



IF I RULED THE WORLD

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contents

- .5 CALLING ALL IMAGINATIONS: LETTER FROM THE EDITOR (3)
by kimi hanauer
- .75 IF I RULED THE WORLD (4-5)
by nas, featured on the album "it was written," released in 1996
1. YOU COME FROM THE STARS, BLACK PEOPLE (6-19)
by jared brown + khadija nia adell
2. COOPERATION IS A FACT OF LIFE (20-25)
a conversation with person ablach
3. LAVENDER BLUE SKIES (26-33)
by amy reid + greydolf
4. LEARNING YOURSELF TO YOURSELF (34-39)
a conversation with bonnie jones
5. LIFE EXPERIENCES: WHAT HAPPENS IN OUR WORLD? (40-67)
by mang thang, cing kim, lun, dimmy, huai and other anonymous baltimore city community college refugee youth project students + the press press team
6. NUMBER ONE IS EMPATHY! (68-71)
a conversation with kursten pickup and bomin jeon
7. AUTOMATION, [APPLICATION]; (72-85)
by besan khamis + rahul shinde
8. FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT TO DREAM (86-89)
a conversation with bryanna jenkins
9. THE REAL ARTISTS OF GET YOUR LIFE! PRODUCTIONS (90-97)
by anais, d'asia, daja, dalin, derrick, jaida, karisma, la'daya, lee, louquaina, luz, maggie, malanda, nia and xavier
10. THERE'S NO NO! ONLY YES! (98-101)
a conversation with loring cornish
- 10.5 IF WE SAY THESE THINGS GO TOGETHER, AND THEY ARE GOING TOGETHER, THEN THEY MUST GO TOGETHER! (102-105)
an afterword by kate khatib
- 10.75 CREDITS (106-107)

CALLING ALL IMAGINATIONS

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Last summer in Baltimore, just a few months following the Baltimore Uprising, I started reaching out to possible collaborators for a project that has now become If I Ruled The World. At that time, it felt like the most important thing I could do was to be present with other people who cohabitatem the city, to be as aware as possible of the people around me and the vastly different experiences of this city that we all have. I'm not sure that I was able to discreetly identify this at the time; I didn't know exactly why I was starting this project, but somehow this collection of works and conversations came out of an attempt to be fully present. Starting at that moment, and over the past couple months in Baltimore, for me, to be fully present has meant having conversations, or listening in on conversations, that investigate where freedom and joy exist in Baltimore and where freedom and joy could, but does not yet, exist in Baltimore.

The prompt for this project, taken from Nas' song "If I Ruled The World" (It Was Written, 1996) featuring Lauryn Hill, is a contradiction itself; on one hand, it asserts that everyone has the right to take up space and envision the world as they want it, but on the other, it claims an old-school, hierarchical way of structuring life. However outdated this question might be, it provoked a series of collaborative, artistic responses and conversations by Baltimore-based creatives and activists, who attempted to find a contemporary way of asking the question itself. Artistic collaborators who stepped into this project did not only contribute content but also defined the direction of the entire project and identified new collaborators to pull in. Thus, this collection of unique voices, works and conversations grew organically over the past few months.

When starting this project, my hope was that the prompt would inspire collaborators to imagine their most positive visions of the world, and through that positivity, would be able to thoughtfully and critically investigate the nuances within the struggle for social equity in our city. However, this collection of works evolved to approach art and activism much more broadly, touching on subjects such as health, education, language, public space and more. These themes that emerged in reaction to the on-going threads I set up, questions such as, *What makes you feel free? What is special to you about Baltimore? What do you say 100% yes to?* ground this investigation in the idea that activism can take many different forms, and is, at its root, something that is strongly tied to the ways we live our lives every single day. Instead of being a call for imagination, this project evolved to investigate and exemplify the concrete actions that can grow out of the audacity and the courage that it takes to imagine the world as you want it to be.

This is a call for more than imagination. **What if you ruled the world?**

Kimi Hanauer
Press Press

AN EXCERPT FROM

IF I RULED THE WORLD

BY NAS, FEATURING LAURYN HILL

*Life..... I wonder....
Will it take me under.... I don't know*

*Imagine smoking weed in the streets without cops harassing
Imagine going to court with no trial
Lifestyle cruising blue behind my waters
No welfare supporters more conscious of the way we raise our daughters
Days are shorter, nights are colder
Feeling like life is over, these snakes strike like a cobra
The world's hot my son got knocked evidently
It's elementary, they want us all gone eventually
Trooping out of state for a plate knowledge
of coke was cooked without the garbage we'd all have the top dollars
Imagine everybody flashing, fashion
Designer clothes, lacing your click up with diamond vogues
Your people holding dough, no parole
No rubbers, go in raw imagine law with no undercovers
Just some thoughts for the mind
I take a glimpse into time
watch the blimp read "The World Is Mine"*

