF in general. For example, interviewee A, who moved to Tsunan in 2018 and is now the manager of a cafe in Tsunan, only went to HKH and had a quick look once. She also said that she did not even know about the Kamigo Clove Theatre. Given that her cafe is only 3 minutes drive from the HKH and the Kamigo Clove Theatre, her voice may reflect that the HKH has limited reach to locals.

According to Asai, some people who are not supportive of the project kept a distance away from it. He mentioned that there were locals who were suspicious about the Hong Kong people. As some locals cannot distinguish the difference between Hong Kong and China, one asked him if the Hong Kong people were spies, collecting information for the Chinese

government. Asai also told me that the locals are unsupportive of the project because they are not used to accepting strangers. They felt uneasy with strangers because Tsunan is a very remote area. The area is especially inaccessible due to heavy snow in Winter, so people are used to staying only with their neighbours and family.

Apart from Asai, several local people also told me that some locals try to keep away from the HKH. Interviewee H said that it is because they are shy. Interviewee E suggested another reason: some local people simply do not want many people to come to the place. She told a story about the HKH which is worth noticing: According to her, originally the APO did not propose to build the HKH in Sakasamaki, the village where it now locates, but in another village in Tsunan. Officials from the Tsunan government even went to that village to discuss with the villagers. However, the proposal has to be given up because the villagers opposed the idea. According to the interviewee, many of the villagers, especially the elderly, were worried that foreign people and traffic would damage the quietness of the village. Interviewee K, who has been running a restaurant⁴⁰ next to HKH since 1989 and is very supportive of HKH, suggested another reason that some locals may feel uncomfortable with the presence of HKH: Because they do not know what is happening inside. She also raised her concern that the HKH rarely invites the locals to go inside. “Not even I have a chance to stay there for a longer time.”

8.3 Local’s Suggestions for Improvement

Interviewee K and most of the local interviewees see me as a member of the Hong Kong team. When I asked them why some people are not supportive of the HKH, they also gave me

⁴⁰ Since her restaurant is just next to the HKH, it became the “canteen” of the people in HKH in 2018. In 2019, she and her family decided to stop eating-in service and only do bento boxes. The people from Hong Kong still bought the bento frequently.

suggestions for improving the relationship. Interviewee K said that, because the locals would feel “strange” if they went to the HKH for no reason, the HKH should give them reasons to go in, such as tea parties or pickle tasting. “Merely discussing how much salt and sugar should be added to the pickles is already good enough to create a heartwarming atmosphere.” She also encourages Hong Kong people to say hi to the locals and communicate with them more often. “You should praise the locals more often, even using strange language is okay.”

Interviewee K’s suggestion echoes with the experience of interviewee N. Interviewee N is over 80 years old. Although he operates a clinic just a few doors next to HKH, he has never communicated directly with the Hong Kong people. Interviewee N’s wife brought small gifts such as vegetables to HKH from time to time. She would also greet the people from Hong Kong when she met them in the community, but both interviewee N and his wife had never sat down and talked to the Hong Kong people properly. This is not because interviewee N is not interested in the project. In my interview with him, Interviewee N showed interest in HKH, such as asking me if people can actually live there. “I know neither what it is like inside nor how big it is.” He said. He had never been to the house, although he did pass there a few times and noticed that “there are photographs showing inside”. I asked him why he did not enter, he replied by a question: “Can I enter? You need to pay, isn’t it?” Since the HKH belongs to the ETAF, during the exhibition period, it is shown on the poster that a “passport” (a pass for the festival) or a 500 yen ticket is required to enter. Although, as an “insider” of the Hong Kong team, I am sure that the house would not charge interviewee N if he asked to come, the entrance fee stopped him from coming. He also said that he had no communication with the Hong Kong people because “the Hong Kong people don’t speak Japanese”. He advised the Hong Kong people to “learn some Japanese, at least a ‘hi’ or ‘thank you’.” He mentioned to me that there was going to be a local matsuri soon after my interview with him.

“If the Hong Kong people are staying here, I think they need to show up during the matsuri and have fun with each other.” “The hearts between people are actually not that far away. Even though we are from different countries, we can still have fun when we eat and drink.”

Interestingly, when people suggest to me ways of improving the relationship between the HKH and the community, they rarely talk about the artworks.⁴¹ It may not have something to do with the quality of art in the HKH though, because they seem to have no interest in other artworks in the ETAF as well. Most of the interviewees said to me that they rarely see them. For instance, interviewee H said that she is not a big fan of the ETAF. She said that in 2000 when the first edition of the ETAT was launched, she did not know that there was an art event. In 2006, her kid who was studying in the primary school received a festival passport as a gift. That was the first time she knew about ETAT. However, since she was busy with her work, she did not see the exhibition. Even after 12 years since she knew about the festival, she has only seen a handful of works which are displayed outdoors. However, she played several roles in the production of the festival. For example, she made the HKH cookies for the opening of Wan’s exhibition. She and her husband also helped other artists from Taiwan to gather materials for their work. She also told me that, since she runs a cake shop, she got to know some artists when they come to her shop. It suggests that for many locals, the communication process may lie in the production process or even daily routine, rather than the conventional way of appreciating art.

In conclusion, the local people I have interviewed are seemingly positive to the HKH, although they mentioned that about half of the people are not positive to the project. For the

⁴¹ An exceptional case here is interviewee S, who was one of the local portrayed in the exhibition. She went down with ulcerated colitis in 2018 and had to stay in hospital. She said that the experience was very important to her life, so she hoped to share it with the others. Although she had written her experience and published them on the internet, before Wan approached her, she had never talked about it. Through the conversation, she said that she was able to reflect the meaning of the experience for her. After seeing the artworks, she thought that the pieces were able to express those she found it difficult to express clearly by language. She also thought that she was able to see herself from the artist’s point of view.

reasons that some people are not positive to the HKH, many said that the HKH has not enough active engagement with the local people, such as inviting them to visit the HKH. They recommend me (as a member of the Hong Kong team) to communicate with the locals more often by means such as hosting food party. It may be interesting to ask that, if half of the people are not positive, why did I fail to find anyone who explicitly told me that they dislike HKH? I choose these interviewees by random. Some of them never met Wan and spoke to the Hong Kong team before. So the reason is unlikely that the interviewees are selective. The reason may be as follows: It is interesting to note that one of the interviewees X, who asked to speak anonymously, told me that another person whom I have also interviewed, Y, did not like the HKH. However, when I interviewed Y, Y told me that he actually likes HKH, on the contrary criticising X for being “like HKH too much because it helps her/his business”. From this small episode one may guess that the reason that they all “like” HKH is that they do not want to criticise the HKH in front of me, who is from Hong Kong.

9. On Intention to Exchange

The above shows that many locals encourage members of the HKH to communicate with them. However, does the organiser (the HKH and the ETAF) also have a clear intention of communicating with the local people? My findings are that their intentions are more complicated.

For the ETAF, Kitagawa is quite clear that he wants exchange to happen in the HKH project. He hopes that Wan and the locals can understand each other through cultural exchange. Through creating artworks together, he hopes that the locals can have an enjoyable experience, and the artist can be stimulated to create new works.



Fram Kitagawa (credit: Tinshui Yeung)

On the contrary, the staff of ETAF, Tadahiro Asai has another idea. He does not think that for the locals, cultural exchange with foreigners is necessary. For him it is “a kind of spice”: sharing cultural experience with others is fun but he did not insist everyone do it. In this sense, he told me that he is “still thinking” what is the goal of the HKH project. One thing for him is certain: “I cannot make all the people here happy, so I just want to communicate with those who support the project and make them happy.”

For the APO, the intention of exchange is even more complicated. According to pamphlets published by the organiser, one of the HKH’s aims is to carry out cultural exchange with the locals (Lo, 2018, p.44; Lau, 2019, pp.3). However, on other occasions, exchange is not regarded as essential. For example, it is not listed as an essential criterion for the selection process in the open call document. The APO only requires “[a]rtwork . . . highlighting the unique history and culture of Echigo Tsumari region as well as featuring distinctive and

abundant nature that has the power to connect various cultures.” Moreover, the open call’s FAQ document stated clearly that public participation is considered welcomed by not a must (“Yuet hau chai yau”, 2017).

This complexity is reflected in my interview with Lau, the curatorial team head of the HKH project. She said that the reasons for establishing the HKH could be seen in the missions and visions of the APO, which include:

- 1) Provide one-stop service for art talent from art training and creation to presentation;
- 2) encourage partnerships among different art and community groups;
- 3) nurture young artists and new ideas; and
- 4) enrich the living environment and enhance the quality of life by launching innovative

Art Projects. (“Vision/Mission/Values”, n.d.)

She said that the APO is different from conventional institutions such as the Hong Kong Museum of Art⁴², in the sense that the latter “put ‘art’ as their core”, while APO’s curatorial direction has “a strong human touch”. However, she also said that it does not mean that the APO prefers “human touch” than “art”. Lau said that they are art curators, and art is still the core of their work. Furthermore, she said that as an art curator, she believes in artistic freedom, and tries not to interfere too much in the creation of the artist, although she also gives some hints of preference in some documents. For example, she said that in the open call, the APO said they are looking for “works which are related to the place”. She said: “However, what does it mean by relating to the place? It is really broad. To create art, you always need a broad topic, so you have a broad frame for your creation . . . If you set your frame too strictly, it is not good for visual art creation.”

⁴² A public museum which is also run by the LCSD of the Hong Kong government.

The above shows that for the APO, there are various considerations ranging from ensuring “artistic freedom” of the artist to emphasising a “human touch” in their curatorial approach.

With these considerations, the APO does have an intention to exchange with the locals, but to do it or not to do it, they leave that to the artists to decide.

So what about Wan? She said that she forgot whether the APO had suggested her to communicate with the locals. However, she believes that exchange with the locals is necessary for producing her work. She thinks that the residency period is important for her practice. “You have to stay here for at least one month in order to be able to ‘see something’.”

Since the communication process is for her a means to art production, Wan mostly conceives this communication as a one-way process: Wan told me that she has not thought about telling the locals about her own story and Hong Kong. For her, the reason for communication is more about “getting information” than “giving information”.

However, merely “giving information” is not what is expected by the locals. Interviewees said to me that they wanted to know more about both Wan and Hong Kong, but this is not satisfied in the communication process. Yet, Ng the interpreter noticed that, although the Hong Kong team asked the locals many questions, the locals rarely asked about them and Hong Kong. Why is it so? Interviewee H hints that the reason could be that communication is mostly taken as a formal interview. Interviewee H said that this form is too serious for a “good exchange”. She thinks that rather than formal conversation, informal ones such as discussion of daily life can create more intimate relationships.

In summary, this part shows that different individuals have different intentions and expectations in the process of communication. It invites us to extend our thinking about the reason and value of communication. What do we want and what do the others want?

10. On “Language Barrier”

As the communication is mostly a one-way process, many interviewees said to me that they do not know Wan very well. For example, interviewee E said: “I only know Annie is a very gentle lady. I know she makes ceramics. I saw photos of her work . . . I hope I can know more about her.” She also said that no specific impression was formed from her communication with Wan. “I just think that they [artists] have many interesting ideas.”

However, apart from one-way communication, there is another reason suggested by the interviewees that they do not know Wan well: The “language barrier”.

Asai commented that Ng played a very important role in the production process because he speaks Japanese. He observed that language barrier is a serious problem for HKH. Every time he introduced people from Hong Kong to the locals, the locals asked: “Does he speak Japanese?” He said that even if they cannot speak Japanese, the locals would still give out small gifts such as cookies or tea to the Hong Kong people. However, their exchange would be very much limited.

The voice of the locals agrees with what Asai observed. Interviewee E told me that language barrier is indeed a problem. She said that, although the HKH gave her a chance to talk to foreign people, she was unable to communicate due to language problems. “I feel disappointed because I cannot say what I want to say.” Similarly, interviewee K said that she wanted to talk to the Hong Kong people more often. However, sadly because she cannot speak English she cannot do so.

Interviewee H also has a similar view. She also said that some local people feel that it is difficult to understand what the Hong Kong people are doing because of the language difference. Also, because of the language barrier, she said: “I find it difficult to understand

what she [Wan] thinks as a person.” It is for this reason that she said that she knew Ng the interpreter better. During the interpretation process, Ng had developed a friendly relationship with interviewee H. He had been to her cake shop on his own and talked to her. He had also shown images of his artworks to her and shared some of his personal thoughts with her. Given that the presence of the interpreter supposedly can help to overcome the language barrier, it is interesting to see that interviewee H’s relationship with Ng and Wan is so different. This observation leads us to the final part of this chapter: What is the role of the interpreter in this communication process? How did he work? How did he affect communication?



Locals involved in the project (credit: Tinsui Yeung)

11. Role of the Interpreter

Finally, as the previous part hints that the interpreter may play an important role in the communication process, let us also look at his experience.

Ng admitted that the locals are more intimate to him than to Wan. He said that it is mainly because he commands Japanese. He felt that even if there is an interpreter, it is difficult for both sides who speak different languages to talk informally.

While many people may think that interpretation is the process of which one listens to a lingual message from one language, and then speaks the message by another language, Ng described his interpretation process quite differently.

According to Ng, his role as an interpreter was not one which interprets both sides as fully as possible, but one which heavily involved his own thinking. “I think I acted not only as an interpreter but also a journalist.” He said. He mentioned a few reasons for him to see himself as a journalist: Firstly, he wanted to find more stories; secondly, “It is a waste to ask [Wan’s] questions only and then finish the interview”; thirdly, it can improve the relationship between the artist team and the locals. He saw the expansion of his role as something not only for himself, but also for Wan. “Because the stories Annie wanted to find can only be heard if you are curious enough.”⁴³

Ng said that during the translation process, he would skip those content which he thought as “useless”. Furthermore, if he heard some points which he considers relevant from the locals, he would ask follow-up questions himself. Sometimes he would also actively ask questions, and interpret the answer to Wan if he decided that it was relevant. When asked what does it mean by “relevant”, Ng said that it means “useful to Annie’s work”. He understood that

⁴³ Wan had not interfered with his self-initiated expansion of the role. Ng said: “I feel grateful for this because even though the artist interfered, I would probably do the same.”

Wan's project was about food. So if there was content "really not related to that", such as the history of Tsunan and Tokamachi ("As you know villagers really like talking about these", he said), he would skip them. Thus he thinks that it is essential for the interpreter to understand what the artist is doing. "It is important to ask questions from the artist's perspective." Ng also said that if the interviewee asked a question about Wan, he would directly answer by himself if he knew the answer. "Because I don't want to waste time."

In this specific interpretation process, what is the experience of Wan? Wan observed that the exchange process with Ng as a mediator was different from direct communication with people sharing the same language. She said that since there is an interpreter in between the interlocutors, she cannot be sure if any details have been lost during the interpretation process. In this sense, the information she captured is incomplete. She said that for her the communication process was comparable to watching a movie which often loses signal. She has to guess what happened when the signal was lost. Based on this incomplete information, she continues to ask follow-up questions, which leads to more incomplete information. She also mentioned that since there was an interpreter, she can do something else (such as using her smartphone) during the interviews, since she did not need to listen when the local spoke.

While some may think that using a smartphone during conversation may be a signal that Wan felt bored or annoyed, Wan said that in fact the communication process was enjoyable and interesting for her. She said that it might be because she has a certain degree of social phobia. She sees herself as a shy person, commenting that she was self-centred when she was young, not knowing how to see from the others' perspective. "I thought that everyone feels the same

as I do.” Compared to herself, Wan said that Ng is very outgoing.⁴⁴ Having the mediation of Ng in her exchange process with the locals, Wan feels more comfortable.



Ng Ka Ho (credit: Tinshui Yeung)

12. Conclusion

Kitagawa is seemingly optimistic about the language problem. Although he recognised that language difference is a problem for intercultural exchange in ETAF, he believed that art could be mutually understood by people from different cultures. “This is the characteristic of art.” He said. Yet, given that almost every local member I have interviewed speaks very little

⁴⁴ For example, there is one night she was invited to to drink with the locals. She decided not to go and said to Ng: “You can go with you want.” She thought that Ng would not go since he did not need to interpret, but he went to the gathering.

or even nothing about interpreting art, how art may facilitate exchange by creating mutual understanding among people from different cultures is uncertain.

From my findings here, it seems that the language difference is indeed a problem in communication between the locals and the artist. Even though there is an interpreter between the two parties, the communication is still affected. The language difference, together with the one-way process of communication, make some of the locals unable to get what they expect from the communication process: to know more about Wan and Hong Kong. This becomes one of the reasons that some locals are not supportive of the Hong Kong House project. Yet, although for some locals the communication process is not fully satisfactory, for Wan, the process has served her purpose of getting the understanding of the place for her artwork. So is it a “successful” or “good” communication process? It depends on whose perspective you see from.

I end this chapter by asking a question: In my interview with Wan, I asked if she thinks that the communication process changed her art form. She agreed and she said, “I could feel that too.” However, how exactly does this change happen? Answering this question can help us to understand the relationship between communication and creativity in this case. However, this question cannot be answered by merely using the above ethnographic description, not only because she cannot explain it clearly by herself, but also because it requires a theoretical understanding of the relationship between personal experience and change. I will answer this question in Chapter 6.

Putting aside this question, as a conclusion of this chapter, I argue that, by listening to different voices of individuals, who include not only the conventional audience but also people who are often neglected, such as the interpreter, we may open up the complexity in the communication process of an SEA project. In this case, we can see that the exchange process

is in fact participated by people with different expectations and intentions. Additionally, the difference of language and the presence of the interpreter also effectively change the process and outcome of the communication. I argue that these complexities should not be overlooked by researchers, critics and practitioners of SEA, especially those involved in multilingual projects.

Chapter 4: Rebuild Foundation

In the previous chapter, I have analysed a new project in Japan. The pros of analysing a new project are that I can follow the making progress and draw timely results, while the cons are that comparison with other research is not possible. So in this case chapter, I move to the US to analyse a widely discussed project of SEA. i.e. The Rebuild Foundation in Chicago by Theaster Gates. Theaster Gates has been discussed a lot⁴⁵ (Moss, 2015), but it is precisely for this reason that it is valuable to revisit his work here. It allows me to demonstrate that inquiring into the experience of individuals can yield new understandings.

In this chapter, I also intend to show that, looking at individual experience does not only mean looking at how the audience experiences an artwork, but also means looking at the life of the people outside the context of the artwork. That is to say, while in the last chapter I focus on the experience of the individuals during the communication process, in this chapter I show why it is also valuable to look further into the lives of the individuals.

Similar to the previous chapter, this chapter is mainly descriptive. I will leave the theoretical analysis to Chapter 6.

1. Background

Theaster Gates was born in Chicago in 1973, but has grown up in the West side instead of the South, where the discussed project sits.⁴⁶ In 2006, he got a position at the University of

⁴⁵ The project is ranked no.29 on Blouin Artinfo's "100 Most Iconic Artworks in The Last Five Years" in 2012 ("The 100 Most Iconic Artworks", 2012) In 2020 January Gates won 26th Annual Crystal Award in Davos, an award associated with the World Economic Forum, "for his leadership in creating sustainable communities" (Chakrabort, 2020).

⁴⁶ According to a profile article in the New Yorker (Colapinto, 2014), Gates wanted to improve the living conditions for the black neighbourhoods since he was in high school. He studied urban planning, zoning and property law in Iowa State University. In university he took a pottery class and became interested in pottery. After graduation, he went to Tokoname, Aichi in Japan to study pottery for a year. He returned to

Chicago, of which the campus is located near Greater Grand Crossing.⁴⁷ Because the properties there were cheap, he moved to a former sweets shop on that Avenue⁴⁸ (Colapinto, 2014, para.32). After that, he not only lived in the building, but turned the building into a mini art centre with a ceramics studio and design lab (McGraw, 2012, pp.92). At the same time, he continued making object-based artworks.



Dorchester Avenue (credit: Tinshui Yeung)

Chicago in 1999, after 5 years working as a city planner, he quitted his job and pursued a master degree in urban planning, religion, and ceramics.

⁴⁷ According to a news report (O'Brien, 2019), the university has a complicated relationship to its black neighbourhood. In the early 1930s and '40s, the university supported the practice of keeping black residents from living near campus. In the '60s and '70s, when the university wanted to expand its campus south, they faced protests by community activists. In 1988, the university closed its hospital's trauma centre to save money, leaving victims of violence and accidents without nearby access to trauma care. The residents in nearby neighbourhoods fought a long battle to get the trauma centre reopened in the 2000s.

⁴⁸ The building cost him \$130,000 USD.

In 2008, Theaster Gates bought another building next to his (Gates, 2015).⁴⁹ It is the beginning of the Dorchester Project, which is officially started the year after⁵⁰. At first, he was not sure what he wanted to do with the house. However, soon he started to hold exhibitions and dinner gatherings. Since then, he started to conceive the house as a gathering space for people with various backgrounds.

Soon after he bought this building, the University of Chicago's Art History Department finished digitising the images on 60,000 glass slides about Western art history. Gates asked for them and the university gave him all. (Rebuild Foundation, n.d.). Gates then re-envision that his houses could be home to "bodies of knowledge". He further renovated the house, especially for storing this collection. The house was then renamed as "Archive House". Apart from these slides, the Archive House also contains other items, including 14,000 books of Art and architecture bought from a former bookstore. After that, a house which is called the Black Cinema House, which hosts events such as screenings and video workshops, was also added to the project. And then his home in the area was further renovated to become the Listening House, where 8,000 music records bought from a former record shop are stored. In 2012, Gates added one more building, which is now a landmark, to his line up. That is the Stony Island Arts Bank. It is an old bank building located a few blocks away from the houses of the Dorchester Project. It was initially a building of Stony Island State Savings Bank built in 1923⁵¹ and have been abandoned since 1978 (Ibid.). 17 developers had tried to develop a profitable business model for the building but all ended up failing (Konstantinides, 2015). The government decided to demolish it. However, with the support of the Chicago Mayor

⁴⁹ He bought it for about \$18,000. The price was cheap because it was during the economic crisis.

⁵⁰ Sometimes Gates and others would alternatively say, 2006, which was the year he bought his own house, is the beginning of the Dorchester Project (Ferry, 2018, pp.35).

⁵¹ The building was first Guaranteed Bank, then The Nation of Islam, then the Southmoor, and then the Stony Island State Savings Bank (Gates & Mitchell, 2016, pp.71)

Rahm Emanuel, Gates decided to buy it from the city for \$1 USD on the condition that he would be responsible for its renovation, which at last cost \$6 million (Rebuild Foundation, n.d.). Gates' idea is again turning the structure into an arts and community centre for the area. Accompanying this renovation, Gates established the Rebuild Foundation, a non-profit organisation which officially manages various projects he is doing in Greater Grand Crossing. After the Rebuild Foundation was founded, the original Dorchester Project officially became part of the Foundation's programs.

According to the Rebuild Foundation website, the missions of the organisation is "to demonstrate the impact of innovative, ambitious and entrepreneurial arts and cultural initiatives." They described their work as informed by three core values: black people matter, black spaces matter, and black objects matter.⁵² ("About Rebuild", n.d.)

⁵² There are also other sources which show the goals of the project. Arte Util archive described its "beneficial outcomes" as to "[p]rovide cultural institutions in the neighbourhood, brings together different community organisations and individuals, creating what Gates calls 'radical hospitality'" ("Theaster Gates-Dorchester Project", n.d.). According to Theaster Gates, radical hospitality is "simply having intentionality about the way in which traditional constructs of invitation and generosity are shared" (Quoted from a private email by Marstine, 2013, pp.168). In other occasions and interviews, Gates further added explanations and visions to his project. In a video he said, "In a place that had been crack-filled, and where people imagined that there was only violence, I was really excited . . . to transform people's ideas about what happened in spaces." (Quoted from video "Cultural Space Seattle", by McGraw, 2012, pp.94) In another interview, he said he also attempted to create new spaces and new identities through alternative cultural narratives for the black neighbourhood (Huff, 2013, pp.32). Gates stated in an award statement that the project is "committed to bringing attention to the South Side as a creative depot . . . we are committed to fostering new projects, relationships, and art on the South Side (Ibid., pp.50). And in a conversation with his teaching colleague W.J.T. Mitchell (2016), he mentioned that he wanted to create a system "that tries to open things up" (Gates & Mithcell, 2016, pp.67). Gates also wrote, "I leverage artistic moments to effect real change." (quoted by Reinhardt, 2015, pp.196). Another Gates' often quoted statement is that he said he does not want to be a "community do-gooder", but only wants to be "a good neighbour" ("In Conversation", 2013).



Stony Island Arts Bank (credit: Tinshui Yeung)

The 17,000 square feet Arts Bank was opened to the public in 2015 (Rebuild Foundation, n.d.). After acquiring the bank building, Gates moved most of his collections there. He further added many new collections such as the Johnson Publishing Collection (the publisher of African-American culture magazines *Ebony* and *Jet*), the Edward J. Williams Collection of “negrobilia” (Ibid.), and the Frankie Knuckles Collection (A collection of vinyl from Frankie Knuckle, who is regarded as the godfather of House Music, which was born in Chicago in 1980s (Ibid.)).

After the Rebuild Foundation was established, Gates (or the Foundation) continued to run more and more projects. Artist in residency program is created. Another project is the Dorchester Art + Housing Collaborative. It is a housing complex redeveloped by old houses in Greater Grand Crossing. The \$10 million project offers apartments for a mix of artists and

public (McGraw, 2012, pp.99). Some of them (32 units) are rented by affordable rate while the others are rented by the market rate. It is a collaboration between the Rebuild Foundation, the Chicago Housing Authority and commercial developers. In the redevelopment process, a community space with a large kitchen is also created for the residents and the neighbourhood. Another program is called Dorchester Industries, a program which gives job opportunities to individuals around the neighbourhood. One of the main parts of the project is recruiting locals to learn carpentry, so that they can do related jobs, including jobs offered by the Chicago city government on trees in the city.⁵³

In 2020 the Rebuild Foundation received a donation of \$500,000 to fight AIDS (“Rebuild Foundation to Use”, 2020), which reflects that their projects are now no longer only located in Greater Grand Crossing, but reaching a wider, more general audience.⁵⁴

However, government and non-government funding is not the major source of income of the Rebuild Foundation. Rather, Gates employs an unusual business model for the project. He strategically uses the affluent art world to fund it. The trick is that he sells the salvaged pieces of the old buildings as “art”. He also makes sure the buyer knows that the money s/he spends on buying these “artworks” is funding the projects in Greater Grand Crossing. For example, when Gates renovated the Stony Island Bank Building, he removed a marble slab from a bathroom and transformed it to an “artwork”. These works are inscribed with the statement “In ART We Trust”. One hundred of them were sold for \$5,000 each (Adams, 2015). Some other larger ones were sold for as much as around \$50,000 a piece (Austen, 2013). In 2011, he used unwanted fire hoses to make a set of canvas works, imbued a historical narrative to it (e.g. the Birmingham campaign in 1963, which high school students were hit by a

⁵³ Together with the University of Chicago, Gates has also created other projects, such as the Chicago Arts + Industry Commons. It is also about redeveloping an area with the arts.

⁵⁴ Gates’ practices have expanded to other cities such as St Louis, Missouri; Akron, Ohio; Gary, Indiana, and even to Bristol in the UK (Adams, 2015).

high-pressure water jet from a fire hose during a peaceful protest in Birmingham, Alabama) (Wei, 2011, para.29) and called them “In the Event of a Race Riot”. One set was sold in a Christie’s auction for £250,000 (Adams, 2015). Since 2011, Gates has been represented by the White Cube Gallery. With connections in the art world, he repeated his pattern of buying property, renovating it, selling the scraps, and buying another property again (Colapinto, 2014, para.37).

1.1 Greater Grand Crossing

To understand the Rebuild Foundation, it is essential to know about the area where it is situated. It is situated in the Greater Grand Crossing area in the South Side of Chicago. The city of Chicago, with an estimated population of 2,695,652 in 2019 (“QuickFacts”, n.d.), has been known for its segregation. In the North side, residents are mostly white. While in the South, most of the population is black (Krysan, 2018). A government report shows that 96.2% of the 31,766 residents in Greater Grand Crossing is black (2013-2017 figures. Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2019).

While Hyde Park, where the University of Chicago is situated, is a chic district, Greater Grand Crossing which is only about 2.5 km from the campus is “a different world entirely” (Adams, 2015, para.4) *The New Yorker* writer Colapinto described the neighbourhood as dangerous, “it averaged one fatal shooting a week” (2014, para.32; other similar descriptions include Wei, 2011, para.1). A local media report says that the area is Chicago’s 4th most murderous neighbourhood (“The Most Murderous neighbourhood”, 2013). The bad security is associated with poverty (Gates, n.d.), but the actual situation there, as Gates sees it, is not as bad as what the media reports. Thus for Gates, the Dorchester Project is also an opportunity

for the people living outside this area to come to see the neighbourhood, to change their presumption of it⁵⁵ (Gates, 2015).

3. Literature Review

As I have already mentioned in the introduction, Rebuild Foundation is a well-known project with plenty of discussions. In this part, I grouped these discussions into themes. I do this in order to show that, by studying the same project by an individual-based approach, I can gain findings which are different from those already suggested.

Firstly, as for all SEA projects, whether “it is art” or whether “it is good art” is always an issue for scholars and critics. Art scholar Vid Simoniti argues from an institutional view that, if something is accepted by members of art institutions that it is art, it is art. As Theaster Gates’ work is widely discussed, shown and traded in the art scene, it should be regarded as art (pp.77).⁵⁶ Alternatively, Sociologist Timon Beyes argues that Gates work is valuable as art in the sense that it has “a singular potential of questioning, irritating and intervening into the habitual forms of organising urban life” (2015, pp.217). By asking questions, Beyes wrote that the work could resist or even transcend classification and grand narrative. (For similar arguments, see also Samborska, 2016) Other positive arguments include praising his business model as a form of art (e.g. Khadivi, 2014, pp.58). Negative arguments include those by art administrator Daonne Huff. The author claimed that the quality of the artwork had been mixed up with the character and outlook of the artist (2013, pp.54).

⁵⁵ According to a White Cube gallerist, Gates represented a kind of “cultural tourism”, since collectors of Gates’ artwork do go to visit the Dorchester area (Colapinto, 2014).

⁵⁶ He further argues that to judge whether it is good or bad, one cannot just take the “philosophical theories of artistic value”, but also need to assess it pragmatically. “a socially engaged artwork is good art simply to the extent that it realises a politically valuable end, regardless of the means the work employs” (pp.80; for similar arguments, see also Horwitz, 2013).

Another debate revolves around the accusation of abandoning artistic autonomy. Art writer Gregory Sholette is sceptical to the project, as he argues that this kind of “1:1 art” (i.e. SEA of which the work is exactly a part of the society, without transformation of representation) is redundant because it provides a function already fulfilled by something else (2015, pp.24).

The third debate topic concerning the project is whether Gates has improved the condition of the community or worsened it by collaborating with parties that create the problem (e.g. government and commercial sector) Some writers argue for the latter (e.g. Gogarty, 2014, pp.8; Vishmidt, 2013), while there are also arguments supporting Gates’ project include that by cultural programmer Andy Horwitz, who argued that the consideration of money is both practical and necessary, especially for the engaged black race (2013, para.13). Another argument by art historian Kathleen Reinhardt is that “practitioners should only be interested in the next step and not in a universalising principle of transformation” (2015, pp.201). Gates himself has an answer for this too. He said that while some people “have a much more radical engagement”, some others stay closer to the system. They are not mutually exclusive. Rather, “those people have to do things together” (Gates & Mitchell, 2016, pp.68).

The fourth issue is about the relationship between the artwork and the community. Some authors acknowledge that the Rebuild Foundation has a good relationship with the community (e.g. Reinhardt, 2015). On the contrary, Huff (2013, pp.28-56) has written a strong criticism regarding this topic, claiming that the Rebuild Foundation serves the educated elite rather than the Greater Grand Crossing neighbourhood (Ibid., pp.38). Journalist Harry Backlund has also fired an explicit criticism (2011). In his article he highlighted a quote by Gates in his interview: “It’s [the project is] for me. And it’s for us. It’s for my neighbours. And then... It’s for all those who will come.” (para.9) Backlund criticised that Gates is intentionally making this a confusion to satisfy his egoism (para.22).

Another argument is related to the racial issue. Art scholar Stephanie Anne Johnson articulates Gates' projects to the "Black Lives Matter" movement. She argues that the Rebuild Foundation can be seen as an example of "The Black Public Sphere" theory (Johnson, 2019, pp.41). Gregory Sholette (2017, pp.135) also wrote that Gates is often considered a successful example of black SEA artists in the art scene, while in fact he is not the first artist of colour in SEA.⁵⁷ Sholette argues that his fame mostly comes from his business model, which is relevant in the context of capitalism.

Here I have included most of the key discussions related to the Rebuild Foundation. I argue that these literature reflect that conventional SEA analysis in the West rarely looks at individual experience, because none of the projects I mentioned above discusses what people really think about the project. Rather, the arguments are made mostly from art history and social theory perspectives. Even Huff (2013) who fiercely argues that the Rebuild Foundation lacks concern on the voice of the neighbourhood, the author mentioned no voice from the neighbourhood. On the contrary, this chapter begins with this question: What does the neighbourhood think?

4. Methodology

This research collects data through qualitative means. Data were collected through interviews, on-site fieldwork, as well as textual material. I was on-site from 11th February 2020 to 23rd February 2020. Every day I spent around 4 hours joining programs of the Rebuild Foundation such as their workshops and guided tours, talking to people and observing the facilities. Sometimes I just walk around the neighbourhood, or have dinner or wash my clothes in a local laundromat (at the same time observing the community). I have spoken to more than 30

⁵⁷ For example Project Row Houses (1993), which is similar to the Rebuild Foundation, is initiated by Rick Lowe, a black artist.

people. Among them, I have interviewed 11. These people are selected by random and mainly according to their willingness and availability. I tried to avoid referrals from the Foundation to avoid possible control of information. Even interviewee M, a staff of the Rebuild Foundation, is approached by me unexpectedly rather than pre-arranged. I interviewed some of them face to face in Chicago, while some others I spoke to them by phone. Theaster Gates is not among them⁵⁸ but since there are already many interviews of him, I think that Gates' interview is not compulsory. Time and location of the interview are shown in the bracket.

The Rebuild Foundation

Interviewee M, a programmer of the Rebuild Foundation (2020 Feb, on-site)

Interviewee A, a volunteer of Rebuild Foundation and an artist (2020 Feb, on-site)

Collaborators

Interviewee D, an art workshop facilitator

(interviewed together with interviewee T, 2020 Mar, by phone)

Interviewee T, an art workshop facilitator

(interviewed together with interviewee A, 2020 Mar, by phone)

Locals and Participants

Interviewee P, a ballet class participant/instructor (2019 Feb, on-site)

Interviewee G, a ballet class participant/instructor (2019 Feb, on-site)

Interviewee C, a chat group host (2019 Feb, on-site)

Interviewee T, a chat group participant (2019 Feb, by phone)

Interviewee J., a writing workshop host (2019 Feb, on-site)

Interviewee C2, a participant of writing workshop (2019 Mar, by phone)

Interviewee C3, a singing and yoga class participant (2019 Mar, by phone)

⁵⁸ I approached but there was no reply from him.

An inductive research approach was taken for the research. I began with a simple question in mind: Has the Rebuild Foundation transformed the community? If yes, how? If no, why can't it?

While the previous chapter presents my findings by grouping them into themes, in this chapter I will present them first by my own field experience, and then by individual interviews. I consider this method appropriate since it can show that how the interviewee experiences the project is heavily depending on her/his own life history. More general findings will be discussed briefly after presenting these interviews.

5. Field Experience

I was in Greater Grand Crossing in February 2020. There were not many people in the area. During my days in Chicago, all the houses of the Dorchester Project were closed. A staff member of the Foundation told me that the Dorchester Project houses are closed unless there are events. Walking from these houses for about five minutes, I reached the Dorchester Art + Housing Collaborative. It is in a street with newer buildings. Among them, there is a glass house. The house is about 400 square feet in size, with a big kitchen of around 200 square feet. It only opens when there are events, but events are frequent. Usually there are one or two events each day, around two hours for each event. During Saturday and Sunday, events are more common (3 to 4 per day). Examples of events include classes of “Soul Healing yoga”, “African Dance” and “Adult Ballet”. They are officially called “Dorchester Art + Housing Collaborative Free Public Programs”. The event schedule is shown on the Rebuild Foundation’s website.



The closed Listening House (credit: Tinshui Yeung)



The glass house of Dorchester Art + Housing Collaborative (credit: Tinsui Yeung)

It takes another 5 minutes to walk from the glass house to the Arts Bank. The Arts Bank is very eye-catching due to its distinctive style. One day, in front of the Stony Island Arts Bank, when I was waiting for one of my interviewees, I was approached by two black men around 20s. They were amused because it is rare to see Asian in the area (I have never seen one). They asked me what I am doing. I did not say I am waiting for my interviewee (because it will be too complicated as an answer). I just said I am visiting the Arts Bank. Then they asked me what that building is. I was surprised because given that the bank has such a distinguished outlook, I thought everyone in the area knows about it. I asked them in return what they think the building is. They said they don't know, "it used to be a bank, but I have no idea what they are doing here now." They told me that they have been living in the area for a long time. When I told them that it is actually an arts centre, they did not seem to care.

Perhaps because the project has been set up for some time and because of the Wintertime, there are not many visitors in the Stony Island Arts Bank. Every Sunday there is a guided tour for the Arts Bank⁵⁹. In the Arts Bank there are books and records collections. There are also spaces for events such as screenings and artist talks. Paintings and sculptures are also exhibited in the site. When I was there, apart from the guided tour, around 20 people were attending a book launch, while another 20 people were seeing a film related to black culture. After the guided tour, visitors are free to explore everywhere. Some of them move to the bar, where one can enjoy drinks and music. There is a resident DJ who regularly performs in the bar.⁶⁰

Most of the programs of the Rebuild Foundation are those in the glass house, which are operated by different people, ranging from interest groups from other areas to local residents. They are allowed to use the venue freely. Some of them openly seek donations (around \$10 per person per session) from the participants, although some others never talk about money. There is also a community chat group where people just come and chat freely. Most of the events are operated on a weekly basis. These groups have a participants size of around 2 to 9 people. I have observed 6 of these groups.⁶¹ About 90% of the participants are black.

I describe here especially the Wednesday chatting session hosted by interviewee C, since the experience can reflect the general feeling of participating in the events in the glass house.

Interviewee C came with a bunch of coffee, tea and snacks. They are served during the chat

⁵⁹ During my days of visit, the Arts Bank opens to the public every Sunday. The staff said that it is going to be changed to three days a week from Spring to Fall. The tour I joined has about twenty guests, three of them are black, two are Asian, the rest are all white. Staff from the Foundation brought them to see the building inside with a tour for about 1.5 hours.

⁶⁰ Furthermore, next to the Arts Bank there is a memorial for Tamir Rice. Tamir Rice was a 12 years old black kid who was murdered by a Cleveland Police Officer while playing with a toy gun in Ohio. The signage of the memorial said that it aims at providing a space for visitors to reflect upon the racial, political and economic crisis of the country.

⁶¹ Among them, the one with the least participants is the writers' workshop, which had only two people at the time I participated. The one with most participants was the ballet class, around ten people participated.

session. Some other chatters brought snacks with them too. All the chatters know each other in the chat session, except one newcomer, interviewee T. One of the chatter is a local artist who does dance performance and street art painting. He showed us his works during the chat session.

Topics discussed ranging from weather to food to music (“tell us about Japanese music”, they asked me) to racial discrimination. They spend about 40% of the time discussing topics related to black people. They asked me how schools teach black history in my home country (Hong Kong). I said we have world history lessons but this “world” rarely includes African. They said that is exactly suppression.

They said they treasure the chat event very much. They said that for them the group is like a ritual of life, reminding them to enjoy daily life.

In the chat session, they also tried to convince me that the area is actually not that dangerous. They complain that many people think that the area is unsafe because they only read the news, which only makes reports when (bad) things happen. They said that if you are not associated with crimes, no one will hurt you. As an example, they mentioned that recently a resident was killed, but only because s/he sold drugs. They also said that the area is safe because they have never seen corpses on the street. Personally, after hearing their examples, I found that I am not very convinced that the area is safe.



Greater Grand Crossing at night (credit: Tinsui Yeung)

They told me that except regular comers, from time to time there are also outsiders who come to visit the chat session. I was an example. Apart from me, before elections occasionally politicians would also come to talk to them. The participants are all grateful to the Rebuild Foundation, because the Foundation gave cultural resources to the area where the city government ignores.

Below I summarise the interviews. I intend to show from these interviews the experience and thoughts of the project by these people, under the background of their own lives.

6. Interview Summaries

6.1 Interviewee M

Interviewee M is a 26 years old programmer in the Rebuild Foundation. Interviewee M's job is to help to coordinate programs and events. He said that currently there are only 2 full time staff for the Rebuild Foundation: a director of public programming and him. However, they get support from Theaster Gates' studio team for various tasks. According to him, Theaster Gates comes to the Arts Bank often.

Interviewee M has been a programmer for about 2 years. He was born in Bronzeville, a neighbourhood in Chicago around 15 minutes drive North from the Rebuild Foundation. Due to the cost of living, he moved further and further South. Now he is living in Woodlawn, an area 5 minutes south from the Rebuild Foundation. He took classes at a college in Chicago, but left before he graduated. Previous to working in the Arts Bank, he worked at the "Peach's at Currency Exchange cafe", another site not near the Rebuild Foundation but also an affiliated project of it. He said, at first he met the cafe because it is near his home, "and when I walked into it, I instantly fell in love with this space. Not only that, but the space fell in love with me. They asked me if i'd like to work there." After that, he was further asked if he wants to work for the Foundation.

Regarding mission and vision, He describes his work in the Rebuild Foundation as "cultural redevelopment on the South Side of Chicago". He said that the neighbourhood is changing continuously⁶², one of the aims of the Foundation is to "ensure that the natives of this community remained to be a part of the conversations that are occurring about it."

⁶² For example, the Barack Obama Presidential Center is planned to be built in Jackson Park on the South Side of Chicago, near the University of Chicago campus. In the centre there will be cultural facilities such as a new branch for the Chicago Public Library.

Commenting on the impact of the Foundation to the community, Interviewee M said: “That’s very beneficial, which is it’s creating space that did not exist before. It created an opportunity that didn’t exist before.” He said that it had been a long time in the South Side that they lack cultural facilities. There is also a long history in which black people are not welcomed by regular cultural facilities such as theatres. “So I think the creation of this space is a kind of Renaissance.”

Interviewee M spoke about the collection of the Arts Bank. “Our work here is not only to allow us to honour the excellence that was cultivated among them [black people], but to allow the engagement to continue.”

He commented on the Arts Bank building too. “So many people, myself included, walked past her for so many years . . . Some people feel like it’s something that they instantly resonate with, so they appreciate it. I appreciate it, and I think that the work definitely uplifted the people that were around”. He further added: “The beauty of this place is that it does a great job of mixing all these different groups of people together, whether it’s architects, creatives, artists, scholars, or people who are just locals inside the neighbourhood. It does a great job of building the bridge to connect them all together.”

Interviewee M said that the place had changed him quite a few ways. “Because there are so many different parts that come together. There’s architectural elements that breathe into the idea of art, making them breathe to the ideas of community engagement. They’re intersecting so well, so my time here allows me to kind of see different sides of all of it coming together, to learn from it and be able to utilise it better.” He said that working in the Foundation gives him access to many other artists and art organisations. “It’s hard not to be inspired by that because you’re always being immersed into something different.” For example, he said the work on different collections “taught me a lot about collecting, archiving and digitising all the

things.” And he regarded himself as an artist, filmmaker and dancer. “Having different projects that I get to jump on here, I can later add different ideas to my own artistry”. Talking about the future, he said he wanted to continue to work with the Rebuild Foundation, while starting his career as an artist. He said he wanted to apply for a residency in the Foundation, as an artist instead of a programmer. “For these two years, I learnt so much about what it means to manage, which definitely is helpful. However, now I think it’s time to focus on my practice. I think I can take it to another level.”

He said he sometimes thinks about going back to college to finish his bachelor degree. “I think artists tend to try to get as much accreditation or schooling or training they can possibly get, before jumping into their practice.”

6.2 Interviewee C

Interviewee C is 62 years old. She works as a temporary staff in the Rebuild Foundation once a week on Sunday. She is also the host of the community chat group. She told me that she has been participating in the chat sessions for many years. In early days Theaster Gates joined too. She said she is happy with this group because she can meet new friends, but she disagrees that the Rebuild Foundation or the chat group changed her in any ways.

Interviewee C was born and raised in Chicago. She has been living in the Greater Grand Crossing community since the early 80s. She said she likes this community. “People say many bad things about it, and things do happen, but I don’t feel in a constant state of danger or pending doom or anything like that, it’s way worse on the news than it’s actually living here.”

She said she learnt about the Rebuild Foundation because the Arts Bank is walking distance from her house (before the Bank opened, she did not know about the Dorchester Projects).

Since the Arts Bank was opened to the public in 2015, she saw the publicity and started attending the chat session. Other currently active members of the chat group joined in around 2017.

She said that the chat group has no agenda, and it is important for it to have no agenda, because nowadays people rarely talk to each other without an agenda. She said all she wants is a free chat.

Apart from the chat session, she also attends seminars and various lectures organised by the Foundation. Commenting on the Rebuild Foundation, she said the Foundation is valuable because they offer cultural events in the South Side, which normally only exist in the North side or Hyde Park. Given that Hyde Park is only 7 minutes drive from the Rebuild Foundation, the problem is not a matter of distance. Interviewee C said: “Hyde Park is a campus town. When you go to Hyde Park, even though it is on the South Side, you don't feel like you're in a neighbourhood like this.” And when I told her that there are also other community centres in Greater Grand Crossing, she replied, “those community centres are generally run by the government. They don't have a creative part.”

Although the chat group is great, she said that it is not a must for it to be associated with the Rebuild Foundation. “I have even talked to friends on the other side of town about doing it, you know. All you need is a space in any public library.”

For her commitment to society, interviewee C said: “I want to help transform this community here. I want to transform the narrative about this community and black communities in general.” She said that many policies are made on false assumptions, so she wanted to change that. She is currently studying for her bachelor degree, with a focus on urban planning and policy. She said she wants to be a registered parliamentarian. “I'll be the oldest person in the workforce with the newest credential.”

However, she does not think that her actions and intentions have anything to do with the Rebuild Foundation. “I am a fully formed adult.” She said. “So the things that I am interested in, the goals that I have were already there.”

Interviewee C said, after getting her bachelor degree, she is prepared to move to other areas if her career needs her to. She does not care if she can stay in Greater Grand Crossing. Wherever there is better pay and better chance to use her ability, she is ready to move there.

6.3 Interviewee T

Interviewee T is a retired black lady who needs a stick to move. She was a teacher. She has been living in the area for decades but she never knew about the Rebuild Foundation. She said she always wanted to find someone to talk to, so she joined the community chat session. The day I met her was the very first day she participated in the group. We did the interview the next day. This interview serves as a rare account of how newcomers see the Rebuild Foundation project.

Interviewee T has been living on the Southeast side of Chicago for about sixty years. She was born in Michigan and came to Chicago when she was three years old. She has childrens but they moved away after they have grown up. Now she is living alone in a senior building. In this kind of building there is elderly service, but she also has her own apartment.

She said she was interested in the chat group because she wanted to connect with other people. She does not use social media, preferring real conversation. She said that before joining the chat group, she has also tried to get a group of friends together, meeting once or twice a month to talk. However, people did not value it. So she searched if someone is doing that, and she ended up finding the Rebuild Foundation chat group.

And the result was wonderful to her. “I was thrilled. I had the best day yesterday. Very very thrilled at everything. And I met you. I met a man from Japan! This crazy person made me feel very cosmopolitan. Not just you, I’ve met everybody. It makes me feel very international.”

Having been living in the area for more than half a decade, she gave me her observations on the change of the neighbourhood. For the University of Chicago, she said it is not very related to the South Side. “It is an international area. It can be in any country in the world, because it’s a major University.” For other areas in the South Side, there are more and more deteriorated buildings and empty lots. However, it is not because of the lifestyle of the black people. Interviewee T said, “It’s really a matter of discrimination. Because when black people move to an area, the bank will not lend money. You can’t get loans to keep up your property. It’s called redlining.” Because black people cannot get loans, it is difficult for them to maintain their property. They’ll [the privileged white] let it happen for 30 or 40 years. So it becomes really worn down and then the developers can come in and scoop up the land really cheap. They can build high rises and so forth and make big money. So it’s all part of the plan. And you can’t break out of the cycle of poverty. It is institutionally designed to be that way.”

She thinks that talking about these issues among black people, like what they did in the chat group, is important. “I feel that when people try their best but never seem to accomplish what they know they’re capable of accomplishing, they can internalise that, and that leads to depression. It leads to violence. They take it personally. So I think people need to know that, it is not you, but the system. They need to understand the system so they can make choices.”

Apart from talking about the issue, can the Rebuild Foundation transform the community by improving the said institutional problem? Interviewee T said she remembered that the elementary school where she studied has been bought by Theaster Gates and turned into a

community centre. “Here’s my excitement about the Rebuild Foundation. I just learnt about it a year ago. When you live in a community that’s very blighted, and you manage to accumulate resources, normally you move away. You go somewhere nice and pretty and organised and not blighted . . . I can go downtown to the Art Institute [of Chicago], I can go and watch all the great masters, look at all the sculptures... However, that’s not my culture, my heritage. Even though you can go and embrace any other culture, until you embrace your own, there is an emptiness in you. Most people don’t know that it’s [the emptiness] there, because they have never felt it. I know the feeling. I know what I felt.”

“However, now I know that a man, with my same cultural heritage, is investing in the physical structures, not to tear down and build high rise condos, but investing in their physical structure, to invest in the community and preserve our accomplishment, that’s beautiful.”

6.4 Interviewee C3

Interviewee C3 is 36 years old. She is a regular participant in the yoga session and the singing session. For the yoga class, she has been joining for a few years. And for the singing session, a few months. In many ways she shows how diversified participants of the Rebuild Foundation can be, reminding us again that we should not assume that participants can be seen as a coherent group - She got a master degree from Harvard University. Why does she join the programs of the Rebuild Foundation?

Interviewee C3 was born in Chicago but not on the South Side. She went to the University of Illinois, studied psychology and sociology, and then went to Harvard and got her master in educational policy and management. She is now working in an NGO called Public Allies, an

organisation committed to changing the leadership by recruiting and training talented young leaders with a passion for social impact.

One day she asked her friends where she can do free yoga on the South Side. Someone recommended her to the one by the Rebuild Foundation. She joined, and then she learned more about other programs.

In the interview I frankly told interviewee C3 that my assumption was that a Harvard degree means success. It sounded strange to me that she wants to find FREE yoga with a Harvard degree. Interviewee C3 explained that after graduation, she had financial difficulty because she had no permanent job. “I had the education, but not necessarily the money. It took me a long time to find the work that I currently have, but since I work in social services, it doesn’t necessarily pay much money anyway.” However, working in social service is her choice. She said she wants to serve the others and not necessarily do something for money. Furthermore, apart from yoga she also does many things: Working with her mom on a series of books, and singing in a band. For her this means investment. “I have to be conscious of how I spend my money, so I try to get the yoga class free.”

For the singing class, she said she appreciates it because it is professional. She hopes that she can be a better performer, so that she can make progress with her band. “[the teacher] has been helping me to figure out my voice, figure out the best ways to approach singing. He has been really, really helpful.”

She admitted that she might not be the “ideal” participants of social service. “I definitely have the privilege. I am not a person in poverty. However, that does not mean I don’t struggle in some way. I am privileged, but I am also African American. I am a woman. I face situations in a society that doesn’t value me, a coloured woman, as a person many times. I face sexism and racism. I live in Brainerd, in the South Side of Chicago, my community does face many

what other communities face, in terms of violence and those you might hear about on the South Side. I've seen all the different issues that people could face within these communities."

"So these classes (in Greater Grand Crossing) still serve me because they give me a specific community that I wouldn't find in other places. I can go to a more expensive place, but I won't feel comfortable . . . The space gives me something that other spaces may not have."