*If I ruled the world
Imagine that
I'd free all my sons, I love em love em baby
Black diamonds and pearls
Could it be, if you could
be mine, we'd both shine
If I ruled the world
Still living for today, in
these last days and times*

*The way to be, paradise like relaxing black, latino and anglo-saxon
Armani exchange the reins
Cash, Lost Tribe of Shabazz, free at last
Brand new whips to crash then we laugh in the iller path
The Villa house is for the crew, how we do
Trees for breakfast, dime sexes and Benz stretches
So many years of depression make me vision
The better living, type of place to raise kids in
Open they eyes to the lies history's told foul
But I'm as wise as the old owl, plus the Gold Child
Seeing things like I was controlling, click rolling
Tricking six digits on kicks and still holding
Trips to Paris, I civilized every savage
Gimme one shot I turn trife life to lavish
Political prisoner set free, stress free
No work release purple M3's and jet skis
Feel the wind breeze in West Indies
I make Coretta Scott-King mayor the cities and reverse themes to Willies
It sounds foul but every girl I meet to go downtown
I'd open every cell in Attica send em to Africa*

**YOU
COME
FROM
THE
STARS,
BLACK
PEOPLE.**

**MOVE AROUND.
DO WHAT YOU
NEED TO DO.
LITERALLY.
FLOAT.
OUT.
HERE.**



**jared brown
+ khadija nia adell**



(Untitled, Khadija Nia Adell, 2016)

INITIAL INTEGRATION RESPONSES

1 If bodies of water are used as metaphors for life, then can we cleverly deconstruct the notion of ‘floating’ as opposed to being ‘taken under’? **2 Is socialism a distraction until we co-opt capitalism for our own personal benefit?** **3** How much longer can we imagine the future before we start addressing that the future is now and we are in it? **4 In 2016, is it future to continue to think about ruling the world even with nuance if that means as ruler you’d be responsible for designing moral conduct?** **5** How can we redesign the question *if I ruled the world* so that it still distributes hope and power to the one who is asked? **6 How do we construct images of rulership?** **7** As people of

color, can we ever have an association with rulership that isn’t tainted by the reminder of what the white body has done to African, Native and Indigenous people? **8 How do we enforce “order” in an ideal world without becoming oppressive?** **9** When dealing with populations beyond numerable imagination, is it possible to find something that caters to everyone? Or is it more about providing equity and equality through resources so that everyone is able to make positive decisions for themselves? **10 The Manifest Destiny attitude behind rulership and ownership is a White-centric ideal that dragged the rest of the world into its messy fantasy. How does one come to the feeling and develop the drive to rule what was not born theirs?**

Khadija Nia Adell: I've heard the song, like, I know it, but I'm reading the lyrics now. It's interesting the way that lyrics can be timeless, when they're talking about real issues. They are still so relevant.

Jared Brown: I wouldn't say I'm a diehard Nas fan, but I appreciate a few albums of his, just as lyrical manifestos because he just sort of diagnosis what's going on in his surroundings in a way that's very clever but also to the point. I think he has a lot of clarity; he's giving it a lot of thought, even just talking about life, being taken under by life, wondering about that and what his outcome will be. Its nothing new what this song is doing, talking about life as a fluid body of water... What does it mean to really be floating out here? What does it really mean to be taken under? That's what it takes me to right away because he just starts it off with, "Life , I wonder..." but Nas, like any man, or anybody--it's so contrived to think about if you ruled the world.

There's something really powerful about redistributing that privilege so everyone feels like they have the right to think about the world in that way, but how much is it really doing for people if just everyone is thinking they need to take ownership and moralize codes for everyone else to live by? What is it really doing in 2016 for everyone to think that way? I don't know if I really need to rule the world or if everyone needs to follow my ideologies. There's still something super phallic about that in my mind. What do you think?

KA: I'm still holding on to the lyrics here. I was picking out different lyrics that he says and where he's dropping wisdom that people may not know unless they really know a lot, or not even a lot, just beyond what we're taught in Western education about Black history, and how it does not start with slavery. Referring to the history of world trade and travel that was occurring between Africa, Asia, and the Middle East before Europeans and the West in general got involved, he says this line, "Trips to Paris, I civilized every savage." To me, I started to think about how that relates to Black and Brown bodies, Africans and Middle Eastern people, going over to Europe and civilizing them. The modern Black man (and woman), in some ways represents the image and the advances of the historical Black body, and what that means in the societal history of places like Spain and Italy. Many places in Europe have gotten their foundation of modernity, which became known as "Western" culture from the technological advances of cultural groups like the Moors and the Ottomans, etc.