She further explained the necessity for staying in a black-only community. "The reason why it's valuable to have all black, is that sometimes it is about safety. There are just some conversations that are uniquely shared among black people because they have a shared history and culture . . . You don't have to worry about getting into a conversation like 'Is Donald Trump a racist'. Sometimes it's about not having to engage in conversations that are really harmful. Some conversations should be within the black community, because it's about us."

"It is also about pride and celebrating us. I think in a society where black people are not valued, there are so many stereotypical representations in media and other spaces, there's a need to create spaces that celebrate us, where we value each other, we love each other, where we are whole and we can be ourselves."

"Because many times when you navigate different spaces, with different people and different racial groups, you have to be 'black American'. You have to split who you are because you are navigating the world as a black person. So being in a black space, means you don't have to navigate the space in that way. I don't have to be careful about what I say, and what I do, and worry about the gaze upon me."

I explained to her that in the field of SEA, there is a criticism about micro-utopia, that people connected together in a project may feel good among themselves, but nothing is changed outside that group. She answered: "The [this criticism's] assumption is that I don't have a

world outside that bubble, that the only place where I go is Rebuild. However, Chicago is a big city, I go everywhere. So it is a faulty assumption. The experience that I have in Rebuild would probably translate to other places that I go.”

“I think dealing with racism is not just about having conversations with white people, that is not the only way to fix racism. You can also help black people by giving access to wellness programs, dealing with the lack of access to cultural resources, educating people about black culture and black history, which is important to preserve our culture. It also improves racism .

. . What people are asking for in black communities is resources. They’re like, we need more mental health services, we need more afterschool programs, so that the kids would not run around. There will be violence if the kids have nothing to do. So there is a gap of resources, and they [Rebuild Foundation] provide the resource.”

“On the other hand, I do hear the critique. I think it could be beneficial for the black and other races to come together and have conversations, in addition to this program, maybe be a separate type of programming that Rebuild offers. It doesn’t have to be either one.”

“I guess the fear is that people outside the community don’t understand the intention of creating black spaces that are safe, and they come into the space and change the intention, and then you lose something that was created. I saw white people in yoga class. Nobody cares. It was just the same class. You know, nobody is asking ‘why are they here?’ I think there will be an issue only if there is an imbalance.”

6.5 Interviewee J and interviewee C2

Interviewee J is the host of the writers' workshop and interviewee C2 is one of the participants. The workshop has been held for about 4 years. There is no preset rundown. The participants would often bring their writings to the workshop and read-aloud for the others to

give comments. They also have a showcase event once a year, where they print their works as books and sell to the audience.

Interviewee J lives in Rogers Park on the North side of Chicago. She works with the group as an independent publisher. She does this not for money but for helping each other to publish their works so that they may continue writing. She also said that if she helps the writers to publish books, the writers would have experience when they have the chance to talk to big publishers. She is also a writer herself. I asked interviewee J why she lives on the North side but holds workshops in the South, she said she has activities in the North side too. Furthermore, she said she lived in the South before, so the area is like a home to her.

Interviewee C2 is now in his 80s. He said he started writing when he was 70. With the help of interviewee J, he has published around six books. Most of the books are related to black people. For example, one of the books is an account of the urban black riots in the 1960s. Another book is about the life and death of a corrupt police officer who preyed on the black community.

In this part, I summarise the interviews of them. Their interviews are done separately, so although I put them in a single part, I will present them separately as well.

Interviewee J said that she has been writing since she was young. She is an arts educator at the Smart Museum of Art in the University of Chicago, where Gates is also working, so interviewee J knows about Gates for quite a long time. Shortly after the Arts Bank opened in 2015, interviewee J approached the Rebuild Foundation and asked them if they could do something for NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month), an annual Internet-based creative writing project that takes place during the month of November. The foundation agreed, so they organised a two days event to have people come in and bring their writings and read them. Some people asked them if they could do something more, so in 2016 January,

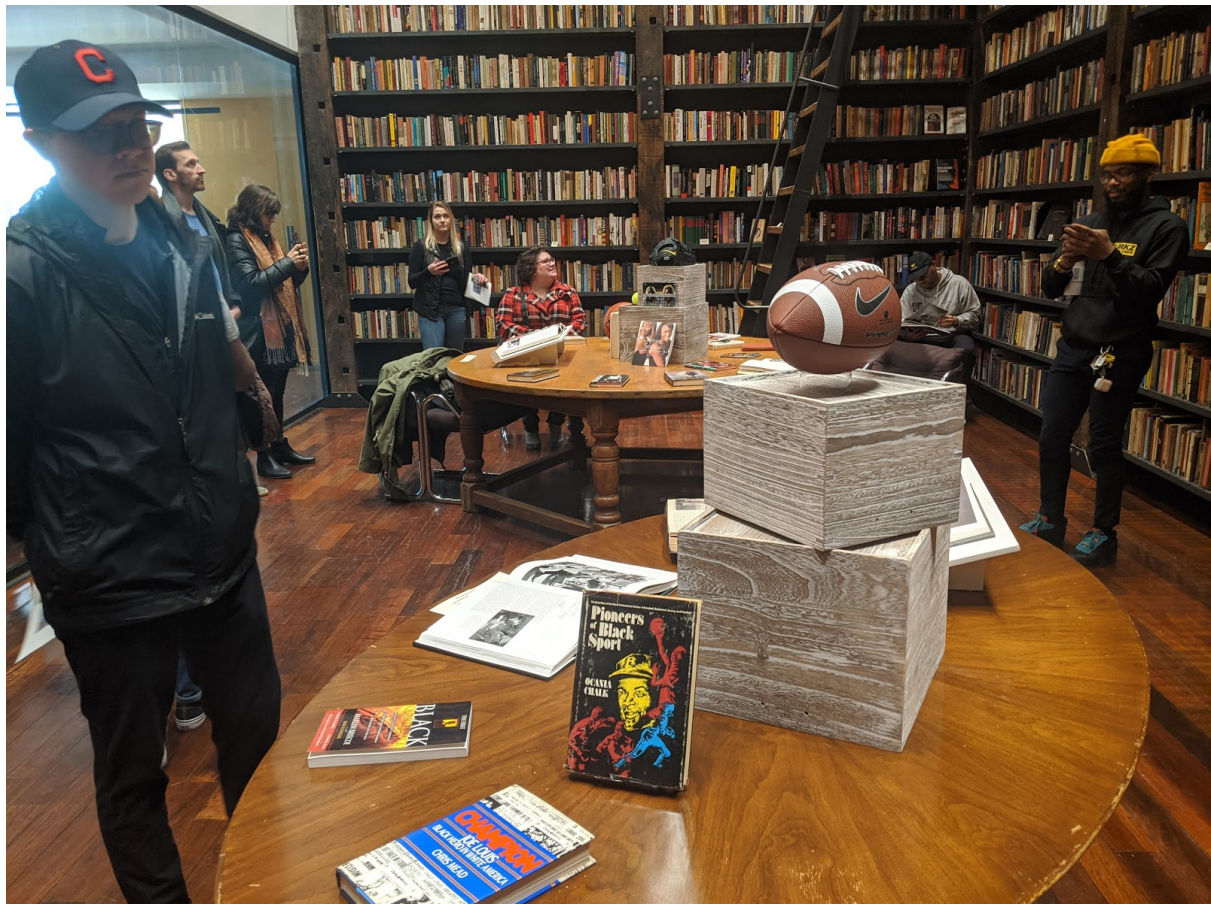
they started the weekly writing group. Normally they do it in the library of the Arts Bank, but in the first two to three months of the year, the Arts Bank usually closes, so the group meets over at the glass house. “It’s an inspiring place.” said interviewee J. “You can feel the energy.” She said: “One of the main goals [of the writing workshop] is for people who write to become published authors. Many people write their memoirs, they write in diaries and no one does anything with it. They have a wealth of knowledge that is not shared because they can’t make the connections with New York publishers and even small press publishers, so I’m like, OK, I will help you to publish.”

Regarding her participants, she said that most of the group is black. However, interviewee J said they do not discriminate. Anyone can come. Most of them have no formal writing training. “Most of them have thought that their writing was just something very personal that they would only share with a couple of people. This [writing group] has given them a different perspective of what they are, where they’re going.

“Many of their stories need to be told. Often the things that are said [about this neighbourhood] are the things that are negative. There are many shootings here... but they [the public] need to know that these [other] people are our violinist or pianist, and they tour all over Europe. These stories need to be told. And I just feel happy that I can help to get those stories out by encouraging them, by letting them know that this is how you go from being a writer to being an author.”

In the writing workshop people write different genres. Some of them write non-fiction (e.g. a book about collecting black art) and some others write short stories (e.g. Interviewee C2’s works). Interviewee J said: “Being with like-minded people in the group who feel the same way I do about the written word or spoken word in poetry or song is invigorating . . . we inspire one another, we help each other over those writer’s blocks.”

Interviewee J is positive to the Rebuild Foundation. Commenting on the Arts Bank, she said: “They have the Johnson Publishing library . . . I grew up with *Ebony* and *Jet*, so it’s familiar to me. Commenting on the relationship between the Rebuild Foundation and the community, she said: “The projects, the courses, the classes, everything is community-driven. People who live in the community, who work in the community, who have an investment in the community . . . it’s not like Rebuild says, OK, we need this, we need that. They are there to support.” And when I ask her to define “community”, she said, “I mean we are talking about the South Side surrounding the Arts Bank, but it also can extend to other places because the arts community isn’t just one place.”



The Johnson Publishing library in the Rebuild Foundation (credit: Tinshui Yeung)

She thinks that the group is successful in changing some of the members, in the sense that some people who never thought that they could get their books published, are now writing

their third or fourth books. “[Interviewee C2] said he’ll do about twenty or so. He’s got seven now, so I think that’s the difference.” And she said she had transformed too. “I have transformed because I was one of them. I had tons and tons of composition books with short stories that I put aside, and I challenged myself to get published.” In 2017, which was about one and a half years after the writing workshop, she set up her own publishing company, first publishing her own book. “Little did I realise at the time that I would also be publishing for other people. Of course everybody could start their own publishing company, but some people don’t want that. They want to have someone else to do it for them, someone that they can trust.”

According to interviewee J, because with Amazon they can print books on-demand, they do not need to spend a lot on their writing. Furthermore, the Rebuild Foundation provides them a meetup place for free, so they do not need to worry about venue cost too. For other publishing tasks such as cover design, the group exchange service, “so someone may be editing someone’s book, and someone is creating a drawing for me for something. So there’s an exchange of services, which again brings us closer together as a community.”

As the host of the writing workshop, interviewee J is willing to give more. She bulk purchased a set of ISBN numbers and gave the participants for free. “However, everyone always kicks in and gives me a little money to help to defray the cost”. For the showcase every year, since interviewee J “wanted to make it professional”, she always likes to give some extra money for that to happen. “This year they made me cut back, so I didn’t spend. They said that it wasn’t fair. So this year we up the fee to \$25 and it was once I hit the ceiling on it, I was not to spend any more money. [Interviewee C2] said he would be there to watch every cent. So we protect one another.”

Interviewee C2 is an 80 years old author. Before retirement, he was a state worker in Illinois. With his master degree in management, he is now a substitute teacher in a high school. He is not a trained writer. “In undergrad I took a literature course but that’s it.” Before he started writing short stories, things he had written only included school newspaper and business writing.

He said that he picked up writing because he liked it. “Since I retired I have time to do this.”

“I write my first book because I want to remember the 1960s⁶³. The 1960s movement was a civil right movement for black people in America. The riot. I remembered it very clearly.” said interviewee C2. He said he wanted to write about this, for his own enjoyment, for passing his memory to his son, and for the readers. “For some people who like to read, I hope they can enjoy my books.”

In 2017, one of interviewee C2’s friends, who is a member of the writing group, invited him to join them. He said he joined the group mainly because of interviewee J, since interviewee J can publish his books. When he was 76, he published his first short stories collection, of which he spent 9 months. At first, he has never thought of publishing. He just wanted to write and then keep the writings in the drawer. “[Interviewee J] inspired me from the start because she can publish my books . . . She published 6 of my books. I found that she is very responsible. I think I can work with her. And I have ideas. I am 80 years old. I thought I have no more ideas, but new ideas pop up. Those ideas are mainly from my experience.” Having said that, he also noted that if he did not get his first book published, he does not know if he would keep writing.

⁶³ In the 1960s there was a wave of civil rights movements in the US. African Americans struggled to end legalized racial discrimination, disenfranchisement and racial segregation. Eventually, the black people were able to secure new protections in federal law for the human rights of all Americans.

He still continues to write now in a library for one or two hours every day. And he said he wanted to change other people too. “I want to inspire people to write. They see that I am productive. I want to get work done.”

6.6 Interviewee G and Interviewee P

Interviewee G and Interviewee P are participants in the ballet class. Normally they participate as learners, but when their instructor is absent they also act as teachers. Both of them first started taking classes by Joel Hall Dance Center, a dance centre in the North side of Chicago. Joel Hall Dance Center is also the organiser of the ballet class in Greater Grand Crossing. The ballet class can be seen as an “outreach” program of the Dance Center. I interviewed interviewee G and interviewee P on the same night but separately.

Interviewee P is in her 50s. She is a resident on the South Side. She is a self-employed hairstylist. She has been learning dancing in the North side for around three years⁶⁴. “However, I live South. So I felt like this was the perfect opportunity for me to be able to start some classes on the South Side. She still goes to the North side studio too.

Before picking up dancing again, she had danced in high school. After that, she stopped for over 20 years. “I’ve always loved dance, but the main reason I wanted to get back into it was because I wanted to get back in shape. I don’t like going to the gym because it’s like work, whereas with dances it’s like more of enjoyment, and I still get the workout.”

When the instructor is not available in the class, she volunteers to instruct the others. Interviewee P sees this as her own learning, as well as an opportunity to contribute to the community. “It is a great opportunity. Because many times they [people in the community] don’t get introduced into dance. It’s not like it used to be. They used to have dance in the

⁶⁴ Interviewee P has 3 dance sessions every week, spending about 14 to 15 hours on dancing.

school system. They've taken many of those out, especially in the public school systems where people can't afford it. This class, you don't have to pay. You can donate money if you want, but you don't have to pay though."

She said that most of the participants in the dance class in the Rebuild Foundation are black, although there are also occasionally white people coming in. "I want to say that the majority is black. It is because of the area that we're in, and many Caucasians probably don't even know about the class. But they can still come without a problem."

She thinks that it is important to have this kind of dance class on the South Side. "Joel has always had his class on the North side. He has trained many dancers on the North side. However, because it is in the North side, there is a white community mostly over there. And we can't take advantage of it because that is so far⁶⁵ North and most black people can't go that North. So now he is given an opportunity to develop something on the South Side." It does not mean that in the South Side there is no dance class, but for Interviewee P, Joel's is something special, and it is free.

As a result, she is very positive to the Rebuild Foundation. "I think this is one of the greatest things that they started over here. It is fantastic. I don't think that we would even have this opportunity, because of the rent, what it costs. If you have to pay for the space, you couldn't do it without charging people."

On the other hand, interviewee G is more professional. She is 62 years old now. She was born in Alabama and moved to Chicago around 1970. She has been taking classes with Joel since 1982. She is a social worker "in the real world", but she has also danced professionally for around 25 years, and she has joined different dance companies before.

⁶⁵ It takes half an hour driving from Greater Grand Crossing to Joel's North side dance centre.

She explained that this class is Joel's "outreach class". It has been in the South Side for 4 years. "Because he didn't have anything on the South Side. And the kids in South Side neighbourhoods were the reason that he wanted to reach the South Side. I'd say he's always wanted to give back to communities and help poverty communities."

Same as interviewee P, she volunteers to teach in this class. She said she is happy to do this because the location is just about 10 minutes drive from her home. "It is a way I can get exercised during the week."

Interviewee G said she wanted to keep dancing to keep herself in shape. "I'll be 63 next month. So this has helped me to stay in shape."

She is also positive to the Rebuild Foundation. "This building, this venue here is really good for this community. It brought many arts for the little children in the community, and it helps. They have the dance here and everything, so it keeps the kids out of the street and it helps them to bring out talents."



Interviewee G and P's dance session. (credit: Tinshui Yeung)

6.7 Interviewee A

I met interviewee A in the Arts Bank. He is a volunteer in the Rebuild Foundation. He is also an artist who studied painting in his bachelor degree and was then graduated from the Master of Arts in Art Education program in School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

He is from Pennsylvania, and came to Chicago for this master course. He lives in the South Shore of Chicago, around 5 minutes drive from the Rebuild Foundation. He made this choice because it is affordable and he wanted to live in a black neighbourhood. He said that before he came, he knew Chicago was said as a very dangerous city. "I did have my reservations about coming. However, I knew I was coming anyway, because of the graduate program that I got accepted into. I was really excited."

However, after he saw Chicago with his own eyes, he felt that the reputation is not exactly true. “I felt completely safe in my neighbourhood. I have actually seen no violence as an eyewitness. I think it's really a lovely place.”

In the school, he got introduced to the Rebuild Foundation. At that time he had a schoolmate who was working with the Foundation, so the schoolmate invited him to an event. He signed up as a volunteer at the end of 2019 and started in 2020 January. He wanted to be a volunteer because he is interested in the Johnson publishing collection.

He is positive to the Rebuild Foundation. “It is a great initiative. It's heavily based on social engagement. I like the fact that it's located in a neighbourhood where you wouldn't necessarily find an art institution. So it bridges the gap between the neighbourhood and those who have access to fine art and literature.” He further added, “It's bringing different people to the South Side. You know there's fear for certain people to come to the South Side because they think that it's dangerous. However, the reputation that it holds is not the environment that it actually is. Experience with the South Side is actually all that is about.”

He thinks that the Rebuild Foundation is helping to transform the neighbourhood, “in a way that it's bringing more beauty and more activities that are art-based and community-based. And also health consciousness. You know you don't really find too many places where you can practice yoga in this neighbourhood, but Rebuild offers free yoga to the community. For many activities, people would have to travel outside of this neighbourhood to participate in. So the Rebuild does open the door for opportunities of things that you wouldn't necessarily find here.” He does not think that the Rebuild is giving him the opportunity as an artist. “However, it's giving me a space that is closer to where I'm living, so I don't have to travel so far to go view something that's beautiful or that is arts related.” He also appreciates that he

can use the space in the Rebuild Foundation if he wants, as an artist and as an art educator, just that he is not interested in holding anything at the moment.

We have also discussed the black identity. Interviewee A thinks that the Rebuild Foundation is giving the black artists an opportunity to show what they are doing, especially those centred around blackness. “We haven’t had a majority of acceptance within predominantly white institutions. So what it does is really giving a face to our community.” He thinks giving a representation to the black community is important. “The black identity is a major part of the American identity. When you see things in the media or in historical literature, you know our history has been whitewashed. So when we say we want to strengthen the black identity, it’s not like we’re actually an outsider. We just want to bring light to the fact that we have been here. So it’s [our identity is] not separated from the American identity, but we’re seeing that we do have a separate culture that hasn’t been focused on.”

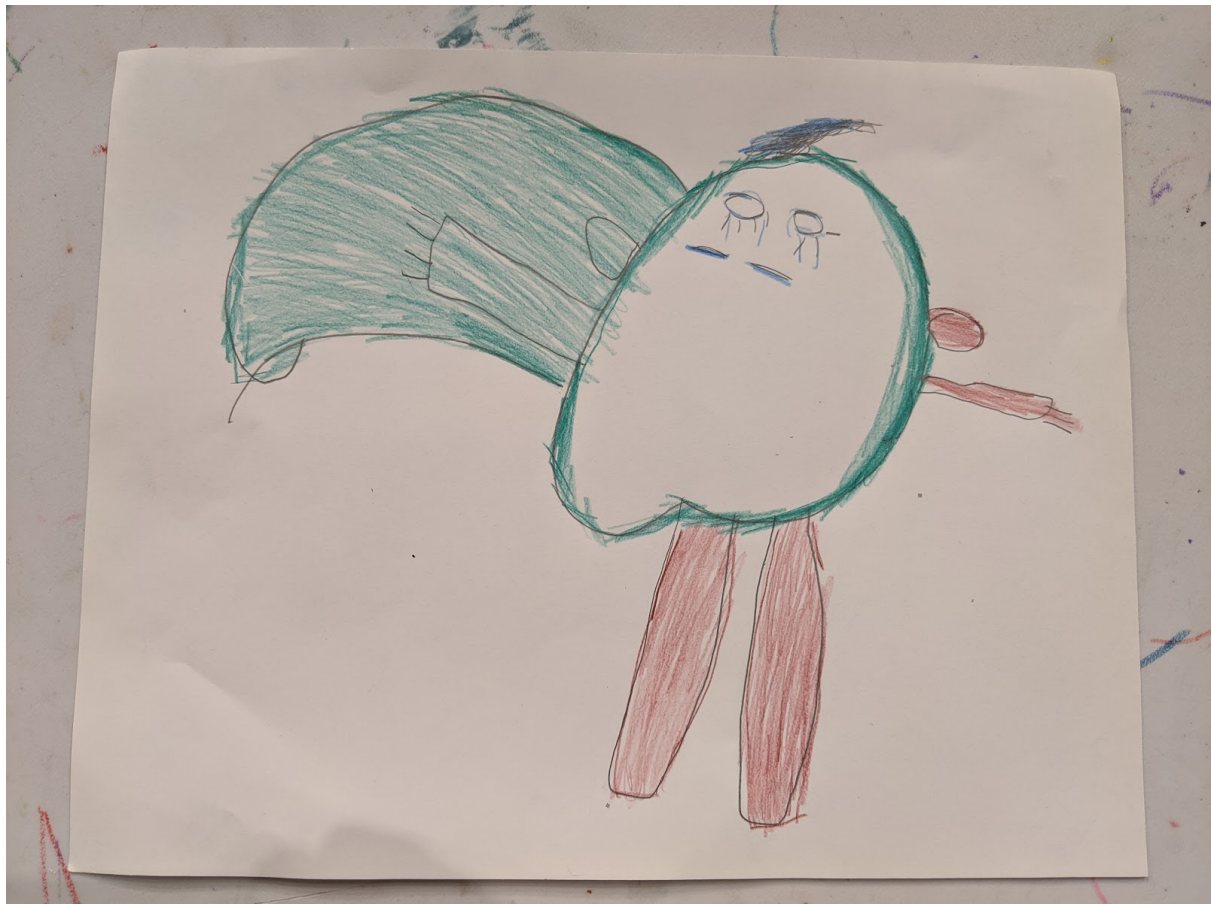
Interviewee A further compares his life outside the black community and within the black community. “The intellectual scene and the art scene have always been predominantly white. I would say I don’t feel uncomfortable in those spaces, but when you’re in a space like this [Rebuild Foundation], where it is heavily focused on the black identity, you get more of a camaraderie. You relate to the information that is being told in a different type of way. However, I wouldn’t say that I feel more comfortable here and less comfortable there. It’s just the talking points are different.”

6.8 Interviewee T and Interviewee D

Interviewee D and interviewee T⁶⁶ are hosts of an art studio session for people with disabilities. In their session, five people participated. All of them were elderly. The

⁶⁶ Their interviews are done together and here I assume their voices are equal.

facilitators gave them papers and colour pencils and then the participants drew whatever they liked. Most of the drawings are without distinguishable shapes. For me I would consider them as merely brushing the colour pencils on the paper instead of drawing. However I can feel that all the participants enjoyed the session. Sometimes interviewee T and interviewee D would give them some encouragement (“What is this? This is beautiful.”). They would keep the works too after they are finished. Since the participants were elderly with disabilities, most of them can hardly communicate verbally. I drew one picture during the session. A lady seemingly said that my work is beautiful and exchanged her work (a girl, she said) with mine. She seemed happy. I was happy too.



The painting of a girl which I get from exchanging artworks. (credit: Tinshui Yeung)

Apart from working as facilitators, interviewee T and D are both working for an art organisation called Arts of Life, a non-profit aims at creating a working, person-centric,

artistic community while providing a work environment of equality in Chicago. Furthermore, interviewee T is an artist and interviewee D is a writer. They may thus be considered as players in the art scene. Indeed, they said that they had been familiar with Theaster Gates and the Rebuild Foundation for a long time.

The two travelled around the country to visit programs that support people with disabilities. They had worked in some similar programs. After that, they landed in Illinois because it “is one of the states near the bottom as support and policy for individuals with disability”. “And within Chicago on the South side, there is the least amount of access to resources . . . So there is a large need for providing both arts programming for individuals with disabilities.” After moving to Chicago they went to a community meeting, met a representative from the Rebuild Foundation, pitched their idea to them. The foundation agreed to their use of the glass house, and then on 28th July 2020, they started the workshop.

“We felt that what the Rebuilt Foundation aspires to do and what we aspire to do is very similar. We want to use art to empower people, by providing art to people who are disadvantaged.”

Their idea is that, by providing the disadvantaged art as an option and allow them to make art freely, these people are able to express themselves in a way that they were not able to in any other forms. “What we look for is for the people that we work with, to develop an independent interest in their own art-making, and make sure that their interest grows into a commitment and passion.” They aim at making the people they work with to understand that “this is their way of engaging with the world”, “so their work can become a really in-depth and complex expression of who they are, and sort of contribute to the world”. They said that, while success is defined by the disadvantaged themselves, there are also other more concrete ways of measuring success, such as being able to support them as fine artists, to help them to

sell artworks, or to have exhibitions. “And there have been some fairly significant successes in that regard as well”.

Although the workshop is successful to some extent, Interviewee D and interviewee T said that they had not been able to get local people to join the workshop consistently, so they have the intention of changing the format from weekly to monthly. “We thought that might help to get more people there at the same time, instead of having to ask people to come on a regular basis.”

Their programs are all free to the disadvantaged. So how do they fund themselves? They said that they receive writing grants from other organisations. The Rebuild Foundation also pitched them some art supplies in the beginning. Other materials, they bought them themselves. “It's just not that expensive for us to do it, because it's just once a week. It's not a daily thing.”

For the participants, they mentioned that most of them are black artists because they come from local neighbourhoods. “Gates was speaking at an event about what he tries to support, and he said that he was interested in supporting black people, and is interested in supporting artists, interested in supporting the South Side community. So it's kind of a nebulous sort of thing.”

7. Observations

In this part, I suggest some observations from the above interviews to highlight what can be seen from these individual stories.

The first commonality among these interviewees is that they are all generally positive to the Rebuild Foundation. Members of the community claim that they benefit from the project, such as having a free space to host activities and being able to meet new friends. In this sense,

this chapter may serve as a response to claims which criticise the project for being serving the elite and the artist himself instead of the community (Backlund, 2011; Huff, 2013).

The second point is about the meaning of the location of the Rebuild Foundation. Many said that they appreciate the presence of the Rebuild Foundation because it is located in the South Side of Chicago. However, what does it mean? While this can mean that the Foundation provides them with convenience in terms of physical distance, this is not the only meaning in this case. It is because Hyde Park, where there are many cultural resources, is just a few minutes drive away from the area. However, interviewee C said: “When you go to Hyde Park, even though it is on the South Side, you don't feel like you're in a neighbourhood like this.” Therefore the importance of the location of the Rebuild Foundation is not only about physical convenience, but also about creating a space where community members feel that it belongs to the neighbourhood. It is what many interviewees refer to as “black space”. This space makes the community feel “comfortable”. As interviewee C3 said, “there are just some conversations that are uniquely shared among black people.” Alternatively, we can say that, if the Rebuild Foundation is a “white space” rather than a “black space”, it may not be regarded as “located in the South Side of Chicago” even if it is physically located in the area.

The third point is that in the project, the difference between various roles such as host of events, staff, founder and local members is less clear than one may think. Writers such as Huff (2013) seem to separate the people involved in the project as external (organiser) and internal (community) in order to argue that the Rebuild Foundation attempts to transform the community through external power instead of organising residents to transform it themselves. However, Theaster Gates lives in the area. Should he be regarded as a resident? Interviewee M, who is now a staff of the Rebuild Foundation, has been living in the area for a long time, and from his interview it can be said that he has benefited from the project. Should he be

considered as a part of the “external power”, a participant, or a staff? Interviewee J, the host of the writers' group, does not live in the area. However, as a black writer, she has also benefited a lot from the writers' group she is hosting. The two dance class participants are also instructors... Only when we look at the project, not from a structural perspective, but from an individual-level, can we see that one person can have many roles in an SEA project. This encourages us to rethink how we should describe the power relationship between different “roles” in this kind of project such as the Rebuild Foundation.

Similarly, the fourth observation here is that the relationship between class, gender and race are more complex and very often cannot be separately discussed. Writers such as Marina Vishmidt (2013) have been criticising that Gates' work addresses racial and regional issues but not class issues. Although most of the interviewees do say that they appreciate the project because it addresses the black issue rather than the class issue, many of them also said that it is important that the activities in the glass house are free. From the voice of individuals such as interviewee T, it can be seen that the racial discrimination, poverty and regional problems in the South Side of Chicago are all interconnected to each other. In this sense, it is questionable if the Foundation can be said to deal only with one issue but not another, even though the project never claims that they deal with the working-class or poverty.

The fifth observation is that to discuss the social impact of the Rebuild Foundation, one should not only look at how people participate in the project, but also the lives of the people outside the project. Interviewee C3 has addressed this point directly: The Rebuild Foundation is not the only place she goes. Certainly, she has her own life which has little or no relation to the project. Interviewee C2 participates in other writing workshops apart from the one offered by the Rebuild Foundation. Interviewee G and P have dance class on the North side of Chicago too. On one hand, for these people, the experience in the Rebuild Foundation is

rendered by their experience outside the Foundation. On the other hand, the experience they gain from the Rebuild Foundation also affects how they act and render their experience outside the Foundation. While many critical theory analysis focuses only on the project, analysis from an individual-level helps us to capture what happens outside the project.

The sixth observation is related to the value of the arts. While many SEA theorists have already a subjective definition of the arts and the value of it to human society, many interviewees understand it differently. For example, for interviewee G and P, they dance because they want to keep their body in shape. For interviewee T and D, their workshops are for people of disability to express themselves freely. Interviewee J and C2 consider writing as a way to tell their stories. Which one is the “correct” understanding of the value of the arts? Of course there can be no definite answer. It implies that how critics and theorists see “what art should do” is also merely a subjective perspective, rather than something universal. If their perspectives are relevant to the discussion, is it not that the perspectives of the stakeholders are relevant as well? As a result, I argue that looking at individuals can give us a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of SEA projects.

8. Conclusion

I show in this chapter the experience of different individuals involved in the Rebuild Foundation, and their thoughts towards the community and the project. I began this case study by asking if the project has transformed the community. So what is the answer?

It is still not easy to tell. From above, it is certain that some of the interviewees such as M, J, and C2 have changed personally. However, it is unclear how these particular cases may be translated into arguments of community transformation. As I have argued in section 3 of Chapter 1, one way to argue for community transformation from particular cases is to

generalise a mechanism of change from these cases, so that this mechanism reflects a possibility of change which may not only apply to the particulars, but also to the community in general. This is not to say one should again see the individuals as generalised groups, rather, what is important here is to draw a general mechanism, which does not reduce individuals to abstract entities, but at the same time general enough to serve as a reference for us to understand situations of other people related to the Rebuild Foundation and even other SEA cases. I will show how such a mechanism can be created in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

Chapter 5: Wochenklausur

By using the case in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, I intend to show what it means by looking at individual experience in SEA studies. However, individual-level analysis does not only mean interviewing staff and audience to listen to what they say. My argument is that grounding an analysis to the individual also suggests a different mode of thinking, and this new mode of thinking can generate interesting arguments which are different from currently available ones. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the above argument, by looking at one of the most well-known SEA collective (Lippard, 2007, pp.415), Wochenklausur. Wochenklausur is used as an example in Grant Kester's theorisation of dialogical aesthetic (2004). Kester argues that dialogue plays a central role in their practice (Kester, 2004, pp.107), a claim later shared by many scholars. In the art world, arguments surrounding Wochenklausur now relate strongly to the notion of dialogical aesthetic. But what can we get if we analyse the approach of Wochenklausur through an individual-based model of thinking?

In this chapter, I do not look at the participant's experience. Rather, I will present an interview of the group, where the group told me that they disagree with Kester's representation of their works. I will explain the reasons behind this disagreement. After that, in Chapter 6, I will rethink how we should understand the strategy of Wochenklausur, from the perspective of individual-level analysis.

1. Background

In the early-1990s there was a sense in Vienna that what was presented as contemporary in the art scene was detached from social reality (e.g. Kravagna, 1995). Wolfgang Zingg, a critic with the Vienna publication *Falter*, also shared this feeling. For Zingg, art is not

necessarily objects displayed in galleries and museums: “When these activities are carried out by artists at the invitation of art institutions and are recognised by a community as art, then they are art” (Zinggl, 2001b, pp.133).

In 1993, the Secession invited Zinggl to curate a show. Zinggl recruited a group of art students from the Vienna Academy of Applied Arts, where he had graduated and was teaching. Understanding that Karlsplatz, the plaza just in front of Vienna Secession, was a meeting place for homeless people, Zinggl’s team decided to deal with the issue of homelessness in Vienna.

After research, the team pinpointed a medical care problem. Firstly there is bureaucracy. As one of the artists Erich Steurer wrote: “Theoretically, a homeless person could obtain a voucher from the state health insurance company and seek care from a general practitioner or hospital. In practice, it was simply impossible for the homeless to handle these complicated bureaucratic procedures” (2001, pp.23). Another problem is discrimination. Homeless are not welcomed by many doctors, “with ‘go and wash yourself first’ being the most common response” (Ibid., pp.23).

The team then decided to create a medical bus which takes doctors to the homeless. No question asked, no vouchers needed. The final result was a mobile clinic called “Louise,” which provided healthcare free of charge to more than 700 patients monthly. Homeless who use the facility can even provide false names if they prefer.⁶⁷ Caritas, which managed the mobile clinic, purchased another larger vehicle, “Louise II,” in 1998 to expand their service. The project is still functioning in 2020.

Since then, Wochenklausur has done many projects in different parts of the world. As of 2020, they have worked on 42 projects in many cities, such as Berlin, Fukuoka and Chicago.

⁶⁷ The source of this information is my interview with a user of the “Louise” conducted on 18th May 2019.

In terms of strategy and principles, Wochenklausur “sees art as an opportunity for achieving long-term improvements in human coexistence” (Jeannée, 2001a, pp.7). They try to go beyond the symbolic to actually solve a problem on a micro level. To achieve this, a concrete goal is necessary (Ibid.). That is why they call their approach “concrete intervention”. While for most of the conventional art production, success is mostly subjective, Wochenklausur wrote that for them “it is possible to observe how many of its objectives have been achieved. It is then the task of the critic to compare the intention with the result.” (Ibid., pp.8)

2. Literature Review

2.1 Kester’s Framing of Dialogical Aesthetic

In this part, I review how Kester discusses Wochenklausur.

Grant Kester used Wochenklausur as an example in the development of his theory of “dialogical aesthetic.” Kester claims that the group “define[s] their artistic practice through the facilitation of dialogue and exchange” (Kester, 2004, pp.107). He introduces Wochenklausur as “part of a younger generation of practitioners concerned with communicative interaction in nonart settings” (Ibid., pp.97). Kester argues that their projects “involve an intensive process of dialogue and discussion to determine the appropriate form for a given intervention” (Ibid., pp.100). One of the examples Kester investigated is the “boat colloquies”: In Wochenklausur’s project titled as “Intervention to Aid Drug-Addicted Women” in 1994 (Zingg, 2001a, pp.29-35), the collective’s goal was to create a pension in Zurich where women addicted to drugs could find shelter. The collective thought that to reach their objective, they should urge the heads of different organisations to talk; therefore, they created the “boat colloquies,” which consisted of a three-hour boat trip in Lake Zurich. Each time, they invited four people on board to discuss the drug issue. To allow them to discuss

freely, journalists were forbidden from reporting the content. Kester sees it as an example of successful consensus building. He praises the idea of inviting stakeholders to a boat to talk, insulating them from public pressure. He links this situation that one may talk freely from public pressure to Habermas's concept of ideal speech situation⁶⁸. “. . . [O]n the boat trips they were able to speak, and listen, not as delegates and representatives charged with defending a priori positions, but as individuals . . . at the least, these external forces were considerably reduced by the demand for self-reflexive attention created by the ritual and isolation of the boat trip itself.” (2004, pp.110) Kester contends that the dialogical exchanges “altered people's consciousness of the reality of sex workers in the city.” Through conversations, Kester argues that interlocutors may “think, and agree to, things that they couldn't have otherwise” (Krenn, 2013, para. 45), and finally “led, eventually, to a practical solution”. (Hagoort, 2018, para.13)

As a result, Kester argues that Wochenklausur, through dialogues, was “able to reach a consensus supporting a modest but concrete response to the problem” in their projects.

2.2 Arguments by other Writers

Grant Kester's theory of dialogical aesthetic is influential. Many writers agree with Kester when they discuss Wochenklausur (e.g. Kanouse, 2007; Koizumi, 2011; Bucher, 2014; Giordno, 2015). Some writers such as Fiona Geuss further expands Kester's discourse by claiming that Wochenklausur's “Floating Dialogues” (i.e. the 1994 intervention in Zurich) is “less a concrete outcome . . . than an improvement in the sense that it realises Hannah

⁶⁸ According to Habermas, “Ideal speech situation” refers to the realisation of at least the following four presuppositions: (a) publicity and inclusiveness: no one who could make a relevant contribution concerning a controversial validity claim must be excluded; (b) equal rights to engage in communication: everyone must have the same opportunity to speak to the matter at hand; (c) exclusion of deception and illusion: participants must mean what they say; and (d) absence of coercion: communication must be free from restrictions that prevent the better argument from being raised and determining the outcome of the discussion (Habermas, 2008, pp.49-50).

Arendt's notion of the political public as speaking and acting together" (2015, para. 1). It is rare to see anyone disagree with Kester's framing of Wochenklausur. The only literature that questions Kester's representation is perhaps Elizabeth Hawley's *Art, Activism, and Democracy: Wochenklausur's Social Interventions* (2015). She writes that, although the decision-making process within the group demonstrates a certain degree of consensus, "the interventions they enact however are often also indicative of agonism . . . that is, without leading to consensus" (pp.89).⁶⁹

3. Methodology

Since this case study focuses primarily on the artists' own account of their strategy, I gather my data primarily by two means: 1) an interview with the artists and 2) a review of literature related to their work, particularly their own accounts of their projects.

As I have stated, in this chapter, I do not intend to include on-site observation of their work and interviews of other stakeholders, nor to analyse the result of Wochenklausur's practice. I only present their interview and discuss why the group claims that dialogical aesthetic is not a suitable framing. Then in Chapter 6, I will analyse their strategy by an individual-based approach. This analysis should be seen as an explanation of Wochenklausur's strategy, rather than an illustration of the success of realising such strategy.

4. Interview with Wochenklausur

I first give a summary of my interview with the art collective.

⁶⁹ Hawley wrote: "... While he [Kester] echoes Zinggl in characterizing this aspect of the intervention as 'designed to catalyse consensus formation,' I would argue that the talks are representative not of consensus, but rather, agonism ... these discussions [of boat colloquies] did not actually lead to a decision, or consensus ... a sustainable solution had not yet been reached by the close of the eight-week exhibition." (2015, pp.92–93)

I conducted my interview with Wolfgang Zinggl and Martina Reuter on 17th May 2019 in their office in Vienna. Both of them are the “core team” members of Wochenklausur. For the sake of simplification, I group the interviewees together as “Wochenklausur” or “the members”.



Martina Reuter and Wolfgang Zinggl (credit: Tinshui Yeung)

4.1 About Wochenklausur

Wochenklausur said that their projects usually consist of one or two members from the core team, plus a few new members, sometimes with one or two from the city they are invited to. Zinggl is the founder of the group. He graduated from painting and stage design, but he has only created a few object artworks. Apart from art, he also studied art psychology. "Because I want to understand how art works and all these social things. And why someone would find

an artwork interesting while the others say ‘no, it’s definitely bullshit’. It was interesting for me. How come?”

After studying art psychology, he stopped working on his own art and thinking more about society. He became an art critic. He was always concerned about the relationship between art and social reality. He said, there are often claims that artists are able to involve in reality. However, where are these artists? “Show us these people!” Taking reference from artists such as Joseph Beuys, Artist Placement Group and Russian constructivist, Zingg started his first project in Vienna.

4.2 Creating Social Change

The team said that they intentionally avoid topics that are too big or too vague. If they were asked to do this kind of topic, they would refuse. “We always try to do projects which are manageable for a couple of weeks. We really intend to have concrete outcomes for the project.” They took their first intervention as an example. “Of course we can’t solve the homelessness problem in Vienna. However, we can improve a small section of their life. That was manageable.”

Wochenklausur said they knew there are critics saying that their projects of small interventions neglect bigger context, thus became part of the whole system which creates the problem⁷⁰. Wochenklausur counter argues by commenting that these critics are not interested in real solutions to problems. Furthermore, Wochenklausur said that their ultimate goal does not end in small intervention. Using their intervention in Zurich (the one with the boat colloquies) as an example, they said: “drug-addiction is a cultural thing. You can handle it

⁷⁰ Arguments of these critics are summarised by Hawley by two points: institutional imbrication, and the potential repression of structural change by their interventions within current frameworks (Hawley, 2015, pp.103).

from a big view, or you can bring it down smaller and smaller so that it is small enough to handle. We cannot solve the drug-addiction problem in Switzerland . . . but if you show that you can solve small problems in a bigger context, the project becomes a model on how it may work. [The project then implies that] you can also solve bigger and higher level problems.”

Wochenklausur said that the way they select topics is different from project to project. Some institutions already have a topic in mind when they invite the group. This was the case in the intervention in Zurich. The curators said to the group that the city had problems related to drug-addiction and asked if the team can do something about it. There are also other institutions which have nothing specific in mind, allowing the team to select themselves. For this kind of case, the group usually requests a few days research trip if possible, so that they can have the chance to see the city and talk to the people. In these research trips they also ask the collaborating institutions to help arrange meetings with other local organisations. After that, the team comes together and comes up with a few topics which are both important and manageable within the limited project time. They then send the topics to the institution for further discussion.

4.3 Importance of Time

Wochenklausur means weeks of closure. The name implies a few rules which the team members must follow. Firstly, within the project time team members must work only for the intervention project but nothing else. They recalled that for their first intervention, the original idea was that each of the team members should have a table in the exhibition hall as if they were in an office. When visitors come to the exhibition, they should see the artists working only for the intervention. “Say if you are a painter, you cannot bring your canvas to work. I swear this is strictly forbidden. You have to be very, very focused. You have to give

all your energy to reach the goal.” Secondly, once the project time is set, there can be no extension. “There may sometimes be a second project in the same place but we don’t want to work on a project longer than we planned, because first of all, there’s no money and no time. We all have our schedules. The second thing is that it is necessary to have a time limit. Because there is a schedule, there is pressure and we need to be really focused. Otherwise we would say, ‘we have enough time, let us do this or that tomorrow.’”

4.4 Artistic Autonomy

Usually there is no conflict between the team and the collaborating organisation. However, the team recalled two special cases. One of them is the project of an outdoor program in Spain in 2012. The invitation was sent by a group called “Association Inland – Campo Adentro”⁷¹. According to Wochenklausur, the group initially wanted to do a project related to the relationship between wood fire and shepherds. However, the curator said no, and asked them to do “a kind of promotion for organic beef”. The members said: “We are not going to do this. We are not a marketing agency. This is not our job.” At the end the curator unwillingly allowed them to practice freely. They then did a project connecting the school kids to environmental activists to talk about issues related to nature and wood fire. The curator was not happy. As a reflection, the team commented: “[in terms of topic selection] there is always a little bit of negotiation [between us and the one who invites us].”

Another case was an intervention in Leeds in 2006. This is the only case which Wochenklausur considered as “failure”. In this project they were invited by Bauman Lyons Architects in the UK. The artist group found that the growth of the economy in Leeds brought about problems such as gentrification, so they decided to connect the privileged area of the

⁷¹ It is an Art Project by artist Fernando Garcia Dory dedicated to agricultural, social and cultural production. (“Inland - art, agriculture & territory,” n.d.).

city with the deprived area.⁷² Yet, their attempt was seen as sensitive to urban redevelopment schemes. According to Wochenklausur, the organiser did not expect this sensitivity. They thought that Wochenklausur is some public artists who would “put a nice sculpture in the middle of someplace and are harmless”. Wochenklausur said: “They were really shocked when they saw what we did and they said they don’t want to pay for everything like our flights . . . they decided to stop the project.” To conclude, “they did the bad research and we did the bad research.”

Using these cases as examples, Wochenklausur stresses that they have their autonomy, and are not instrumentalised by government authorities and institutions.

4.5 Criticism of Kester

Putting concrete intervention as the core of their practice, the team criticised Grant Kester’s misinterpretation of their work. They said, indeed their projects involve many talkings. That is why they usually do not have good photographs as documentation of their practice. “It is always sitting with people, talking with the authority and the concerned people. And in between the talking it is thinking about how we can reach the target.” However, while Grant Kester sees dialogue as the essential component of Wochenklausur’s practice, the team said, “discussion is necessary as a method to get the result, it is not the art or however you say. It’s only a way to go there.” They take the Zurich intervention as an example: “We needed a kind of consensual result from the boat discussions because we needed the help and support from

⁷² In this intervention, what Wochenklausur planned to do is a temporary cooperation with various local organisations to realise multiple small projects in both the rich part and the poor part of the city. The group successfully found 50 associations including NGOs and businesses which agreed to cooperate. Wochenklausur has also formed an initiative which is called “City-Cooperation”, so that longer term collaboration can be realised. However, according to Wochenklausur’s description, after the members returned to Vienna they got an email from the commissioners that the project “won’t be supported any longer”. Even the last outstanding installment was withheld and may only be paid later through other projects of Leeds City Council. “City-Cooperation” was then shut down (“Intervention to Overcome Social Barriers”, n.d.).

all the people.” However, “if it is not so easy to reach our goal through talking, we would be happy to consider other strategies, such as playing some trick sometimes.”

They compare their practice with conventional visual artists. They said that it is important for them to include conversation in their intervention process, just as it is important for visual artists to apply paint to the canvas. However, the artwork is still the completed canvas but not the paint. A similar to a visual artist who shapes and forms the canvas in some ways, Wochenklausur shapes and forms a section of the society, “and the result is our artwork”. “It is the result which is important, and we reach it without compromises.”

The team said, on one hand, Kester’s argument was helpful because after his publication, they became more well-known to the world. However, on the other hand, “the bad thing is that it is a wrong knowledge, because conversation is not the goal but what we use to get to our goal.”

4.6 Handling Media

Wochenklausur said their way of handling the media depends on the project nature. Sometimes they think it is necessary to get the media to report about the project, and sometimes they think it is better to keep the media out, due to the sensitivity of the intervened issue. “It could not be really of help if it’s already reported in the public.”

An example they raised was their 2012 intervention in Kassel. This intervention was held in Lutherplatz, Kassel. The Lutherplatz was a square with a protestant church, a community centre and a park. It was also a place where drug and alcohol addicts gathered. As a result this community had a bad reputation especially among the local press. In 2013, the church invited Wochenklausur to work as part of a series of cultural programmes. After thorough research⁷³,

⁷³ Wochenklausur conducted more than 90 talks with representatives in different positions, including the police, the church, the city council and the addicts.

they planned to put two social workers to take care of the place.⁷⁴ To realise this plan they need funding. Wochenklausur acknowledged that it is only possible with the support of the city and the church, and they needed the media to gain attention from the city government and the church. So they built a bright-pink house in the middle of the city. Then the group invited representatives from conflicting parties to have private talks in this eye-catching house. Topics of the talks include management details of Lutherplatz such as who should be responsible for paying the social workers, how many working hours are needed. “Of course the media is interested in who built this hut in the middle of the main place, and why did they do that.” In this way, they were able to use the media to reach their goal. Indeed, the house successfully got public attention and in the end, the city and the church agreed to pay for the social workers. The social workers reported duties in Spring 2013 (“Implementation of an Intermediate Social Work”, n.d.).

Based on my own experience (The author of this paper is a practising journalist), I suspected that journalists might not be happy with Wochenklausur’s approach because journalists often see themselves as autonomous rather than a tool for others to reach their goal. I asked Wochenklausur what they think about this, and they replied with a laugh: “It is never a question of the happiness of the journalists, or politicians, or whoever. We are happy if they agree to take part as a partner. However, our intention is not to make them happy.”

4.7 On the Criticism of Patronising

Wochenklausur said that often they face criticism that they are “patronising” in their project. As a response, they admitted that they are not doing empowerment. They said that they are not doing what is commonly called as participatory art too.

⁷⁴ Their job would include mediating conflicting interests, setting rules for the square and giving assistance to the addicts.

“We do not see them (the engaged community) as participants. No one is participating in the sense of what is now called as participation art. We do not create things like gardens with them. However, we talk to them. We ask them: ‘what can we do for you within these couple of weeks? We cannot solve the whole problem, but let us know if you need anything. Maybe in the neighbourhood, maybe personally, maybe in the educational system in your town.’ We try to hear, and once we think we have enough information, and we have defined our target, we try to realise the project. We do not work with them anymore. It is because it’s not their intention to make art, and it’s not our intention to become good friends with them. We want to do our work for them, but not with them. They are definitely not interested in this [work with the team] too. They say, ‘that’s fine if you do that for us. If you succeed, it’s great, but we are not here to work with you.’”

“Self-empowerment is very important. However, we make a difference between help and self-empowerment. There are situations in which self-empowerment is the best, but there are also situations in which help is the best. Like when someone is drowning in the sea, do you say ‘empower yourself’ or should you throw a lifesaver to help? I would say help is the best thing. Self-empowerment needs much more time, but we have only short time. When we have only like 11 weeks, we are much more on the help side.”

4.8 On Benchmark of Success

Wochenklausur said that, while different projects have different benchmarks of success, there are also universal criteria. One of them is the duration of the effect of their project. By this logic their first intervention in Vienna is the most successful one, “because it is still working after 25 years. So even if we have another project 2 years after, it can only work 23 years at most.” However, they also said that they do not see themselves responsible for the project

anymore once it is handed to an organisation or institution. An example is the intervention in Zurich. The pension lasted for about 7 years. “Of course we wished it would still work. However, if after some years they stop working or they don’t get the budget anymore, that is not our responsibility”.

5. Discussion

In this part, I aim at answering these questions: Wochenklausur claims that Kester has misrepresented their work. What is the reason behind this claim? What exactly has Kester misrepresented Wochenklausur?

First of all, I investigate why Kester is said to have misrepresented Wochenklausur. Putting Kester’s dialogical aesthetic theory (2004) to Wochenklausur’s practice implies the following results:

- 1) Wochenklausur achieves their sociopolitical purpose through creating consensual knowledge by dialogical interaction;
- 2) The artist group does not emphasise on their own subjectivity. Rather, subjectivity is formed through discourse and intersubjective exchange (Kester, 2004, pp.108).⁷⁵
- 3) The artists do not see discursive exchange as a means to represent their “self”, but a means of empathetic identification with the interlocutors (Ibid., pp.114).⁷⁶

⁷⁵ It is because for Kester, discourse is not a fixed, hierarchical system of a priori meaning, but is parole and dialogue. Quoting Habermas, Kester contends that identities are formed through discursive interaction. As a result, rather than seeing the artist as a superior subject, the dialogical aesthetic defined “artist” in terms of openness, of listening and of a willingness to accept a position of intersubjective vulnerability relative to the viewer or collaborator.

⁷⁶ As Kester wrote: “It is through empathy that we can learn not simply to suppress self-interest through identification with some putatively universal perspective, or through the irresistible compulsion of logical argument, but literally to redefine self: to both know and feel our connectedness with others.”

5.1 The Role of Consensus in Wochenklausur's Strategy

5.1.1 Tricks and Pressure

For Wochenklausur, is consensus through dialogue a necessity to reach their sociopolitical purpose? My answer to this question is no.

Firstly, I agree that dialogue and consensus are employed to achieve certain results. One of the examples is the boat colloquies in 1995. Other examples include the intervention to improve the conduct of public debate⁷⁷ in 2000, which involves discussions between conflicting parties in the society.