You know, you can say what you want about it, but just

like the feeling of being taken under... I can't swim and I always have the fear of drowning, and I think that's how we feel when certain things in our life don't go however we thought we planned them. That feeling of being overwhelmed by emotion, it does feel like you're drowning... I remember I had a panic attack about a month ago, you know, just feeling overwhelmed with everything that was happening in the news and in the world... And that feeling of drowning is so real.

MAYBE BEING TAKEN UNDER BY LIFE IS LIKE A WAY OF BEING DOMESTICATED BY LIFE ITSELF AND ITS CONDITIONS?

JB: In that way, I think of the Black body being civilized by a Eurocentric system, couldn't that be almost synonymous with--because in a way being civilized is like being domesticated, I mean, I don't like comparing ourselves to animals, but this idea of really domesticating a species and what it does to the genes and the psychology of that animal and how then that animal's evolution kind of changes? I think applying that language of life as a body of water and being taken under vs. floating--maybe being taken under by life is like a way of being domesticated by life itself and its conditions? Maybe and if you allow yourself to be taken under that's when you stop dreaming or stop kind of reaching for more or thinking you deserve more? I'm always looking up. I'm always looking at the sky and clouds and wondering what it would be like to just leave this world. That's so much of my practice; figuring out how to take me and mines out of this world safely. To me, that feels like floating, like not being allowed to be taken under. But, there's something weird in the Nas song that does seem like he's negotiating respectability politics and how they exist in his lifestyle, or maybe that's the music industry, but, you know, maybe everyone doesn't need to wear designer clothes ...

KA: That's not everyone's idea of rulership either. Those

are things that we associate with it now.

JB: The huge elephant in the room is, I don't know if sending Black Americans to Africa is gonna rectify that much trauma. Maybe I'm carrying by saying that, I just don't know if... I've just been having intense experiences with my Blackness being calibrated by African bodies and it's always something like, well "You're not African boo boo," "You're not what we are." I've had so many conversations that are an "us and them" conversation. It's super weird. So, I don't know if me going to Africa will make me feel... I obviously want to go--I can't speak about the whole continent generally but--I think, that was the whole aesthetic of that time, you know Belly at the end, it's like him and T-Boz and they move their kids to Africa and she ditched her blond bob for a head wrap...

KA: I think that's true. You can't deny that, yes, we are of the African Diaspora, but that doesn't mean we understand life in Africa. Like as all Black people, we do all share that. But still, you can't presume that we know life there and that we can assimilate to culture so eas-

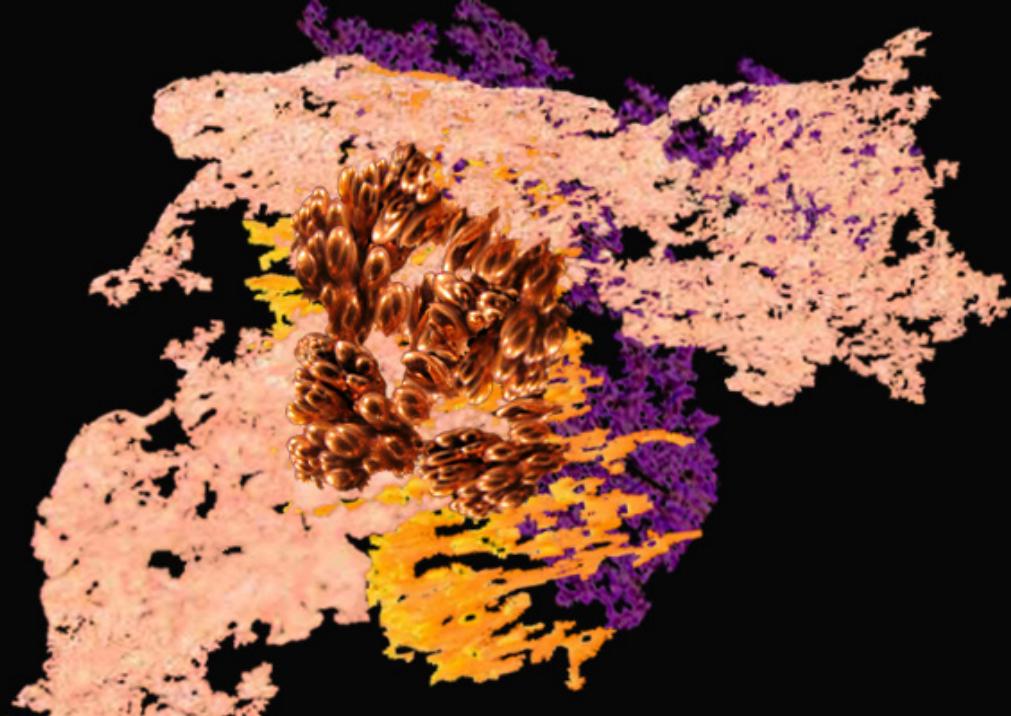
on-going
references
+ influences

ANTI by Rihanna



2
Strolling Series by Cecile Emeka





ily there, because we still are American in culture in some ways, and those are very different. Even the cultures within the African countries are very different, but I agree with that--I do think we should travel, but it's complicated, like everything.