However, on the other hand, consensus and dialogue are not employed also in many other projects. One example is the intervention for immigrant labour issues in Graz in 1995. In this project, Wochenklausur developed a means of circumventing legislation to allow seven immigrants to stay in the country ("Immigrant Labor Issues", n.d.). Wochenklausur noticed that some of the immigrants in Austria could not return to their home countries due to political, ethnic or religious concern. If they want to stay in Austria, they have to make a living. However, in order to make a living they need work permits. Nevertheless, for them, at that time work permits were nearly impossible to get due to legal restriction. To solve this problem, Wochenklausur made use of a special policy for foreign "artists": Since in Austrian

⁷⁷ In this project, Wochenklausur was asked to conduct an intervention to network Greater Nuremberg. Wochenklausur thought that many conflicts between different parties in a society are seemingly unsolvable not because they are really unsolvable, but merely because the parties do not have enough knowledge of their adversaries. A reason for this phenomenon is that many people only understand their conflicts in the media but have never tried talking to their adversary face to face. Believing that "emotionally charged enemies were in fact able to become opponents who expressed themselves using objective argumentation" (Jeannée, 2001c, pp.121), the team set up several small rooms for discussions. These discussions usually consist of three people: two from conflicting parties and one professional mediator. The discussions were private, but the rooms, built by euro-pallets, were created and placed in public space with the aim to get public attention to the project. Most of the discussion program was also announced to the public in order to let them know that conflicting parties can talk to each other.

The group managed to bring thirty-two people from conflicting parties to meet. The discussion was limited to two hours. Most of the parties spent all the time and even extended until the battery-powered lighting ran out. Some of them agreed to realise some projects together; some agreed to continue to meet after the first meeting (Jeannée, 2001c, pp.124).

immigration law it is written that foreigners pursuing artistic activities need no work permit insofar as their livelihood derives from the income yielded by their artistic activity (Ibid., para.3), Wochenklausur was thus able to make 7 refugees “artists” to enable them to work legally⁷⁸. Wochenklausur also helped them to find “patrons” to commission their works⁷⁹, so that proof of income can be presented as legal documents.⁸⁰ In this case, dialogue and consensus do not play an important role.

Another case is the intervention of voting systems for Stockholm in 2002.⁸¹ In this project, Wochenklausur spent five weeks in Stockholm to create an unusual voting experience for the public. That was two weeks before the actual parliamentary election. Thinking that only voting can only allow showing what one supports but no other opinions such as “I would be for a party if...” or “I don’t know which party I am for, but I certainly know which one I am against...”, the group decided to carry out a project with the goal of demonstrating how a different voting system would produce different results. The group set up a voting laboratory, asking eligible Swedish voters to participate in an “experimental election”. In this “election” one is asked to vote in various ways, including voting a “negative vote”. More than 1,000 voters participated in merely a few days. These voters include political party chiefs and government officials such as the culture minister. These politicians also criticised the existing voting system when they talked to the press about their experimental experience. By this way,

⁷⁸ The group asked these refugees to produce “social sculptures”. All these “artworks” have their own humanistic dimensions. For example, a Kurd refugee collected baby food for the Kurdish cities. Another one collected children’s clothing and education resources for Bosnia. One repaired old bicycles for the Students’ Union in the University of Graz.

⁷⁹ The works were shown in an exhibition titled “Project Social Sculpture” in 1996.

⁸⁰ After the project, four of the refugees returned to their home countries. One of them married in Austria, and two of them got further commissions as artists. A stricter immigration law was legislated in 2006. Since then, foreigners can no longer work as “artists” in this way.

⁸¹ In the preparation stage of the project, one of the members, Pascale Jeannée died unexpectedly. She was the core member of the group and had worked on all of the projects since 1995. Her death was a blow to the group. After that, all the members left the group too, except Zingg, who decided to continue by recruiting new members (Temporary Services, 2007, pp.37). Even now in the group’s website (<http://www.wochenklausur.at>) there is still a dedicated page named “Pascale” for her.

Wochenklausur demonstrated the possibility of a different voting system. However, again, this project is done merely by setting up the system, rather than creating consensus through dialogue.

Instead of consensus, I argue that the group widely employs tricks and the power of the media to reach their goals. These tricks include exploiting the grey zone of the system and exerting public pressure on certain people.

In terms of the former, an example is their intervention with immigrant labour issues in Graz mentioned above. To reach their goal of facilitating 7 refugees to stay legally in Austria, rather than starting a dialogue to reach consensus, Wochenklausur applied a “trick”: naming the 7 refugees as “artists”. Wochenklausur also try to reach their goals by exerting pressure on some people. An example is their first intervention in Vienna. In order to reach their goal of setting up a medical bus for the homeless, the group needs money. To secure funding, the team contacted the City Councilor for Social Welfare, Ingrid Smejkal. According to Steurer (2001, pp.25), Smejkal was enthusiastic about their idea, but refused to pay for the doctor due to budget considerations. She also said that it is impossible to treat the homeless without an insurance voucher. Without the approval of Ingrid Smejkal, no funding can be given. In the end, the team employed a “media trick” to reach their goal:

We had routinely told a correspondent from the magazine Der Spiegel about our plans. Although we were not able to get him to write an article, we finally did convince him to help us. He did us a favour: In a meeting with Social Councilor Smejkal, he pretended that he was going to write about the bus. Then he asked the Councilor if she would approve funding for the doctor, and since she did not want to appear in Der Spiegel as a spoilsport, she had no choice but to say yes. On the day before our closing press conference she approved the subsidy. (Ibid., pp.25)

By this way, the group was able to get a “yes” from the social councillor by exerting pressure through the media to her.

In terms of the latter claim, i.e. Wochenklausur makes tactical use of the media to reach their goals, examples are again plenty. One of them is the Vienna intervention, which the team reflected that the media was crucial to the project’s success. More than 100 articles appeared in print for this project. They also spoke in radio programs in a somewhat threatening way: “Now it’s up to the City whether the bus providing healthcare to the homeless will also be carrying a doctor.” (Ibid., pp.25-26) Through these articles and programs, they “succeeded in getting officials to take steps that otherwise would have been put off indefinitely.” (Ibid., pp.25)

Similar ways of using the media can be found in the 1996 intervention in Salzburg. In this case, the group carried out an eight weeks project in the Salzburg Police Detention Centre.⁸² The team found that conditions in the centre were bad, e.g. food was inadequate and inmates could only shower once a week. Therefore they set their goal as improving the detention condition by establishing a social service agency in the detention centre. The police rejected their idea. As a result, Wochenklausur turned to public pressure. They gained public attention by building a cottage in Salzburg’s historic centre. In the cottage they held discussion sessions with different people such as the media, scholars, police authorities. They also intentionally built the cottage at the historic centre of the city, which is considered as inappropriate. The cottage caused not only protest but also legal action. Media reports followed. By this way, Wochenklausur tried to direct public attention to the aim of the cottage, i.e. detention centre condition. The police chief finally agreed to establish the social service agency.⁸³

⁸² The detention centre is one of the largest deportation detention facilities in Austria.

⁸³ At the end each inmate in the centre was assigned a volunteer counselor to take care of them, to ensure that they could have the basic human rights. A dayroom with fitness equipment and TV sets and others was set up in the centre (sponsors found by Wochenklausur themselves).

Another example: A case in Ottensheim. In 1997, Wochenklausur was invited to conduct an intervention involving community development in the small town of 4,000 residents. Wochenklausur's goal was to catalyse the community to engage in town planning and decision-making. They developed a framework for public participation and founded three interest groups, one of them is the Youth IG, for representing the interests of youths.⁸⁴ The Youth IG told Wochenklausur that they wanted to construct a skateboard ramp for a long time but they could not get permission from the government. Wochenklausur tried too. The government seemed to accept the idea, but agreement among political parties concerning the location of the ramp could not be reached. So without waiting, together with the Youth IG, Wochenklausur built the ramp in the town's historic centre. Three days later, the mayor announced that the ramp may move to the banks of the Danube ("Method", n.d.; Wochenklausur, 2014, pp.71).

The above examples illustrate how Wochenklausur creates public pressure on certain people to force them to act in certain ways. As they wrote: "the media reports less about the most exciting social work than about the duller cultural events. Thus Wochenklausur uses the media in any way it can" (Zinggl, 2001b, pp.132).

To summarise, in this part I show that in many cases, when Wochenklausur needs some parties to take action, they employ tricks and media pressure to reach their aim, rather than sitting down with the parties and talking to them to reach consensus.

5.1.2 Time Limit

Apart from tricks and pressure, I argue that the idea of "time limit" is also employed by Wochenklausur to reach their goals. The importance of employing a time limit firstly lies in

⁸⁴ Another two are the Marketplace IG, for revitalising the town's historic center; and the Seniors IG, for promoting social integration of older residents.

the name of the group. In my interview, the art collective described a few reasons to name themselves *Wochenklausur*, one of the reasons is that they see the time limit as a pressure. “Because there is a schedule, there is pressure and we need to be really focused. Otherwise we would say, ‘we have enough time, let us do this or that tomorrow.’”⁸⁵ Interestingly, this approach is used within the group too. In the process of making decisions they have a strategy of what is called “consensus by exhaustion”. Wolfgang Zingg explained in an interview: “. . . the rule was that we shouldn’t go to bed until we have consensus and if one person goes to bed then she is with the consensus . . . So by going to be [sic] bed, he or she says, ‘Whatever you decide to do, I’m with you.’” (Temporary Services, 2007, pp.35) Zingg explicitly added that this does not mean that members agree with each other, just that they reach a certain point that they are too tired to argue, so they have “consensus”. Therefore, I argue that “time limits” is used by *Wochenklausur* as a kind of pressure for interlocutors and collaborating subjects to make swift decisions. In other words, in many cases, decisions are made not because a mutual agreement is reached, but merely because there is no time for further conversation.

As a result, this way of making decisions is not what Kester’s dialogical practice, which emphasises on creating consensual knowledge and shaping each other’s identity through empathy, describes. That is also why, in terms of time, Kester seems to think that dialogical practices should have no time limit. “Dialogical practices, . . . can unfold over weeks, months, and even years . . .”. (Kester, 2013, para.18) Indeed, if consensus building is the principle, intentionally setting a time limit (for dialogue) sounds inappropriate, as it may negatively

⁸⁵ Martina Reuter also said in another interview: “Time is an extremely important factor. It works as a means of pressure and as an argument to enforce certain demands, for example, with state authorities. We emphasise demands by saying that we make art, we have only three weeks time so we need this or that immediately” (Mahlknecht, n.d., para. 55).

affect consensus building. As a result, I argue that the rationales of dialogical aesthetics are difficult to explain why Wochenklausur put time as their key focus.

5.1.3 Conclusion

As a conclusion, I argue that Wochenklausur's strategy may not be fully represented from the perspective of dialogical aesthetic. As mentioned earlier, Kester's theory implies that Wochenklausur achieves their purpose by creating consensual knowledge by dialogic interaction. However, the above analysis shows that in many cases they do not reach their purpose through consensus. In some cases which consensus cannot be reached, tricks and pressure are employed; in other cases, a time limit is set as a pressure to reach a "consensus by exhaustion". In addition, Kester's dialogical aesthetic also requires the dialogue to have an ethical dimension (e.g. the ideal speech situation) which emphasises empathy and collective knowledge building, without exerting power influence by one interlocutor to another (2004). However, Wochenklausur's strategy explicitly employs power influence. For instance, when the journalist from the Spiegel is invited to "interview" the city councillor, Wochenklausur's intention was not to build a collective knowledge between the artist, the journalist and the councillor. Rather, they create the meeting in order to exert power influence from the media to the city councillor. Therefore, I argue that, even though Kester's theory is instrumental in illustrating some parts of Wochenklausur's work, it is inadequate to illustrate their strategy.

5.2 Collaboration and Subjectivity

In this part, I continue to discuss Kester's representation of Wochenklausur from the perspective of subjectivity.

Applying Kester's dialogical aesthetic to Wochenklausur will imply that Wochenklausur does not emphasise on their own subjectivity. Rather, intersubjectivity is formed through discourse and intersubjective exchange. It also implies that the artists do not see discursive exchange as a means to represent their "self", but a means of empathetic identification with the interlocutors. In other words, Kester's theory implies that the group does not only talk to the community, but the community also has the power to make decisions, according to the intersubjectivity created through dialogue.

To verify these implications, let us investigate three interrelated aspects of Wochenklausur's work: their witty use of the norms of art, their view on their subjectivity as artists, and their way to decide their goals of intervention.

5.2.1 Use of the Norms of Art

I first argue that Wochenklausur emphasise on their subjectivity as "artists", as reflected in their use of the norms of art. This use of the norms of art is described by Martina Reuter: "...we use art as a strategy, as an instrument and as a door opener. Artists are not assumed to be evil. When something is declared as art, it is easier to get it through the authorities. We often do not have to go through hierarchical structures" (Mahlknecht, para. 55). Why does art possess this power? Art scholar Takaaki Kumakura (2000) suggests that art is usually perceived as possessing an authenticity. This authenticity allows artists to act in ways that are impossible for a non-artist. This usage of authenticity of art by Wochenklausur is obvious in many examples. Recalling the "nasty trick" of fake interviews in their first intervention, Martina Reuter said in an interview that it is because of "art" that they can do this trick. As a comparison, "[t]here is no such freedom of social work. Therefore, you should make use of this freedom (of art) as long as it does not hurt anyone." (Mahlknecht, n.d., para.15) Another

example is their 1995 intervention in Graz. They took advantage of the Austrian immigration law, which stated that artists were free to live and work as long as they could show proof of adequate income from their artistic profession. However, why does such a law exist? It is because the Austrian government officially recognises that art “thrives on international contacts, cross-border exchange and cultural encounter . . . Austria’s cultural policy supports and promotes the international exchange of creative artists” (“Mobility Guide,” n.d.). It is the norms of art that leads to this law.

All these reflect that the artists use the authenticity of art intentionally. To use this authenticity, they have to claim that they are “the artists”. As a result, their strategy includes the element of emphasising the artist subjectivity.

5.2.2 View on Artistic Subjectivity

I argue that their emphasis on artist subjectivity is also reflected by the fact that they stress heavily on their authorship and identity. As Zinggl wrote: “At first, artists do not differentiate themselves from others at all. However, then at some point they do, at least in the decision to be an artist.” (2001b, pp.133) Art scholar S.E. Fotiadi (2009) also noticed their focus on artist identity. In her discussion of the Salzburg project in 1996, she writes that while the improvement decisions were made primarily on inmates’ recommendations, in the projects’ “official narrations”, the inmates rarely appear as participants. “[T]he protagonists . . . are above all else the artists themselves” (pp.101). It is also because of this emphasis on the authorship of the artists, that the documentation of the practices in Wochenklausur’s only publication, *Wochenklausur: Sociopolitical Activism in Art* (2001) rarely credits participants. This emphasis of subjectivity is also arguably seen in their visual presentation: whenever they work on intervention, they hang their banner “WOCHENKLAUSUR”, large and high, to

make it sufficiently eye-catching. It is a clear visual message to communicate to everyone, “here comes Wochenklausur.” As a result, different from what Kester assumes, the subjectivity of Wochenklausur is presented as strong and concrete. As Wolfgang Zinggl once said in an interview: “We go into projects which allow us to sort out the themes ourselves like a classic artist who has full autonomy over the subject matter” (Saito, 2006, pp.13).

5.2.3 Research VS Consensus Making

One may argue that, although during the execution stage the group emphasises on their artist subjectivity, during their research process, their subjectivity is still an intersubjective, vulnerable one, because they usually talk to different people in this phase in order to set their goal (Jeannée, 2001a). In this section, I try to discuss this question.

Talking to people is indeed a common feature in their research process.⁸⁶ However, I argue that it does not mean that they are shaping some forms of intersubjectivity. One of the key criteria to judge whether a consensus-based on intersubjectivity is made is whether the engaged community has the power to decide the goal. The people whom Wochenklausur spoke to rarely have this power. Wochenklausur once said explicitly that, although they talk to stakeholders during the research phase, “[t]he decision regarding what we are going to do is taken by the group” (Durant, 2012, pp.101). For example, in their intervention in Ottensheim, despite some members of the general public hope that they can beautify the town, the group dismiss it as a “misunderstanding” (Zinggl, 2001c, pp.72) of their work and continue to pursue their decided goal of community development. This is why Hawley argues that while

⁸⁶ Wochenklausur said that the way they select topics is different from project to project. Sometimes the topic is suggested by the institution, while for the others they reject the request from the institution. After deciding their themes, they decide their objectives. They do this by talking to the institution, the people and other local organisations. They also do research by seeing the city themselves, giving out questionnaires (e.g. Zinggl, 2001c), reading academic literature and newspaper reportages (e.g. Zinggl, 2001a, pp.31), talking to the people, and talking with other local organisations. After that, the team comes together and discusses their ideas through a process of what they call “consensus by exhaustion”.

Kester sees Wochenklausur's work collaborative, "[a]uthorial power ultimately lies with the group" (2015, pp.101). Taking reference from artist and writer Dave Beech's (2008) differentiation between participatory and collaborative art, Hawley argues that the people whom Wochenklausur engaged are subject to the parameters of the projects set forth by artists, rather than are involved in making key decisions.

We may compare Wochenklausur's approach with Peter Dunn and Lorraine Leeson's Docklands Community Poster Project (1982–85). This project was a response to the request from the community for large posters to represent the key issues affecting the redevelopment of the Docklands. The community formed the Docklands Community Poster Project steering group, which was formed by the tenants and action groups in the area. They met regularly to discuss the redevelopment issues and identify where actions were needed. The group decided almost everything: the main audience of the poster, the site where they should put up, and the messages conveyed by the works (Dunn & Leeson, 2007, pp.249). The artists, on the other hand, worked on the representation of themes selected by the group. The decision-making process is thus different from that of Wochenklausur, who holds power to make the final decision.

Therefore I argue that Wochenklausur's research process involves talking to people as something like data collection in the research process. Together with other data such as newspaper reports and government policy reports, the data of talking to people form the basis of objective settings. This process is different from consensus making. Therefore, I argue that for Wochenklausur, they have no intention to make their subjectivity an intersubjective, vulnerable one even during the research phase.

5.2.4 Conclusion

From the above, I argue that members of Wochenklausur do not intend to redefine their “selves” through their conversation with the engaged group. Rather, they subjectively define themselves as artists, with or without dialogue with other parties. And in this way they make use of the norms of art to reach their purpose. They stress that they are the “WOCHENKLAUSUR”, and it is both symbolically and strategically important for them to stress that they are. As a result, I argue that Kester’s theory, even though it can capture parts of Wochenklausur’s work, may not be able to fully describe Wochenklausur’s strategy.

6. Conclusion

I end this chapter by returning to the famous case of intervention for drug-addicted women in Zurich in 1995. Kester’s description focused on the boat colloquies, but it may be surprising to know that there is, in fact, another side of this project: Zinggl wrote that (2001a) in the project, Wochenklausur wanted to rent a building to set up a pension for drug-addicted ladies. However, the group faced fierce opposition from the neighbourhood residents’ association. If we think Wochenklausur’s practice from Kester’s theory, a reasonable guess maybe that the group arranges a conversation between the drug-addicted women, the local residents and the owner. So that they can form an intersubjectivity, and make a mutually agreeable decision. However, the reality was that Wochenklausur argued against the residents (that their fears “were unfounded” (Ibid., pp.32)), and supported their argument with expert opinions. Still, the residents “did everything they could” (ibid.) to keep the property owner from leasing the building. And Wochenklausur still insisted on renting the property. The owner agreed to sign a five years contract with the group. However, even after the contract was signed, protest from the residents still continued. The conflict was so strong that at last the owner chose to

cancel the contract. This unfortunate event even led to a court case between Wochenklausur and the owner (Wochenklausur won). This kind of fierce conflict may be surprising to people who believe that Wochenklausur does their work mainly by building consensus.

Therefore I argue that Kester's theory may not be able to fully represent Wochenklausur's practice. I argue that, although dialogue is a common element in Wochenklausur's practice, it is not the collective's primary concern.

From the interview and records of their practices, we may say that Wochenklausur's main concern is objective. There may not be dialogues in some of their projects, but there is always an objective. As Wochenklausur said in my interview, what they want to show is that if one can solve small problems, one can also solve problems on a bigger and higher level. This is why they see their small scale practice not only influence a small group of people but can also provide an impact on society. However, how exactly do they create this impact? In other words, how may we explain what happens, from the point the group successfully reaches their objective, to provide an impact on society? If we can understand this mechanism, we will be able to learn better how such a strategy may be possible. I will attempt to answer this question in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6: Rethinking Antagonism

I have presented my 3 case studies of SEA. In each case study, I pose a question at the conclusion. In Chapter 3, I ask how does the communication process in the Hong Kong House project change the art form of the artist. In Chapter 4, I ask how to theorise the mechanism of change of the individuals involved in the Rebuild Foundation, so that we can extend our thinking from particular cases. In Chapter 5, I ask, in Wochenklausur's practice, how can we understand the relationship between achieving an objective, and the possibility of social change.

In this chapter, I will answer these questions by developing a way of theoretical analysis of individual experience and social change. Previously there were similar attempts by other writers to solve the similar problems. One of them is Michel de Certeau's *Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), which challenges conventional social science lacking formal means to examine ways in which people reappropriate them in everyday life. However, although this theme echoes with what this paper suggests, de Certeau also makes it clear that he "does not imply a return to individuality" (pp.xi). Other examples include the aforementioned Art historian Adair Rounthwaite's *Asking the Audience* (2017). While this paper agrees with Rounthwaite that it is important to listen to the audience in participatory practices, Rounthwaite's account focuses on the audience as a specific group of people, while I am also interested in individuals not only including the audience but also, as I have illustrated in the above cases, other stakeholders such as the artist, the interpreter and the staff. One more example is the Cultural Value Project (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016), which as I have already illustrated, is extremely valuable in helping us to evaluate the outcome of certain projects, but not explaining how such an outcome can be possible.

Therefore I feel a need to answer the question by another approach. In this paper, I will focus on the notion of “antagonism”. Firstly, I will show that this concept helps us to answer the 3 questions suggested above, but its definition should be reinvented so that it can be employed to discuss individual experience. Then I will continue to answer the 3 questions at the same time discussing how an individual version of antagonism is possible. By this way, I attempt to develop a philosophical framework for individual-level analysis in SEA studies. It also serves as an attempt to respond to the knowledge gap I discussed in section 3 of Chapter 2: To explore the possibility of developing conceptual theories for empirical studies (McCarthy et al. 2004), so that we may link the “micro-level effects on individuals to the macro-level of communities” (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016, pp.81).

1. Antagonism and Change

To begin, in this part I intend to show why the concept of antagonism can be a starting point for answering the three questions.

1.1 Bishop’s Conception

Firstly, I review the concept of antagonism in SEA discussed by Claire Bishop. Following Rosalyn Deutsche (1996), Bishop takes reference from the theory of discourse analysis by Laclau and Mouffe (2001) to argue that one can judge the quality of a project by examining the antagonism within. For Bishop, antagonism is somehow equivalent to “unease, discomfort or frustration – along with fear, contradiction, exhilaration and absurdity” (Bishop, 2012, pp.26). She used the term “relational antagonism” (2004, pp.77) to describe this experience of discomfort, claiming that the artworks of relational antagonism “provide a mode of artistic experience more adequate to the divided and incomplete subject of today” by revealing the

antagonism lies in the objectivity and identity of an individual (pp.79). From this perspective, we may say that if an artwork creates an uncomfortable feeling for the audience, the audience may rethink the validity of her/his assumed objectivity. By this way, the audience may change her/his perception towards that assumed objectivity.

For this reason, I argue that the concept of antagonism can offer a possibility to connect audience experience and the possibility of change. In this sense, to answer the 3 questions from the 3 cases, the first step we may do is to look for the antagonism experienced by the individuals. However, it is also my argument that this idea can only serve as a starting point for our analysis, because we cannot directly apply Bishop's concept of antagonism to these 3 questions.

The first reason is that Bishop's theorisation of the concept has encountered some challenges. An often mentioned problem is that the definition of antagonism by Laclau and Mouffe is different from that of Bishop's. Bishop saw antagonism as a kind of negative affect, while to Laclau and Mouffe it is the experience of limitation of objectivity (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp.125). As artist Liam Gillick (2006) points out, Laclau and Mouffe's theory "concerns the recognition of the antagonism suppressed within consensus-based models of social democracy, not merely a simple two-way relationship between the existing sociopolitical model and an enlightened demonstration of its failings" (pp.100). Similarly, performance studies scholar Shannon Jackson (2015) points out that "[t]he conceptual potential of the theory, indeed the social practice developed by this social theory, can be banalised if we decide that antagonism is equal to something like discomfort or discord" (pp.110). To summarise, both writers argue that an oppositional, confrontational feeling does not always equal to antagonism.

Another reason is that it is unclear whether Bishop is theorising antagonism as a possibility of change. Sometimes she seems to argue that antagonism is valuable in its own sense, in other words, “antagonism for antagonism’s sake”. This can be illustrated by Bishop’s discussion (2012, pp.41-44) of artist Christoph Schlingensiefel work “Please Love Austria” (2000). In this project, the artist erected a container outside the Opera House in Vienna, topped with a banner bearing the phrase “Ausländer Raus (Foreigners Out)”. Inside the container, accommodation was installed for a group of asylum seekers. Their activities were broadcast through the Internet, and viewers could vote for the ejection of their least favourite refugee. For 6 days, each day 2 most unpopular inhabitants were sent back to the deportation centre. The winner was purportedly offered a cash prize and a possibility of Austrian citizenship through marriage. According to Bishop, this work is a critique of xenophobia in Austria, and Schlingensiefel aims to antagonise the public⁸⁷. Bishop observed that a frequently heard criticism of this work is that “it did not change anyone’s opinion”. She then defended this work by writing that “political conversion is not the primary goal of art”. (2012, pp.44) But why “political conversion is not the primary goal of art”? Bishop illustrated further in the conclusion in the same text that “the task today is . . . reassertion of art’s inventive forms of negation as valuable in their own right” (pp.284). In other words, art is acceptable for creating no change in the political, because art’s inventive forms of negation are “valuable in their own right”. This understanding of antagonism is different from that of Laclau and Mouffe, who think that antagonism is important because it is an essential element for democracy (Laclau, 1990, pp.261). This uncertainty thus prevents us from using this concept to think about the possibility of change.

⁸⁷ In Vienna this work had received approval and condemnation from all sides of the political spectrum. For instance, some left-wing student activists attempted to sabotage the container and “liberate” the refugees, while some other left-wing celebrities showed up to support the project.

1.2 Laclau and Mouffe's Conception

If Bishop's concept of "antagonism" cannot be directly employed in answering the 3 questions, can we use the version conceived by Laclau and Mouffe? I argue that it is still not possible for us to employ the concept directly. The reason is that, while the 3 questions refer to the experience of individuals, Laclau and Mouffe's theorisation is not intended to be used on an individual-level. That is to say, Laclau and Mouffe do not conceive antagonism as something "felt" by a person. Rather, it happens at the site of discourse. It is unclear how individual experience should be understood in Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical framework. Below I will elaborate this point.

I first explain how Laclau and Mouffe see the category of "subject". They wrote:

Whenever we use the category of "subject" . . . , we will do so in the sense of "subject positions" within a discursive structure. Subjects cannot, therefore, be the origin of social relations . . . as all "experience" depends on precise discursive conditions of possibility (2001, pp.115).

In the *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (1990), Laclau further links his notion of subjectivity to the unconscious in psychoanalysis theorised by Jacques Lacan (pp.96).⁸⁸ He then divides subjectivity into two different concepts: subject positions and political subjectivity (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, pp.12). Subject position means the positioning of subjects within a discursive structure. While the subject position determines how an agent decides, it is certain that not all decisions come from a single subject position. It is because an

⁸⁸ Laclau contends that there are two points where Marxism breaks with the tradition of the Enlightenment, i.e. the affirmation of the central character of negativity (struggle and antagonism) in the structure of collective identity; and the affirmation of the opaqueness of the social, which establishes a gap between the real and the manifest senses of an individual. Laclau then wrote that it is the second point that may be linked to the action of the unconscious in psychoanalysis (pp.94). "The hegemonic subject is the subject of the signifier, which is, in this sense, a subject without a signified; and it is only from this logic of the signifier that the hegemonic relationship as such may be conceived" (pp.96).

agent can have multiple subject positions, and different positions can lead to contradictory decisions in some situations. As a result, there should be “something” which decides which decision to take. That is what Laclau and Mouffe called “political subjectivity”. For Laclau, no subject can be seen in subject positions. It is because everything is already decided by the discourse. As a result, the subject can only be found in political subjectivity, which makes decisions in an undecidable situation. To conclude, Laclau defined the subject as “the distance between the undecidable structure and the decision” (1990, pp.30).

In this sense, individuals are not considered as subjects. The role of individual experience in this theorisation is unclear. As political theorist Chris Rumford argued, in Laclau’s theorisation, “there can be no link between experience and subjectivity, and in fact no possibility of subjectivity as it is traditionally understood” (1995, pp.130-131). Since how should one understand individual experience is unclear, Laclau’s theory becomes “unable to generate a notion of subjectivity which entails consciousness, reflectivity and an ability to act on and change the world” (Rumford, 1995, pp.140). It may not be an oversight for Laclau though, because his theory simply does not focus on the experience of individuals. However, if Laclau’s theory cannot give an individual the ability to transform the world, it is not able to be used to explain the possibility of social change by art from an individual-level.

1.3 Conclusion

In the above, I have argued that, although antagonism may serve as a starting point for us to answer the three questions suggested, both Bishop’s version and Laclau and Mouffe’s version of the concept cannot be employed directly to individual-level analysis. As a result, a reconception of antagonism is necessary. Below, I will attempt to show how this is possible.

Finally, it should be noted here that this reconception, or appropriation of the concept of antagonism, essentially makes the definition of the term in this paper different from that of Laclau and Mouffe's. As I will explain later in this chapter, while antagonism of an individual suggested here and antagonism in Laclau and Mouffe's sense both share the idea of experience of limitation of objectivity, they are indeed two different concepts.

2. The Subject

As we have shown above, the reason that we cannot use Laclau and Mouffe's model here is that they do not conceive the subject as unique individuals. So the first step to conceiving a concept of "antagonism" which is able to be applied to individual experience, is to conceptualise individuals as subjects. If we refer to the 3 case studies, it means that we should rethink the notion of the subject so that the artist Wan, the interpreter Ng as well as all the interviewees can be seen as unique subjects, instead of a collective of subject positions or an abstract "distance" between an undecidable structure and decision (Laclau, 1990, pp.30).

As I have shown in Chapter 1, a hint is that this task can be done by returning to the German Idealists in the 18th Century. A Kantian subject⁸⁹ can be defined by the consciousness of an individual. It is a transcendental self, of which "[p]ersons seem to [see] themselves to be the

⁸⁹ Kant's idea of the self and the mind is influential to various academic fields, although they gain attention only after 200 years after its inception, in the 1960s and 70s (Brook, 2020, para.1). One of the reasons can be that the discussion of the subjective mind was not his main aim (Kant, 1929, pp.12). This is evidenced by the fact that his writings about the mind are "remarkably scattered and sketchy" (Brook, 2020, para.19).

centre of their fields of perception, both inside and outside their own bodies.”⁹⁰ (Harré, 2002, pp.183)

This Kantian conception of the subject reminds us that, whenever we think about the notion of “change” and “antagonism” in SEA, we should make it clear who is the individual in focus. For instance, in the case of Hong Kong House, since the change in focus is the art form of Wan, the subject in focus is Wan. In the case of Rebuild Foundation, there are several interviewees who said that they have changed in some sense. They can all be the subjects in focus. In the following analysis, I am going to focus on the interviewee M and J as examples.

What is interesting is the case of Wochenklausur. How should we locate the subject in focus?

By re-examining Wochenklausur’s claim that “if you show that you can solve small problems in a bigger context, . . . [the project then implies that] you are also able to solve bigger and higher level problems”, it can be seen that their target is the subject who originally believes that solving the problem on a bigger and higher level is not possible, such as the City Councilor for Social Welfare in their Vienna intervention on the homeless issue, who believed that it was “impossible for treatment to be provided without insurance vouchers” (Steurer, 2001, pp.25). Making this subject in focus clear enables us to begin our analysis without

⁹⁰ For readers who want more details about this Kantian self: First it is important to distinguish between phenomenal and noumenal. What is to think? One thing that can be certain is that it involves sensation (Kant, 1929, pp.65). Sensation is defined by Kant as “[t]he effect of an object upon the faculty of representation.” (Kant, 1929, pp.65) All we can know is that there are objects which give us sensations; then we receive those sensations to give ourselves a representation of the object through our faculties. It refers to the a priori capacities and structures of humans to interpret sense, to perform rational function. For Kant, the object that gives us the sensation is considered as noumenal, while the representation of it is phenomenal. All we know is the phenomenal but we can never know the noumenal (Kant, 1929, pp.41). From the distinction between noumenal and phenomenal, we can define the self as a subject. For Kant there are two kinds of consciousness of self, similar to the distinction between noumenon and phenomenon. The consciousness of oneself in inner state (“I” of apprehension”, as noumenon), and the consciousness of oneself when one is thinking (“I” of reflection”, as phenomenon) (Kant, 2006, pp.32). In Kant’s word, “I cannot determine my existence as a self-active being; all I can do is to represent to myself the spontaneity of my thought” (Kant, 1929, pp.169). An easier to understand description by Kant himself is that the inner sense is the soul, the revealed consciousness is the body (Brook, 2020, para.89). Just as we cannot know about the noumenon, we cannot know about our soul, or inner sense (Brook, 2020, para.116).

looking at other individuals who may have no relation to the mechanism of social change in the strategy, such as the drug-addicted woman, or the VIPs on the boat.⁹¹

In this part, we have located the subjects in focus for the three questions. However, what happens to these subjects, so that their experience leads to the possibility of change? I will continue to answer this question below.

3. Mind Map

3.1 Reviewing Laclau and Mouffe's Notion of Discourse

In the above, I have redefined the subject so that it now refers to unique individuals. Can we now apply the concept of antagonism to these subjects?

The answer is still no. It is because in Laclau and Mouffe's theorisation, antagonism exists at the site of discourse. However, we cannot assume that the subjects conceptualised above possess social discourses in their mind, so that these discourses become the basis of the subject to make sense of her/his experience, and become the site of antagonism. Below, I explain this argument.

The problem is that in Laclau and Mouffe's theorisation (2001), different discourses are distinctly separated from each other, and the relationships between discourses can only be power relationships, i.e. hegemonic relations. I contend that this distinction is useful at the analysis level, but it cannot be seen as a general description of our understanding of the world from an individual perspective, because our understanding of different concepts in the world is more complicated: Sometimes individuals can make decisions which neither belong fully to one discourse nor to another. For instance, in Wan's case, the interpreter Ng described his interpretation process as something like what journalists do. As a result, he is at a position of

⁹¹ Here I do not mean that they must have nothing changed, nor their change is not important. What I mean is that they are not the subjects in focus in Wochenklausur's strategy.

one identity (an interpreter), but acting and perceiving his experience by another (a journalist). In this sense, his action and the way he makes sense of his experience cannot be seen as originated solely from a single discourse, but a “mixture” of different discourses. Treating different discourses as distinct entities would make us unable to think about this “mixture” of various elements within the mind of a subject as an individual.

As a result, I argue that we cannot assume that for an individual, articulations between symbols form mutually exclusive entities. Instead of assuming that there are discourses in an individual’s mind, a more complicated theoretical model is required.

3.2 Element, Articulation and Mind Map

To solve the problems above, I propose the concept that each agent possesses a mind map as their mental system to make sense of the world. A similar concept has been illustrated by philosophers Braddon-Mitchell & Fitzpatrick (1990), who proposed the concept of mental maps analogous to ordinary maps. In this mind map, elements articulated to one another through personal experience⁹² to form concepts, concepts are further articulated to form higher concepts and so on. It is because of these articulations that meaning is possible.⁹³

⁹² These experiences include personal one such as interaction with other subjects, and social one such as education and other forms of socialisation.

⁹³ Here I define meaning as the set of articulations around an element. In this sense, the meaning of an element is highly dependent on the subject’s experience. Each individual has her/his own mind map. As the mind map comes from our experience and no two of us have the same experience of life, no two mind maps can be exactly identical. If an individual, for some prior experience, articulates an element A with another element B, the meaning of A and B mutually constitutes each other. The individual may need further articulations, especially those of language to express to the others that they are reasonably and logically connected, but for the individual, the meaning is there.

This articulation method is different from that of the “Language of Thought Hypothesis” (Fodor, 1975), which hypothesised that there is a language (“Mentalese”) in our mind. In Mentalese there are words which can combine into sentences. In our mind we use these words and sentences to think. This hypothesis has a very long history, with its first systematic treatment can be traced back to around 1323 by William of Ockham in his *Summa Logicae*. (Rescorla, 2019, para.2) In 1975, Jerry Fodor published *The Language of Thought* (LOT), which became the Foundation of contemporary discussion. In this theory, Mentalese expressions have logical form (Fodor, 2008, pp.21). This is a claim which states that Mentalese contains words of logical connectives (in English, such as “and”, “if”, “then”, “else”), and it is these connectives which generate complex expressions. This idea presupposes that relationships between words in Mentalese are defined by syntactic rules. I argue that this presupposition is problematic. In daily life observations,

Here culture and social norms come into play. Because meaning is articulated from individual experience, and individual experience is usually produced and rendered by culture⁹⁴, meaning is highly related to culture, involving contextuality, indexicality and historicity (Harré, 2002, pp.144). In this sense, the relationship between culture and individual actions can be illustrated by the positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999): It states that in our society, there are various presuppositions about the distributions of rights and duties to perform certain acts (pp.154). “Position” refers to the momentary clusters of rights and duties to act in daily life. Individuals are instructed by these positions to take action. In this sense, individuals act under the influence of social norms. However, at the same time, it is possible for individuals to overthrow their own positions (Harré, 2002, pp.285). As a result, on one hand, culture instructs individual action; but on the other, individuals can still initiate change. To illustrate, let us look at the three questions as examples. In Wan’s case, her action of communicating with the locals can be seen as the result of the “position” as an SEA artist from the HKH. In this sense, she knows that her rights and duties are to visit the local people

especially those in artistic experiences, syntax is not the sole possibility of symbol connections. Our thoughts can often jump from symbol to symbol, either intentionally or unintentionally. I argue that elements are articulated loosely by memories of previously perceived experience, forming a “mind map” of elements. The rejection of logical form in Mentalese is not new in the debate of LOT. Rescorla wrote (2019, para.43): “[t]he British empiricists postulated ideas, which they characterized in broadly imagistic terms . . . LOGIC plays no significant role in their writings”. Similarly, Clark argued that our cognitive system needs not to be “semantically transparent” (Clark, 1989, pp.17). It means that symbols need not to be operated with definite logics and rules. Clark (1989) suggested that our cognitive system work differently. Signs may not be processed according to preset rules. Systems without semantic transparency may also have, and work on, specific intentions.

The “connectionist model” is compatible with this idea. The neural net can be tuned to generate one sign from another without the necessity of preset rules. Indeed, we do not need to learn the rules and meanings of the statement “1+1=2” to understand putting one apple next to another one gives two apples. The articulations depend on previous perceived experience the agent has encountered.

A counter-argument to this is that images and maps cannot do logical operation (Rescorla, 2019, para.44). What does it mean by putting together an element of “ticket” and a symbol of “concert”? Here my argument is that the relationship between them, be it logical or illogical, is understood by perceived experience as raw materials. In this sense, I do not consider logic as a priori element, but is acquired or learnt by an individual. It is in this sense that I propose the concept of mind map here instead of using the concept of Mentalese.

⁹⁴ Here culture which is defined by anthropologist Edward B. Tylor as the complex whole “which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (1903, pp.1),

and learn from them. However, this position is only a momentary cluster, which means that when situations change, she can overthrow this position: The mediation of the interpreter sometimes makes her cease to communicate and use a smartphone instead. In interviewee M's case, he is at the position of a staff of the Rebuild Foundation, which has the rights and duties to manage the project. However, he is also considering himself as an artist, so he also wants to overthrow this position: He participates in dance classes, tries to make art and applies to the Foundation as an artist in residence. For Wochenklausur's Vienna intervention, we can also see how the City Councilor acts according to the position as an interviewee of the media, so she did not want to be a "spoilsport" and "had no choice but to say yes." (Steurer, 2001, pp.25)

This theoretical framework of mind map and position embraces pluralism. Since a mind map belongs to a single agent, culture and norms also exist in the mind of a single agent. Strictly speaking, we can say each individual has its own version of culture. In this sense, this model is highly pluralistic, and it agrees that no articulation in our mind map is essential and universal. For example, in Wochenklausur's case, how the city councillor thinks that she should respond to journalists is specific to herself, rather than following any universal and essential rules. In the case of Hong Kong House, Ng can also have his own means to interpret for Wan, rather than following any essential principle of interpretation. In both cases, there can be no absolute "right" or "wrong".

Perhaps one may ask if everyone has their own version of culture, how do these different versions relate to each other. The explanation is that when the mind map of different individuals are formed from phenomena commonly experienced⁹⁵, and are mutually

⁹⁵ Since different people experience the phenomenon from different perspectives, strictly speaking their experience is also slightly different. However, since the experience is arguably small, also the interpretation of experience between agents is further mutually influenced by dialogues between them, this experience can be said to be approximately common.

influenced by dialogues among them, the culture perceived by this group of people become similar. For example, in Wochenklausur's case, I have mentioned that they strategically use the privilege of art to carry out their projects. If each person understands "art" differently, how come "art" is also considered as "authentic"? It is because people in society have common experience which is related to the authenticity of art, and they shape each other's meaning of art through language. As a result, although each individual has her/his own version of culture, it is possible to approximate these cultures perceived by different people as a common one in a society for analysis. We will further explain this point in section 5.2 in this chapter.

4. Antagonism

Our goal is to redefine antagonism for individual-level analysis. To reach this goal, the previous part has suggested the concept of mind map. Now we move forward to another question in redefining antagonism: In Laclau and Mouffe's paradigm, antagonism is the experience of the limit of objectivity (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, pp.125). What does it mean by an experience of the limit of objectivity for an individual?

4.1 Predictive Processing

To answer this question, I borrow ideas from the theory of predictive processing in cognitive philosophy⁹⁶.

⁹⁶ Since bringing in cognitive philosophy is rare in the field of SEA, I give a few arguments to support my approach.

Firstly, I argue that bringing in cognitive philosophy to SEA is not a totally new advocacy. In the Art of Changing the World Conference in Ottawa, 2017, scholars gathered to discuss the theorisation of social change in SEA, and one of the major issues they discussed was "change occurs through transformations in cognitive paradigms" (Spiegel, 2017). In this part, cultural studies scholar Jennifer Beth Spiegel, who gave a summary to the discussion, quoted two theorists, Jonathan Haidt and Rick Kemp. The former "looks at the psychology behind adopting a particular worldview and the challenges to changing it" (pp.4), while the

What is predictive processing? To introduce this concept, first I discuss the role of “prediction” in the arts.

I first consider two recent arguments. The first one is a book review by neuroscientist Karl Friston (2013) on medical doctor Eric R. Kandel’s *The Age of Insight* (2012). The book discusses how the mind and brain relate to art by going back to Vienna in 1900. In this book, Kandel analyses the role of the viewer in art appreciation: “Just as the artist creates a work of art, so the viewer recreates it by responding to its inherent ambiguity. The extent of the beholder’s contribution depends upon the degree of ambiguity in the work of art.” (pp.192) In his review, Friston further wrote: “Ambiguity (or perhaps its resolution) gets to the heart of perceptual inference . . . The *raison d’être* for inference is to disambiguate among plausible and competing hypotheses.” (pp.1329) This argument shows how viewers participate in the

latter talks about the mirror neurons, which “are neurons in an observer’s brain that fire in a similar pattern when an action is observed as when an action is actually executed . . .” (Kemp, 2012).

Secondly, I argue that, although cognitive philosophy is the philosophy in/of cognitive science, the knowledge of it does not only deal with observable materialistic worlds with laboratory experiments. This is explained by philosopher Ron Harré (2002, pp.20). In his discussion on materiality, he suggests that we may separate the material universe to 3 “*umwelt*” (regions). Region One refers to the material world which human beings can sense without any external aids. Region Two refers to what we can visualize beyond Region One with external aids. Region Three refers to the world which we cannot see, nevertheless we can imagine. It is often Region Three that cognitive science deals with. In Region Three, rather than real empirical observations, there are many imaginations and rooms for humanities discussion.

Thirdly, much resistance from the arts field to the interdisciplinary approach of arts and science (Brook, 2009) is against the dogmatic, narrow interpretation of naturalism. However, not all science must adopt this kind of interpretation. In the dogmatic interpretation of naturalism, natural, scientific laws govern everything. In extreme occasions, philosophy may even be dismissed because philosophical arguments are regarded as non-scientific (Brook, 2009, pp.219). In this sense, it is understandable to see that the arts resist this form of naturalism. Habermas also sensed the danger of philosophy posed by this kind of naturalism. This is reflected in his criticism of what he regarded as “strong naturalism”. For Habermas, naturalism should be rejected because it fails to “question the legitimacy and presuppositions of scientific methodology, instead taking for granted an objective and universal methodological stance” (Yates, 2011, pp.47). It is thus interesting to see how Habermas deals with the problem. He does not reject naturalism or even science in total. Rather, Habermas agrees that everything that exists can be explained by science. What he argues is that this does not mean that it unjustified philosophical, normative claims. Instead of the “hard naturalism” which is eliminative to other disciplines, he advocates a “soft naturalism” which “reality is not exhausted by the totality of scientific statements that count as true according to current empirical scientific standards” (Habermas, 2008, pp.153). “The ontologization of natural scientific knowledge into a naturalistic worldview reduced to ‘hard’ facts is not science but bad metaphysics.” (Habermas, 2008, pp.207) As I will show in the theorisation here, it is possible to think of science with soft naturalism, and to acknowledge the importance of normative values, at the same time maintaining the basic principles of cognitive science.

meaning creation process by raising and testing various hypotheses (or predictions) on what the ambiguous artwork is about.

The second argument is by the literature scholar, Karin Kukkonen (2017). She wrote that the genre of the fantastic in literature “forces readers to hesitate between contradictory models” (pp.160). By analysing the novel *Le Diable Amoureux* (1772) by author Jacques Cazotte, she wrote that the author continuously reminds readers of the “basic conflict” between two possible predictions of the story (pp.162). This argument shows how readers read the novel by raising and testing which one of the two predictions of the story is the right one.

The above two examples, as I argue here, show that prediction plays an important role in the arts. This is not a recent argument. For example, in his book *Art and Illusion*, Art historian Ernst Gombrich wrote: “It is the power of expectation rather than the power of conceptual knowledge that moulds what we see in life no less than in art” (1969, pp.178) Expectation here resembles prediction. Another example is the art historian Alois Riegl. In the early twentieth Century, Riegl has suggested the idea of “the beholder’s share” (Seth, 2019, pp.380). The term refers to the idea that an artwork is not completed without a beholder’s active perception and emotional involvement. This involvement of the beholder “draws [the beholder] into the magic circle of creation and allows him to experience something of the thrill of ‘making’ which had once been the privilege of the artist.” (Gombrich, 1969, pp.160) This share of the beholder, as “finishing the work before the artist finishes it”, is also a form of prediction. This idea is also similar to Bourriaud’s theory. In *Relational Aesthetics* (2002, originally published as *Esthétique Relationnelle* in 1998) he described artwork as an “inter-human game”, a claim which took reference from the artist Marcel Duchamp (“Art is a game between all people of all periods”) (pp.19). This idea implies that art is not possible without the audience (gamer). Giordano analysed Bourriaud’s view and wrote, “[t]he viewer

then must complete the work each time it is engaged.” (2015, pp.38) This engagement cannot be considered as merely taking a critical stance or analysing the work, because this would assume the work is completed prior to the criticism. Rather, the viewer, with her/his cognition, shares a part of the creation process, through active prediction. To conclude, I argue that prediction from an individual audience does play an important role in the arts.

So what is this role? How exactly does one’s artistic experience relate to prediction? To answer this question, I introduce the model of “Predictive Processing” (Clark, 2016). This model regards individuals who act in the world in a predictive manner.⁹⁷ It means that rather than reacting to stimulations according to one’s perception of the world, the agent tries to guess incoming sensory stimulations as they arrive, using what one knew about the world. Successful guess reconfirms the guess, so that little or no change on what one knew about the world is needed. Failed guesses generate “prediction errors” that are used to make new and better guesses.⁹⁸ Here it is important to note that prediction errors do not mean objective “failure”. Rather, it simply means that the perceived outcome is not what the individual has predicted. As a result it should not be regarded as a criticism of “wrongdoings” to the individual, but a possibility of generating new and better guesses, which may become new ideas or concepts in the mind of an individual, which lead to what we call “change”. As a result, predictive processing, a process which “perception, understanding, action and imagination . . . are constantly co-constructed in the ongoing attempts at guessing the sensory

⁹⁷ Human beings act according to its optimal prediction. However, this optimality is not objective (Schwartenbeck et al., 2015), since nothing perceived can be out of an individual’s subjective mind. That is to say, different individuals can have her/his own “best prediction” (see also Shani, 2006, pp.90). This concept reassures us that to understand human beings, one cannot ignore the cultural and sociopolitical background.

⁹⁸ Not all prediction errors call for new and better guesses though. Depending on situations, they may also inform slower processes of learning and plasticity. Factors affecting the process of prediction errors include whether the prediction error is highly weighted, and whether the cognitive system is able to explain them by using other articulations, and the energy needed to form new ideas (see also section 4.5 in this chapter).

signal” (Ibid., pp.21)⁹⁹, may be applied to explain the linkage between individual experience and individual change.

As I have argued, prediction plays an important role in the arts. As a result, there are already research attempts which discuss predictive processing in art.¹⁰⁰ A pioneer theorisation of predictive processing in art was by Van de Cruys and Wagemans in 2011. Their main aim was to set up a preliminary explanation on the effect of visual art experience from the perspective of predictive processing. Using the artist Giorgio Morandi’s *Natura Morta* (1960) as an example¹⁰¹, they use predictive processing to argue that in this work Morandi “twists expectations of how still-life paintings are defined traditionally” (2011a, pp.1041). Their progress was then followed up by art historian Ladislav Kesner (2014), who gives more detailed arguments on the theory. In 2019, neuroscientist Anil K Seth published another article which expands the discussion of art and predictive processing to various art movements. The emerging trend of connecting predictive processing and the arts does not only limit to visual art. In 2017, in the book titled *Cognitive Literary Science*, 3 chapters are associated with predictive processing (Burke & Troscianko, 2017, pp.2), one of them, titled *Fantastic Cognition* by Kukkonen (2017), is solely dedicated to bridging predictive processing and literature. From these literature, I argue that predictive processing can be applied, and is already being applied, to arts studies.

⁹⁹ Since prediction is always about probability, the core of this model in mathematics is thus the Bayes’ theorem. This is why sometimes a predictive mind is called a Bayesian mind or Bayesian brain.

¹⁰⁰ It is possible that an artwork may generate little or no prediction error to a viewer, but it is the prediction error itself which hints its difference from other experiences.

¹⁰¹ Other case studies of actual artworks include Munch’s *Separation* (1896) and Picasso’s *Weeping Woman* (1937) (pp.1042-1043).

From this point, I further argue that we may think SEA from predictive processing.¹⁰² This theory is especially important for our discussion of SEA, because antagonism, as an experience of limitation to objectivity, is comparable to the idea of prediction error of an individual.

Below I will further show how to define antagonism from predictive processing. The first step is to illustrate the condition for antagonism to happen.

4.2 Framing

As I have mentioned above, in Laclau and Mouffe's framework, the existence of antagonism is at the site of discourse. However, we have already shown that discourse cannot be said to exist in an individual's mind. Rather, I argue that the concept of mind map may be a better representation of an individual's mind. So how should we understand antagonism, from the concept of mind map?

To answer this question, I first argue that our mind map is far from a coherent one. Our mind does not articulate signs and concepts by strictly logical and reasonable ways.¹⁰³ Depending on personal experience, elements can be contingently articulated to each other. Since

¹⁰² A question arises here is that the above examples only illustrate the situation of seeing an artwork and reading a novel. However, the change SEA refers to is often associated with higher level perception such as conceptual change or the change in the understanding of our world. What is the relationship between the two levels of cognition? The multilayered model in cognitive processes can help us to solve this problem (Clark, 2016, pp.32). In this model, there are low level cognitions such as retinal stimulations, and high level cognitions such as concepts and motives. In between are intermediate layers including colours, shapes, textures. Predictions can be generated in any layer of the model. It is then checked with signals transmitted from the layer below. Signals which matched confirmed the prediction, realising our cognitive task, while signals not matched are processed for our mind to call for a new prediction. In addition, the relative influence of these signals are also depending on their precision, or "the reliability or confidence afforded to information" (Seth, 2019, pp.383). This process is repeated until an acceptable match results. In this sense, predictive processing is not only applicable to lower level cognitions such as visual cognitions, but also higher level one such as conceptual understanding of our world.

¹⁰³ This may be understood by the "connectionist model" of cognition (Rescorla, 2019, para.89). The development of this model can be traced back to the mid 20th Century. Its main concept includes "parallel distributed processing (PDP)", which means that the steps in simulation of cognitive process are not taken one by one, but simultaneously (Harre, 2002, pp.191). In this model, the mind does not store memory at specific sites. Instead data is "learnt" by configuring artificial neurons in a net of them. By this way, the input and output of the mind do not require logical or syntactical relationships.

experience is not necessarily reasonable as seen by individuals, sometimes these articulations can even be contradictory. It is my argument that our mind map is full of contradictions, just like in Laclau and Mouffe's framework, different discourses are contradictory to each other.

In this sense, to reinvent discourse, I refer to the concept of framing in cognitive science. A frame, according to cognitive scientist Marvin Minsky, is "a data-structure for representing a stereotyped situation, like being in a certain kind of living room, or going to a child's birthday party". (1974, abstract) People use different "frames" in different kinds of situations to understand and react to the environment. With this concept, we can conceive that different frames separate contradictory articulations, so that an individual recalls different articulations in different situations. The ability to select appropriate rules according to different environments is called "skills" (Harré, 2002, pp.152). When the mind is so skilful that its predictions rarely need to be corrected, the action of the individual can be so smooth that it acts as if it is a kind of objective causal reflex. It resembles what Laclau and Mouffe called the "objectivity".

Discourse may then be understood as what is similar to frames in a mind map. Through "separating"¹⁰⁴ the mind map into frames, we can compare how different frames give different predictions. However, we have to be careful: If we consider a frame as a constant entity, we will be challenged by the philosopher Rom Harré's question that "[w]hatever frame axioms one settles on, something unexpected may appear 'out of the blue' and render the frame inadequate." (Harré, 2002, pp.128) Indeed, situations change every minute. Our consideration follows. If we consider that every situation generates a fixed frame, we will have to accept that there are an infinite number of frames which continuously change for an infinite number of situations. This will make analysis impossible. To solve this problem, we

¹⁰⁴ Here it should be noted that this separation is only a metaphorical separation for analysis. This separation does not exist really in mind (there is no paper map to separate in our head).

have to conceptualise that the way an individual separates the mind map is not predefined prior to analysis, but depends on specific situations. By this way, the same mind map can be analysed as one of different framings in different situations.¹⁰⁵

4.3 Definition of Antagonism

With all the above concepts ready, we may now properly understand antagonism as the experience of limitation of objectivity of a unique subject. First of all, to reaffirm, antagonism illustrated here must refer to an individual. It means that an artwork cannot merely “create antagonism”. It must first be described as “creating antagonism for individual X”. Since an experience of limitation of objectivity can be understood as that the individual predicts that something will happen in some ways, but turns out it happens in another way, so that her/his perceived objectivity is challenged, we may consider this as a process of wrong prediction. Therefore, we can say that antagonism, which is appropriated from Laclau and Mouffe’s concept but essentially different as it is based on an individual level in this paper, may be regarded as the experience of prediction error of a single individual. This prediction error implies that the individual has to predict and decide again how should s/he perceives and act in that situation, therefore antagonism is also a situation of undecidability, echoing what has been theorised by Laclau (1990, pp.30). As prediction error is the origin of new ideas, antagonism is what makes personal change possible. As a result, by theorising antagonism as prediction error, we may explain the mechanism between individual experience and change.

¹⁰⁵ We may also reconceptualise hegemony. As I have stated above, in a specific situation, we may divide the mind map into multiple frames. Each of these frames instruct a specific decision. From observation in daily life, we can see that the importance of these frames to the individuals are different, depending on different situations. Importance is a comparative concept, so it can be expressed by a rate. The overall prediction of a subject to an experience in specific time and space is thus the combination of all these predictions and their respective importance. This rate of importance can be seen as the individual-based version of Laclau and Mouffe’s hegemony.

4.4 Applying “Antagonism” to the Case Studies

With this redefined notion of antagonism, we can continue our answers to the question related to the Rebuild Foundation and that related to Wochenklausur. In the case of the Rebuild Foundation, our aim is to understand the mechanism of change for the individuals involved in the project. As I have stated, in this analysis we focus on the interviewee M and C2. The beginning of their change is antagonism. For interviewee M, we can see that it is when he dropped out of college that how he should continue his life becomes undecidable, i.e. antagonism existed. For interviewee C2, he wanted to write not only because he wanted to remember the 1960s, but also because he wanted his readers to enjoy his book. Here we may say, from the frame of an author, a prediction of writing involves readership. However, it was unlikely to be achievable because there was no way to publish it (before he met interviewee J). This is where the antagonism lies.



Peach's at Currency Exchange cafe (credit: Tinshui Yeung)

We will continue to ask what happens after the subjects experienced these antagonisms later in this chapter. However, here I would like to highlight that the two antagonisms here do not originate from the Rebuild Foundation. Rather, they exist in the lives of the two interviewees. This reminds us that when we look at the social impact of an SEA project, we should think beyond the project to reach the lives of individuals to get a better picture.

For Wochenklausur, I ask what is the linkage between reaching a preset objective and creating social impact. Where is the antagonism in this process?

To answer, I shall take their Fukuoka intervention as an example. In this project, the group was invited to Fukuoka by the Art Project Museum City Project. The team worked for two months there, and their goal was to set up a self-sufficient coordinating agency that would

bring “project teaching” into schools.¹⁰⁶ However, their plan was greeted with scepticism. “Mostly people would tell us that ‘everything requires a very long period of preparation in Japan.’” (Jeannée, 2001b, pp.105-106) Wochenklausur nevertheless tried to reach this objective. They did presentations at public spaces such as shopping centres. Eventually they were able to find experts who can volunteer leading teaching projects. They have also developed a dozen of project teaching proposals, examples include collaborating with a newspaper editor to create a real sports page with students, and collaborating with theatre practitioners to use role-playing to simulate how parliament functions. The remaining problem is to convince a school to run these projects. This problem proved very difficult to solve because, as sceptics told them, many local Japanese needed a long time to trust them (Jeannée, 2001b, pp.106-107).

At last it is the press who stroke the goal. In a public occasion Wochenklausur thanked the principal of an elementary school for his trust. According to Jeannée’s observation, the principal reacted with reservation. However, when he was answering a journalist’s question, he “diplomatically” answered that the process of arranging a project learning session was in full swing. It is unclear how the reportage influenced the others, but a few days later the team successfully fixed project dates with two schools. More confirmation came after. The group was also able to find two young employees, a coordinator and a manager to run the agency. It was then called ASAP (Agency for School Activity with Professionals). The Museum City Project agreed to support ASAP for at least one more year.

¹⁰⁶ Before departing for Japan, the team talked to Japanese people living in Austria. They told them that Japanese education system is conservative. After arriving in Japan, they again talk to city administration, sponsors, artists and district councils. They also set up a Christmas room called “Cafe Tanne” where people can come in to share their stories related to education. According to Wochenklausur, more than 1,000 people came to visit the cafe, including senior citizens, teachers and students. From the information collected in these discussions, they set their goal as creating opportunities for project teaching (or, “learning by doing”).

The process shows how Wochenklausur, even though they faced scepticism, nevertheless attempted to reach their objective, and they finally succeeded. This result thus became a prediction error, or antagonistic experience, to those people who told them that in Japan, things require much time for preparation.

Following similar logic, we can also locate the antagonism in other practices by Wochenklausur. For the Vienna case of engaging her homeless issue in 1993, the antagonism here is the experience of the City Councillor (among others) that Wochenklausur successfully provides treatment to the homeless without insurance vouchers, an experience which is different from her original prediction. Antagonism can also be found in cases which heavily involve conversations. An example is the 2000 “Intervention to Improve the Conduct of Public Debate,” of which the primary themes were dialogues and conversations. In this project, Wochenklausur thought that many conflicts between different parties in society are seemingly unsolvable not because they are really unsolvable, but merely because the parties do not have enough knowledge of their adversaries. A reason for this phenomenon is that many people only understand their conflicts in the media but have never tried talking to their adversary face to face. Believing that “emotionally charged enemies were in fact able to become opponents who expressed themselves using objective argumentation” (Jeannée, 2001c, pp.121), the team set up several small rooms for discussions.¹⁰⁷ They managed to bring 32 people from conflicting parties to meet. The discussion was limited to two hours. Most of the parties spent all the time to discuss and even extended until the battery-powered lighting ran out. Some of them agreed to realise some projects together, some agreed to continue to meet after the first meeting (Ibid., pp.124). From this result, we can see that the

¹⁰⁷ These discussions usually consist of 3 people: 2 from conflicting parties and 1 professional mediator. The discussions were private, but the rooms, built by euro-pallets, were created and placed in public space with the aim to get public attention to the project. Most of the discussion program was also announced to the public in order to let them know that conflicting parties can talk to each other.

subjects are those interlocutors who originally assumed (predicted) that an effective discussion with their adversaries is not possible, and the antagonism given by them is the experience, against their prediction, that there can actually be a good discussion.

So what happens after this antagonism is given to them? In the next section, we discuss the elimination of antagonism.

4.5 Elimination of Antagonism

This section discusses the following question: What happens to an individual after experiencing antagonism? In Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, antagonism is assumed to require elimination. But why is it so? It is not specified in Laclau and Mouffe's model. In our individual-based model, I argue that antagonism requires elimination because organisms tend to minimise prediction errors (Friston, 2010).¹⁰⁸ In common words, we tend to keep our life in control. That is why antagonism is something we tend to eliminate.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ It is because our mind has the intention to minimise entropy (Van de Cruys & Wagemans, 2011b, pp.325; Hutchins, 2012, pp.321-322). Entropy here refers to information entropy, which means the average level of "information", "surprise" or "uncertainty" inherent in a variable's possible outcomes (Shannon, 1948). High unpredictability means high entropy, while low unpredictability means low entropy. Another concept for reference here is "surprisal", which Myron Tribus (1961) defined as the surprise of seeing a specific outcome (pp.64-65). The more likely the outcome is, the less surprising is and therefore lower surprisal value. As a result, minimising prediction error means minimising surprisal. According to cognitive scientist Edwin Hutchins (2012, pp.321-322), this information entropy is related to thermodynamic entropy. In thermodynamic entropy it is known that a system will naturally tend toward equilibrium and increased entropy. However, in a world where entropy increases, life and mind tends to keep themselves and their environment with low entropy. This is why organisms tend to minimise prediction errors.

¹⁰⁹ A follow up question can be that we do not always minimise entropy - if one follows strictly the entropy minimisation principle, the best way to live will be to stay in a dark room for good, as what cognitive scientists Froese & Ikegami (2013, pp.214) suggested: "catatonic withdrawal from the world, and autistic withdrawal from others". There is no point to seek antagonism actively, there is no point to see art. Is this a contradiction to our argument of minimising prediction errors here? Here is the answer: human beings have a tendency to destroy their own fixed points, actively inducing instabilities in ways that result in what cognitive scientists Friston, Breakspear, & Deco call "peripatetic or itinerant (wandering) dynamics" (Clark, 2012, pp.1). For example, a study showed that infants confined in a dark room will press buttons to make patterns of coloured spots of light appear, especially preferring sequences which have the most variety and unpredictability (Jones, Wilkinson & Braden, 1961). It means that subjects that inhabit a complex world would be driven to explore, even when no immediate gains or rewards are visible (Friston, 2010). As a result, it can be argued that seeing art is a way for us to be "surprised" so that we can gain a better understanding of the world.

Now we understand that we tend to eliminate antagonism. There are certainly many ways in which one can eliminate antagonism. For example, when the interviewee C2 of the Rebuild Foundation encountered the antagonism that he had no way to publish his books, he may try to submit his manuscript to big publishers or spend money to publish by himself. Which way to choose, I suggest, may depend on what is called the “Goldilock Principle” (Kidd, Piantadosi & Aslin, 2012)¹¹⁰, which means that individuals choose the most efficient proposal to eliminate¹¹¹ antagonism, so that least effort can be made to gain the most. For interviewee C2, probably sending his manuscript to publication house and publish by himself are both for him too complicated - the required energy is so high that it is better to bear the negative affect of this antagonism (writing without readership except for his friends and relatives), or eliminate it by other means (convince himself that he is not an author but merely an old man who write). So he just locks his writings in the drawer. This is his own decision. But another writer may also fly to New York and try to meet big publishers to publish her/his work. The “efficiency” here does not mean anything objective. Rather, it is still based on the individual’s own understanding of the world and her/his situation. What is the most efficient means depends on the individual.

The theorisation of eliminating antagonism is important because it is precisely where the possibility of change lies. When an antagonistic experience happens to an individual, the individual has the intention to eliminate this antagonism. As a result, the individual may make necessary changes which for her/him is considered as the most efficient. This change can be in many different forms, ranging from renewing one’s understanding of the world to

¹¹⁰ In an experiment, Kidd, Piantadosi & Aslin showed that 7~8 months old infants’ probability of looking away from a source of sensory signal is the highest when the complexity of the source was either very low (very predictable) or very high (very unpredictable). In other words, infants give their greatest amount of attention to what seems moderately complex - sensory signals which are enough complex to catch their interest, but not so much that they cannot be understood.

¹¹¹ Sometimes it can also mean not to eliminate antagonism, if the cost of eliminating it is too high and the reward is too little.

rendering the experience by different framings. For example, in the Fukuoka case of Wochenklausur, after the artist group successfully reach their goal of setting up the agency, the sceptics who thought that their plan was impossible in Japan may ask themselves if they should re-evaluate their understanding of Japanese culture, or saying to themselves that the group is successful only because they are “artists”. They may also simply ignore the success of Wochenklausur, if for them this is the most efficient way to face the antagonism. Different people have different ways to do it. That is why, when we try to investigate the social impact of an SEA project, it is essential to listen to the thoughts of individuals.

4.6 Applying “Elimination of Antagonism” to the Case Studies

The understanding of the elimination of antagonism allows us to continue our answer to the stated questions.

In Wan’s case, since her attempt to break her conventional art form can be considered as a change, it can be considered as a result of antagonism. Then, first of all, what we should ask is, what kind of experience generates this antagonism.

My argument is that it is the communication process, with Ng’s way of interpretation, which creates the antagonistic experience for Wan and thus changed Wan’s art form. Below I will elaborate.

I argue that, although Ng thinks that his way of selective interpretation is more effective and efficient, for Wan it caused another effect. Firstly, Wan lost information in the conversation. The first reason is that Ng said that he would judge whether the speaker is saying something “relevant” before interpreting them to Wan. However, since it is impossible that Ng and Wan’s judgment on the relevancy of the material can be exactly the same, Wan would lose information which she may think relevant in the conversation. This problem is even more

serious in the affective aspect. Since logical reason cannot fully function in this aspect, it is more difficult to share a concrete understanding of relevancy between Wan and Ng. The second reason is that, even for those details which Wan found them irrelevant at the beginning, she may rediscover its relevance by asking follow up questions. Ng's way of interpretation "killed" her opportunity to ask these questions. It is due to these reasons that Wan noticed the abnormal feeling when she asked follow up questions based on uncertain information - For her it is not possible to be sure that whether her questions are sensible.

Secondly, it becomes less important for Wan to be emotionally attached to the conversation. Due to Ng's strong presence in the conversation, he no longer was only a mediator but a "journalist" as he said, actively involved in the communication process. This active role increases his domination in the conversation. On the other hand, Wan's role became less important. That is why she mentioned that since there was an interpreter in between, she can do something else: it was no longer a must for her to listen when the local spoke. For some other people, they may feel uncomfortable in this kind of situation and may try hard to rejoin the conversation. However, Wan did not try to rejoin the conversation because, according to her, this type of unusual communication process is enjoyable and interesting.

I argue that both consequences lead to Wan's change in her art form. As mentioned in Chapter 3, she has been using moulding technique to create her work many times. This is considered as a way to express mainly her emotion. She "predicted" that she would do the same for the HKH project. However, in the HKH, because the communication process was more about factual details rather than affection, to reach her goal of presenting their stories, she has to use more details. Furthermore, since she was emotionally detached, she found it more difficult to present her thoughts by using ceramic objects. These problems made her encounter an experience which is different from her prediction. Antagonism occurred.

The antagonism of being unable to present her thoughts by using ceramic objects can theoretically be solved by various ways, such as altering her own understanding of the relationship between emotion and ceramic objects or lowering her intention to express her thoughts through her works. However, in the end she chose to change her experience, by taking a new action: i.e. she adjusted her show to become more narrative, through changing her art form.

At this point, we have developed an explanation showing how the communication process changes the art form of Wan.

We move to question 2 of the Rebuild Foundation. What happens after interviewee M and C2 encounter antagonism? We now understand that they tend to eliminate the antagonism, and the way to do it is largely dependent on efficiency. In this sense, for interviewee M, the presence of the Peach's at Currency Exchange cafe near his home became a very efficient means to solve his antagonism. It is for this reason that he became an employee there. After that, he further transferred to the Rebuild Foundation. By this way, he further encounters antagonisms related to the arts (since he did not know much about the arts, he cannot predict his experience in the Roundation) and eliminations of them (he becomes better predictor of the experience of his job duties), which is indicated by his statement that he has learnt a lot from his job. By this, his articulations around the arts expanded, and he began to consider himself as an artist. This identification further led to his changes in action, that he is thinking of applying the artist in residency program in the Rebuild Foundation. It is also because of this change that he thinks about returning to college.

Now we look at interviewee C2. As we have discussed, at first he thought that he was going to lock his manuscript in the drawer. But then he was introduced to the writers' group in his community, and because interviewee J transformed his manuscript into a book, he gained an

efficient way to clear the said antagonism - Just publish it. Since then, he continues to write and continues to get his books published. He even wanted to inspire others to write now.

What is special about the two cases is that they show that even an SEA project does not create antagonistic experience to its participants, it is still possible to create change. The Peach's at Currency Exchange cafe does not threaten interviewee M's identity or challenge his understanding of the world. The antagonism presents somewhere else (he needed a job), and the presence of the cafe enhances the efficiency of eliminating the antagonism in a specific way. In this way, the agent selects that way to eliminate antagonism. In interviewee C2's case, the writer's workshop does not threaten his identity and challenge his objectivities. Again, the antagonism existed in his experience that he wanted to publish his books but he could not. The workshop helps him to do so. This mechanism of creating change invites SEA practitioners to think not only to create antagonism to the audience, but also to solve existing antagonism by certain means.

From this case one can also see that the theorisation of efficiency of elimination of antagonism is especially instrumental. It leads us to realise that what the Rebuild Foundation gave the interviewee M and C2 is not necessarily something which they cannot acquire before. It is not that interview M had no opportunity to learn art so the Rebuild Foundation gave him this opportunity (he can go Hyde Park, the public libraries, the internet); nor that interviewee C2 had no opportunity to publish his manuscript so the Rebuild Foundation gave him the chance to do so (he can publish by himself or send his manuscript to publishers). However, the presence of the Rebuild Foundation makes it easier for interviewee M to launch an art related career and interviewee C2 to publish his book, and because this choice is made more efficient, the interviewees take this choice to eliminate their antagonism.

Now we look at question 3 of Wochenklausur. Since this case is not a result analysis, but an attempt to theoretically understand the strategy of Wochenklausur, there is no specific example of elimination of antagonism to be considered here. Nevertheless, what we can say is that the antagonism given to the people who think that it is impossible for the group to achieve their objective, may urge those people to change their mind in order to minimise the antagonism. To understand how people minimise this antagonism, further investigation to specific subjects through qualitative data collection is required. Nevertheless, at this point we may summarise the mechanism of Wochenklausur's strategy: For the people who think that changing certain status quo is impossible, Wochenklausur creates an antagonistic experience for them by reaching the group's objectives, so that the people have to eliminate the antagonism by taking action or changing their perception, such as rethinking if an alternative reality is in fact possible.

At this point, what remains to be answered for these questions is related to the community. In the question for the Rebuild Foundation and the question for Wochenklausur, we only explain how the project changes individuals, but we still have not explained the relationship between individual change and social change. What does "community" mean in this individual-level model? I will try to answer in the remaining parts of this chapter.

5. Community

The above theorisation provides a mechanism from artistic experience to personal change in SEA. However, how individual change can be connected to social change is still unclear. I will discuss this issue in this part. The first thing to do is to define the notion of community.

5.1 Defining the Community

In order to understand what community means, first we have to clarify what it means by “the others”. Here “the others” can be considered as real entities which oneself cognifies.¹¹² The concept of community, then, refers to a concept in an individual’s mind map, which articulates some other individuals to at least one element. I avoid using the concept of central signifier to signify the community here, because not all communities have a unique signifier which signifies it. In other words, not all communities have a distinctive “name”. Nevertheless there are still elements which conceptualise the community. These elements do not only articulate to the element which represents the members of the community, but also to other elements which describe the community. Since there can be no two individuals in the world sharing exactly the same experience, there can be no individual sharing exactly the same mind map. It means that the set of elements which relates to the community is different from person to person. As a result, different individuals conceive the community in different ways, even though they may be thinking about the same group of people. This is the imaginary nature of community: The community which an individual perceives is not a real entity. It is merely a group of people whom the individual imagines to have certain common features, while in fact they likely do not, nor do they agree with that individual that everyone in this group should have these common features.¹¹³

An example here is the neighbourhood of Greater Grand Crossing in the case study of the Rebuild Foundation. What is the target group that the project wants to serve? Sometimes Theaster Gates sees it as the black community, sometimes as the South Side of Chicago, and

¹¹² We have discussed in section 2 of this chapter (in footnote) that, following Kant, the self is divided to the inner one and the outer one. The inner one is unthinkable. What we can think of is the outer one, and the existence of the outer self is independent from other representations. But the others is a different category. They can be perceived by a subject’s mind, and should be considered as phenomenal real entities.

¹¹³ This idea recalls us with Rancière’s claim that the society is fictional (1991, pp.133).

sometimes as the Greater Grand Crossing (“About Rebuild”, n.d.; Huff, 2013; “In Conversation”, 2013). The interviewees I met seem to mix the 3 concepts too. For example, interviewee J lives in the North, but she is black, and she thinks that the project is serving a community which she belongs to. Among the participants there was a white woman from Hyde Park and she was fully welcomed to join the activities. In the chat group I participated in, people sometimes say that the Rebuild Foundation is serving the people nearby, on other occasions they say that the Foundation is serving the black people. It shows that for most of the people I have talked to, “black community”, “Greater Grand Crossing community” and the “South Side community” are interchangeable, although in reality, they are not the same: Greater Grand Crossing is only one of the neighbourhoods in the South Side, and there are still 3.8% non-black population in the neighbourhood (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2019).

What this example shows is that, firstly, there may not be an essential name for an imagined community. While the people I spoke to were talking about the same group of people, is it Greater Grand Crossing or the South Side or the black people? For many people seemingly it does not matter. The Rebuild Foundation just serves “the community”, which does not really require a strict naming and a definition to understand what it means. Secondly, the community is an imagined one, as the characteristics of this community as seen by different individuals may be different, and they do not necessarily reflect the reality (Not everyone who lives in the Greater Grand Crossing is black).

Yet, although the community each of them talks about is imaginary, it is also true that people are referring to approximately the same group of people. Why can the imaginaries that exist in different people’s minds be similar? I argue that it is because of language. I will explain this argument in the next section.

5.2 Language and Social Norms

How do individuals understand language? I have shown in section 4.1 of this chapter how human cognition may be understood by predictive processing. Humans perceive linguistic signals in a similar way. By using language, we can convert personal cognitive signals to public one and be launched into the world, so that it can re-enter our own cognitive system as well as that of other individuals (Clark, 2016, pp.326). After that, the experience of sensing these perceptibles is again a process of continuous prediction, sensing, comparison and refinement of prediction, of the occurrence of other perceptibles (Burke & Troscianko, 2017, pp.188). New ideas can thus also be generated by the same mechanism as illustrated in predictive processing.

Nevertheless, there are also differences between perceiving linguistic signals and perceiving other signals. One of the differences is that the former is designed to be systematic and shared among different individuals. Whether a prediction of a linguistic signal is correct or not depends on the language system and the mutual agreement of the language users. As a result, ideas generated through language are also more system dependent, and more likely to be shared among different individuals.

We may illustrate this by using the example of the community of Greater Grand Crossing above. We can see that, although each of the individuals has a different imagination of the community, the correct prediction of the signified of the community during the communication process depends on the imagination of other individuals. When an individual's prediction of the meaning of "Greater Grand Crossing" is different from the others (e.g. If I thought that Greater Grand Crossing means a mix of white and black people, which is although strictly speaking true, but not what many interviewees perceive it), the

prediction error generated in communication will lead to the refinement of this idea (e.g. I refine my understanding of Greater Grand Crossing that it actually refers to the black community). It is for this reason that language can serve as a device to converge the imagination of different individuals.¹¹⁴

In the above, I explain why different people's imagination of a community can be similar. Since the imagination of different people can be similar, although community only exists in individuals' imagination, it is still possible to think of a community as a group of real people, under the condition that this community is an approximation of all the imagined communities among individuals. By this way, the understanding of the community here can be seen as similar to the conventional understanding of the community as an entity. What should be reminded is that this community should not be considered as one with essential definition, and it is at best the approximation of the imagination of individuals, rather than a full representation of it.¹¹⁵

Certainly, the power of language is not limited to the imaginary of a community. It is also influential in shaping other ideas and concepts in human culture. Below I further explain from two perspectives on how language influences people's minds.

¹¹⁴ This convergence of imagination is effective, because language is powerful to the cognition of human beings. In the above example, people may understand the community of Greater Grand Crossing as equivalent to black community, even though they know that there are actually non-black people living in the area. The power of language is illustrated in two examples here. The first one is a series of interesting experiments done by Lupyan & Thompson-Schill (2012), who indicated that human beings react faster and more accurately to the word "cat" than the sound of a cat meowing. They concluded: "Thus, rather than simply accessing nonverbal concepts, language activates aspects of a conceptual representation in a particularly effective way." (pp.170) The second one is an experiment which is applied to a technique called "Continuous Flash Suppression (CFS)." (Lupyan & Ward, 2013) This experiment shows that when a changing stream of images is shown to one eye, and a stable image is presented to another, the latter tends to be suppressed in cognition. However, when a word of that stable image is heard by the subject before the trial begins, the suppression effect will be reduced. It suggests that language can create a "top-down boost to perception." As Clark argued, language "provides a finely tuned means of artificially manipulating the precision", and can "selectively enhance or mute the influence of any aspect of our own or another agent's world model" (2016, pp.333), this effect is so effective that it arguably dominates our cognition of the world.

¹¹⁵ In this sense, this theorisation acknowledges that individuals can have valid definitions of community which are different from that defined by social norms and the power.

Firstly, language functions in cultural artefacts and “designer environments” (Clark, 2016, pp.324), such as education, art and science. This kind of environment is created so that people can alter their predictability to various aspects of life so that these predictions can instruct the people to act in a “correct way” as defined by social norms¹¹⁶. In this sense, individual perception is conditioned, and individual thoughts become similar.

Secondly, language converges our understanding of the world through the process of collective remembering. As Harré observed, the act of remembering cannot be independent of social norms and culture, because it involves the question of correctness (2002, pp.233). You cannot sense something wrong but you can remember wrong that you sensed something. Although correctness can be proved by concrete evidence, in daily life, most of the time acts of remembering are not judged by evidence, but by a discursive process (Kreckel, 1981). By this way, the discursive process also shapes the mind map of individuals.

From above, we see how language may shape our mind. That is to say, if one can alter the language system (not the language system as an abstract entity, but how real people pragmatically understand the meanings of symbols), one has the potential to enact change in the community.

How can one alter the language system? It is out of the scope of this paper to have a full discussion of this topic. Briefly speaking, one may create an experience which is profound enough (highly weighted prediction error) and reaching enough people. Another way is to change the mind of people with high authority within a community. In a community, influential power is unevenly distributed. That is to say, the voice of some people can have a higher power of changing other people’s minds. For instance, researchers have shown that

¹¹⁶ Here social norms which are commonly discussed in sociology can be said as devices which reduce uncertainty for a group of people so that they can predict the world they live in more easily (Colombo, 2013).

collective remembering of a group is influenced by an unequal distribution of authority in the group (Kreckel, 1981). As a result, if the individual changed is one with high authority, there is a higher chance that more people will be influenced. We will elaborate this point in section 5.4 of this chapter.

5.3 Between Ideology and Materiality

In above we have discussed that the influential power of individuals is unevenly distributed in a community. This influential power is not only about the authority of the voice, but also about political power. I will explore this point In this section, through discussing the concept of Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) (2014) by the philosopher Louis Althusser.

Althusser has shown that ideology and materiality are interconnected. In *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (2014), he argued that in order to continue capitalism, it is vital to make people think in capitalistic terms. Althusser thus stressed the importance of the capitalist education system and institutions. “The ultimate condition of production is therefore the reproduction of the conditions of production.” (pp.232) He invented the term “ideological state apparatuses (ISA)” to describe a “certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialised institutions” (pp.243). These ISA include the religious, education, family and cultural systems. It is the ideology embedded in and presented by these ISA that alters the action and perception of agents, thus maintaining the social system.

The relevance of Althusser’s concept here is two folds. Firstly, it shows how changing the mind of individuals in a community can lead to materialistic and political change. Secondly, if we can change the ISA, there is a chance that we can change the people. Since the political power of individuals in ISA is unevenly distributed, changing the people who hold more

power in the ISA can have a higher chance of changing the whole group of people. We will see how this concept helps us to further investigate the possibility of social change in Wochenklausur's practice in the next section.

5.4 Applying “Community” to the Case Studies

In this part, I will discuss how the personal change discussed in the question of Rebuild Foundation and Wochenklausur's strategy can be linked to the broader notion of social change.

From the above theorisation, the first step to answer the question is to argue that there is no need to define strictly what exactly is the community. In the case of the Rebuild Foundation, we may generally see it as the Greater Grand Crossing.

The next step is to see if we can reasonably assume that the generalised mechanism of change from interviewee M and C2 is also applicable to this community. (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016) In other words, we check the “external validity” (Trochim, 2006) of the individual case studies.

We have argued that the Rebuild Foundation can create a possibility of change for the two interviewees because it increases the efficiency of “doing art”. In this sense, it is likely that this effect is not only applicable to the two individuals, but also to other people in the community, because before the Rebuild Foundation was established, the neighbourhood seriously lacked cultural facilities. For example, commenting on the Rebuild Foundation, interviewee C said the Foundation is valuable because they offer cultural events in the South Side, which normally only exist in the North side or Hyde Park. Similarly, interviewee P said that it is important to have the dance class on the South Side, because the organiser of the dance class has always had his class on the North side. These voices show that the Rebuild

Foundation is also lowering the “cost” of other members of the community to “do art”. As a result, we may say there is a high external validity for interviewee M and C2’s cases in the community. In this sense, the change of a person may reflect the possibility of broader change of the community.

From the above, we can also see the location specificity of the project: The Rebuild Foundation works because there is little cultural activities and venues in the South Side. If there were plenty of opportunities for interviewee C2 to get his work published, and if there were plenty of art venues around the area where interviewee M lives, the presence of the cafe and interviewee J would be less important. As interviewee A said, “It is a great initiative . . . I like the fact that it’s located in a neighbourhood that you wouldn’t necessarily find our institution.” It means that one cannot simply copy the Rebuild Foundation to any area and hope for the same result.

Then we look at Wochenklausur. I have shown how individual change can result in Wochenklausur’s strategy. However, is this change only limited to a few individuals, or influential to the society as a whole?

To answer this question, we may look at two criteria: 1) the influential power of the affected individual, and 2) the degree of generality of the antagonistic process of the individual.

The first point means that if the affected individual is influential, there is a higher chance that s/he can influence other people in society. Here influence can mean that the individual holds hard political power, so that s/he can create bigger change by using this power; or that the individual is ideologically influential to the mass. It is not possible to argue that Wochenklausur can always change influential people. Nevertheless, since in many cases the group engages with government policies, there is a chance that the alternative reality the group demonstrated can make an impact on influential people such as policymakers. For

instance, in the Vienna intervention described above, the group gave an antagonistic experience to a city councillor. In the Stockholm intervention about the voting system in 2002, political party chiefs and government officials such as the culture minister commented on the work. In the case of Ottensheim in 1997, a new political party, Pro-Ottensheim, was formed because of the project and is still functioning as of 2020. The party even managed to put a mayor in office (“Participatory Community Development”, n.d.). These examples show that Wochenklausur’s project has the possibility to reach influential people, so that personal change can become social change.

Nevertheless, there are also projects which are less uncertain whether they can provide an impact on influential people. For example, the Fukuoka case I described above has given an antagonistic experience to those people who were sceptical of the possibility of their project. It is not sure who exactly these people are. In this case, it is uncertain whether Wochenklausur’s strategy can create a broad social change.

But we may also look at this case from the second point, i.e. whether the individual can be seen as a universal case of the community. The rationale here resembles what I have already illustrated in dealing with the question of the Rebuild Foundation. The more the universality of the mechanism of change of the individual, the higher the possibility a social change occurs. To investigate universality, empirical analysis is necessary. For example, in the case of Rebuild Foundation, I have investigated the characteristics of the community (such as demographics and history), as well as experience of other members of the community. Then, in Wochenklausur’s case in Fukuoka, what we may ask is that, among the engaged community, is it a commonly shared norm that everything in Japan takes time? Since this dissertation only discusses the strategy of the group, this question is out of the scope.

However, it does point out a direction of investigation for us if we want to carry out empirical analysis on the outcome of Wochenklausur's projects.

Although I argue that it is possible for the Rebuild Foundation and Wochenklausur to create social change from personal change, they are after all possibilities. Individual interactions in society are extremely complicated and involve many contingencies. No one can be certain if a specific idea can be spread to the whole mass or only limited to a few people. Nevertheless, with reasonable arguments, we can make an estimation. In this section, my estimation is that it is possible for the Rebuild Foundation and Wochenklausur to create social change from personal change.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I tried to adapt Laclau and Mouffe's concept of antagonism to one which can analyse SEA from an individual-level. I first show that to use the concept of antagonism to study individual experience, it is not feasible to use the theorisation by Bishop and Laclau and Mouffe directly. I argue that a reworking of the concept is necessary. Then I discuss the necessary concepts which are necessary for this reworking, such as the subject and the mind map. After that, I redefine antagonism as the experience of prediction error of a single individual. I argue that an individual tends to eliminate antagonism and the way s/he chooses depends on efficiency from her/his perspective. Finally, in order to connect personal change to social change, I discuss the concept of community. I argue that language plays an important role here. It is what may change our mind collectively.

It is also through this theoretical ground, that I can answer the 3 questions I ask in each case study.

What is the relationship between Wan's change of art form and the communication process? I argue that one of the main reasons for this change is the way of interpretation of the interpreter. I argue that the way the interpreter works can have a large impact on the outcome of an SEA project. In this case, it has even changed the art form.

This analysis opens up a question rarely discussed in SEA which involves interpretation. The common thinking is that interpreters interpret: in Wan's case, to make the artist and the participants understand each other. Some other scholars such as Sommer (2004) and Connelly (2015) further argue that interpretation is not merely a coding/decoding process, but a productive one, of which new meanings can be generated from the difference between the two language systems. However, in Wan's case, it is found that in addition to the difference between the two language systems, the "form" of interpretation, i.e. the process of dealing with the difference of the two language systems, also plays an important role. In fact the role is so strong that it altered the form of Wan's convention.

This conclusion invites us to think: What is the best way for the interpreter to work in the project? Should the interpreter interpret everything, words-by-words, as much as possible? Or should the artist consider the interpreter as a creative partner, who is also responsible as a creator of the artwork?

However, it should be noted that, although I suggest that we should look at the interpreter, I have no intention to "teach" what one should do in any SEA project. This is not only because different SEA projects have different goals and context, but also because communication is not an essential goal for all SEA. If we hold on to our principle that individuals should be considered as subjects with a unique voice, they should be respected for their interpretation of the goals of the SEA project.

How is social change possible in the case of the Rebuild Foundation? My argument here is that the Rebuild Foundation can transform the community by allowing the people to eliminate certain antagonisms in daily life more easily in a certain way. What is special about this approach is that it is not necessary to give antagonistic experience to the individuals by the project to enact change.

The individual-level analysis helps to theorise this argument, but in common words it can also be found in the community itself as conventional wisdom. Interviewee C3 and G have said that the community needs more after school programs so that the kids would not run around. Gates has also expressed this strategy in an informal way. “. . . I can’t even get a bottle of sake in the grocery store. What about all the other weird mufuckers like me who just want a good drink? Man, I’m not going to Logan Square to do shit. I’m going to build a fucking watering hole.” (quoted by Backlund, 2011, para.21)

In Wochenklausur’s case, I conclude that Wochenklausur’s strategy is to make some people rethink things that they couldn’t have otherwise by creating antagonism through realising their objectives. The process of reaching an objective by Wochenklausur is similar to a painter painting her/his work. The reality that the goal of the project is successfully attained may be considered as the “painting”, and the experience of this reality is similar to conventional art viewing. However, it should also be noted that this dissertation only discusses its strategy, and no strategy always works. The analysis here has no intention to praise Wochenklausur for being a champion of social change. There are certainly problems in their practices. For example, Hawley wrote that the “Intervention to Improve the Conduct of Public Debate” was only repeated once, because the “locals lost interest” (2015, pp.94). Further research by employing methods like what I have applied to the Hong Kong House

and the Rebuild Foundation can help us to explore the reason behind the success and failure of a specific project.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

1. A Return to the Individual

I began my discussions in this dissertation with the performance “UFrogO” by the artist Frog King. I asked, can the performance change the community?

After going through the journey of this dissertation, it seems that, unfortunately, it would be a question impossible to answer. As I have pointed out, currently available SEA theories are inadequate to answer this question, but if one needs to employ an individual-level analysis to look at the result of an SEA, qualitative data is required. Yet, after the performance, I had not interviewed the ladies who participated in the work. It is likely that the ladies have already forgotten what they have experienced during the performance. As a result, the answer, from an individual-based perspective, may already be lost in history forever.

My contention is that it is an inevitable loss though - the thinking that one can analyse an SEA work merely by its form is problematic. As Simoniti argues, “if we take seriously the intent of these [SEA] art practices to make a difference to the political process, then the value of these works ought to be assessed pragmatically.” (2018, pp.80) Through the case studies of the Rebuild Foundation and the Hong Kong House, I show how a pragmatic approach is possible by focusing on individuals as subjects. The Wochenklausur case shows that it is possible to use an individual-based model to analyse, not only the practical result of a project, but also the strategy employed by the artists.

The above case studies are done by employing qualitative approaches such as ethnography and interview. Some people may think that using these methods to make arguments is already good enough, so there is no need to create a theoretical ground for further investigating the

qualitative data and explaining the relationship between individual experience and social change. I argue that it is not necessarily true.

The first reason is that a theoretical framework can help us to generalise the mechanism of change for some individuals, so that the conclusion reached from one individual can be used to compare situations of other individuals within the project, or even individuals in other SEA projects. Without the process of generalisation, interviews will become merely “reporting the participant’s opinions” like illustrative and anecdotes. Although it is also true that one should not reduce the individuals back to functions of other entities such as social class and discourse, generalisation and reduction are not necessarily the same. It is possible to generalise without falling into the trap of reduction.

The second reason is that ethnographic observations and questions researchers ask during interviews are always informed by theoretical knowledge. A theoretical ground for individual analysis can help researchers to think about what they should look for in the data collection process. During the research process, having a theoretical ground in mind, researchers can even discuss and refine with the interviewees her/his hypothesis, observation and preliminary conclusion, conducting a form of new ethnography (Saukko, 2003, pp.58). In this case, even though conclusions are seemingly suggested by the informant, the theoretical background is still essential to reach those conclusions. As a result, I argue that theoretical ground is important. Indeed, it is also what informs my investigations in the three case studies in this dissertation. From the 3 chapters of case studies, readers can often see how I explicitly tell the interviewees my thoughts, and receive comments (sometimes objections) from them.

In order to theoretically make sense of the individual experience, we must specify the philosophical meanings of fundamental terms such as the “subject”. I took this challenge by reworking the idea of antagonism from Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse analysis. I argue that,

in this way, we may return to an individual-based approach of analysing the relationship between social change and the arts. And in the end, we may reach what Mary Jane Jacob argues as “the question” in *SEA*: The question of “giving oneself to the experience and finding oneself in it.” (2016, pp.258)

2. Limitation

There are certainly limitations of the individual-level analysis proposed here.

The first one is that there are questions which individual-level analysis is difficult to answer.

As Crossick & Kaszynska wrote, issues such as “economic impact and urban generation need have no obvious connection to the [individual] experience” (2016, pp.21). individual-level analysis cannot address socio-economic issues such as the economic impact on a community by the Echigo Tsumari Art Triennale, or the relationship between the Rebuild Foundation and the art market. Also, it cannot answer questions such as whether the Rebuild Foundation is (good) art. The reason is that the definition of “art” and “good art” involves value judgment which varies from person to person. Even all the interviewees told me that they thought that the project is “good art”, it can only reflect their value judgment but not anything objective. This is also why I avoid making political and ethical judgments in this dissertation. To address these issues, one will need knowledge from other fields such as art history, economics and politics.

However, it does not mean that the individual-based thinking must be rejected when one employs these knowledge for other fields. Many theoretical tools are compatible with the individual-based model. For example, The two types of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000) may be understood in terms of mutual articulation of the elements which signify each other among individuals of a community and outside the community. Further

work to adapt these theoretical tools to be used at an individual-level is certainly needed, and of course there are also theories which cannot be adapted to individual-level use. What I want to highlight here is that individual-level analysis needs not to be eliminative.

The second limitation is that individual-level analysis often requires qualitative research, and qualitative research is always constrained by limitations of time and resources. For example, in the case of Hong Kong House and the Rebuild Foundation, it is not possible for me to interview all the people involved. For the former, the time of research is limited to the preparation period, which may be inadequate because it is possible that communication events occur outside these periods; for the latter, the time of research is limited to under two weeks in Winter, which is also not satisfactory. It is certainly better if I can return to these sites multiple times for a longer period of time. However, resources are a big constraint.

The third limitation is that the theoretical framework I propose is without doubt incomplete and requires much more investigations and refinements. Firstly, questions such as the relationship between emotion and antagonism (as I will elaborate in section 3.2 in this chapter) and the factors which affect the ability of language to influence cognition (Clark, 2016, pp.324) are still ill-understood in the field of cognitive science. Secondly, the concept of predictive processing is still facing challenges from other scholars, even in the field of cognitive philosophy itself (Colombo, Irvine & Stapleton, 2019). Thirdly, each of the concepts proposed in this dissertation like mind map and framing requires much more details than what I can offer here. Chapter 6 is inevitably sketchy, but I believe that it may serve as a good start for future research. I have no intention to claim that I have found the “truth” of anything. Rather than claiming for reflecting what is really happening, this explanatory model is a metaphorical one, which should be judged by “their ability to account for empirical ‘facts’, and by whether they can be mapped on to a level of reality different from that in

which those facts are to be observed” (Harré, 2002, pp.245). It means that the model suggested here should be revisited, refined or even overthrown when it fails to account for new empirical observations, or when a better model is proposed.

3. Future Possibility

Apart from limitations, I also suggest a few possibilities which can be explored in the future.

3.1 Implication to Practice

The theoretical model I suggest here is mainly for analysis. However, it also invites SEA practitioners to rethink how they may plan and create their projects, especially for those who have a specific goal of social change.

For example, this model invites us to think about what kind of antagonism should be considered. As I have shown in Chapter 6, antagonism plays a role whenever change is discussed. To aim for a change, what is the antagonism that should be created or should be eliminated?

Secondly, this model suggests that practitioners should identify the subject of which the change occurs and the subject who experiences the work. Sometimes these two subjects may be the same, just as the case of the Rebuild Foundation (interviewee C2 who participates in the writing workshop is also the one who changes), sometimes they can be different, as in the Fukuoka case by Wochenklausur (the participants may be considered as the students who took the learning activities created by the agency, but those whom Wochenklausur intends to change are the people who think that creating such an agency is impossible). Without clarifying these subjects, SEA projects may lose focus.

Finally, this theoretical model also invites us to think about what happens after the antagonism. As I have argued in Chapter 6, in this individual-based model, elimination of antagonism is realised by the way which the subject considers as most efficient. My observation is that artists who intend to create change or claim that a change is made possible often assume too easily that the audience would think critically once a provocation is given to them (Foster, 2003), while in reality, many people may just neglect the provocation and continue their lives.¹¹⁷ Should practitioners not only devise the artistic experience, but also lowers the “cost” for the audience to reflect on the experience? Artist talk and curatorial statements can be ways of doing it. How should these be done requires further investigations.

3.2 Emotion of Antagonism

The second future possibility of this research lies in the discussion of emotion. The theorisation of an individual-level antagonism may contribute to this long-debated discussion in the field of SEA. As I mentioned in section 1.1 of Chapter 6, Bishop claimed that antagonism is related to a feeling of discomfort. This claim is then discussed by several scholars. Although it seems that there is no proof that antagonism is related to discomfort, there is also no proof that antagonism has nothing to do with discomfort. So is it a feeling of discomfort or not? From the philosophical ground of individual-level analysis suggested in Chapter 6, we can obtain a preliminary answer to this question.

To answer, we may look at the discussion by Van de Cruys and Wagemans (2011a, 2011b). For them, experience of visual art involves a two stages process (2011a, pp.1046). The first is

¹¹⁷ Indeed, a fundamental social change by SEA is difficult. Firstly, An individual can have tens of years of life experience, but the time s/he engages an artwork may only be one hour or a few days. It is not easy to change one’s mind in this short encounter. Furthermore, even if an artist successfully gives a “strong” antagonism to a subject, there can well be stronger antagonism given by other sources tomorrow. After all, life goes on and new events happen everyday. Art can lead to social change but a great deal of things can lead to social change as well. To transform the society through art is possible, but definitely not easy.

that the artwork generates prediction error through incongruities of forms and content in the viewers' mind.¹¹⁸ They argue that this prediction error gives a negative emotion to the viewer, as prediction error implies unfavourable uncertainty of our world (2011b, pp.330). However, when this prediction error is overcome through adjusting our mind, the viewer reaches the second stage, which gives her/him a reward effect which generates positive emotion.¹¹⁹ The generated emotion is positive because it is a cognition achievement in the sense that one has a better understanding of our world (2011a, pp.1037).¹²⁰ This second stage which generates positive affect may or may not happen with the same artwork (Ibid., pp.1050). It may even happen after many years of the negative experience. However, Van de Cruys & Wagemans argue that, without this positive emotion, human beings would have no incentive to explore art (2011b, pp.338). To conclude, from this perspective, antagonism does generate negative emotion, but a positive reward may come later.

This answer is however a preliminary one. It is because, as Van de Cruys and Wagemans stated in their conclusion (2011a, pp.1056-1058), the account of the relationship between prediction error and emotion is not yet satisfactory. The generation of affection in this process is extremely complicated. For instance, it is not a single flow process (Barrett & Bar, 2009, pp.1325). That is to say, it is not only that we experience an event so that we feel

¹¹⁸A similar account may also be given to other art forms, such as music (e.g. Van de Cruys & Wagemans, 2011a, pp.1042)

¹¹⁹ Similarly, many researchers such as Jakesch, Leder & Forster (2013) also claimed that ambiguity in artworks may be pleasurable (pp.1). Biologically, Van de Cruys & Wagemans claimed that it is related to various effects in our body such as increased dopamine peaks. However, this view is countered by Kesner (2014, pp.7). She argues that the above account of reward and pleasure is too simple, and there is already much evidence countering the view that dopamine mediates pleasure. Further exploration is still needed in this part.

¹²⁰ Furthermore, Van de Cruys and Wagemans speculate that the intensity of positive affection is related to the difficulty of overcoming the predictive errors. That is to say, more effort paid, more pleasure. This speculation took reference from an experiment by psychologists Johnson and Gallagher (2010). In this experiment, mice are first trained to press two different levers for a reward (food) of different taste. Then they increase the effort required to press one of the levers. After that, they leave the mice free to choose the reward without the levers. What they discover is that the mice have a clear preference to the reward which was the hardest to get. As a result, they concluded that the bigger the effort, the more the pleasure.

uncomfortable or pleasurable, but the uncomfortable or pleasurable feeling also influences our ways of seeing. Another aspect which Van de Cruys and Wagemans do not discuss (as they admitted explicitly) is the “intrinsic or associative affective value of the content” (2011a, pp.1040). In terms of visual art this value includes aspects such as admiration of craftsmanship and nostalgic memories. In the context of SEA, this value includes the individual’s relationship with other people (e.g. feeling of being accepted by a group, feeling of being understood by another person, feeling of being empowered).¹²¹

To conclude: Although a preliminary answer can be obtained from this individual-level model, there is still a long way to go before we figure out exactly what it really means by “discomfort of antagonism” of which Bishop argues.¹²² This can be a possibility in future research.

3.3 Protest Art Studies

The individual-based approach I suggest here is only for SEA analysis. However, I argue that it is also relevant to other fields of study. One example is protest art studies. Impact of protest art on the audience is about the cognitive and psychological status of individuals (Falasca-Zamponi, 2000, pp.25). There are claims which argue that protest art can enact change on the political views and affects of the people, such as raising their political consciousness (Eder, Staggenborg & Sudderth, 1995), foster “useful emotions” (Adams,

¹²¹ It is for this reason that I argue, many hypotheses of art in predictive processing, especially those related to art history and creation of artists, requires further exploration.

Given the fact that interpretation of art is heavily contextualized, one may even argue that a predictive processing account of seeing by using the example of art, without considering the context, is less convincing than an account of seeing a non-art object. After all, a Picasso is not only a Picasso but also a Cubism painting which is well-known, and is what one have learnt in school, and is something that can reflect your cultural capital, but a tomato is just a tomato. See Seth (2019) for his discussion of seeing a tomato (pp.395) and seeing a Picasso (pp.396)

¹²² Indeed, how one can accommodate emotions is one of the most “prescient challenge to the formal description of the brain as inference machines” (Friston, 2013, pp.1331)

2002), remove negative emotions (Morris, 1984, pp.56), and create “psychological warfare” against the dominant culture (Chaffee, 1993, pp.60). However, how exactly these effects are created in the mind of an individual is rarely discussed. What does it really mean by “psychological warfare”? How may the “political consciousness” be raised? What are the antagonisms which should be concerned? An individual-level analysis may shed light on these questions.

I am from Hong Kong. Since June 2019, the anti-extradition bill movement has generated plenty of propagandistic and protest art. Creative means are employed by the protesters. These include myriad forms such as posters, music, literature, theatre, and even video games. To acknowledge the creativity of the Hong Kong protesters, the Ars Electronica Center in Austria has given them (us) the Prix Ars Electronica Golden Nica: Digital Community (“The Winners of 2020”, n.d.). Individual-level analysis can help us to understand how these practices may create impact on the society.

I have been avoiding taking a political stance in this dissertation. It is not because I try to be objective. Taking an individual approach naturally implies the stance that there can be no objective argument in SEA. I try to avoid questions like “how can SEA contribute to democracy” or “how can SEA promote pluralism” because I believe that SEA, just like propaganda (Taylor, 2003), can do “good” things and “bad” things. If a theoretical argument can only argue how SEA do “good” things then I believe it is not a “good” theory. Therefore I avoid making value judgments as assumptions. However, if I am allowed to declare my political stance, I would like to claim that I am totally against authoritarian rule. I would be most happy if my dissertation can be of use to fight for freedom and democracy, especially in Hong Kong.

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