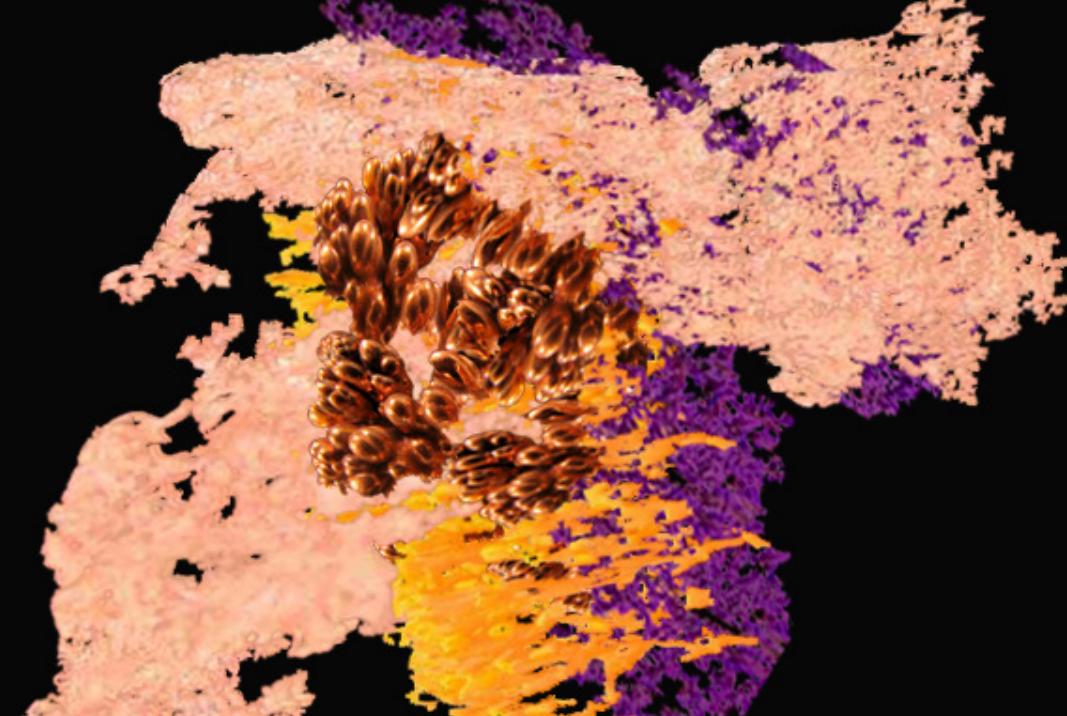
JB: It would be really amazing if Black kids or folks in America could navigate this world as if it all belonged to them, but I still think it's this kind of weird capitalistic idea to sell Black people on, of like, "You're not free until you go to Africa," I think that's bullshit. What would it really be like if it was like, "Yo, you come from the stars Black people. This is your planet. Move around. Do what you need to do. Literally float out here." Maybe that's me projecting my nomadic ideas on everyone. Maybe that's my simple thing. I mean, if I ruled the world, we'd all just be nomadic and have our tribes of people, specified to who can do what and how you guys work as a unit, not super specific, or for my tribe at least, for gender and color per say. It'd be more about how we can communicate with each other and who's doing what. Like "Boo boo, you can build a house? Cool. Boo boo, you can kill the food? That's what's up." I don't know what I'd do in the tribe. I'd probably be the one to keep the morale up, be like "Yo yo, let's keep walking," I'd just be talking

out my ass. I'd play some good Chicago house music to keep the spirits out, "Let's keep moving." We gotta keep trekking... We build our little temporary houses or whatever we gotta do. It's just so exhausting to think about if I was the king, it feels like...

RULING ANYTHING IS ABOUT TAKING FULL CONTROL AND RESPONSIBILITY OVER THE NOWNESS!

KA: It's an act. It's putting on a persona of what you think a king would be in the most ego sense...

JB: And it negates the idea that like, the future is now. Why do I have to wait 20 more years to start thinking about if I ruled the world? It's 2016, the future is occur-



ring right fucking now. Everything we do, we can kind do with some sort of agency to inform tomorrow. It's not about waiting around for people to solve problems. Ruling anything is about taking full control and responsibility over the nowness! Whatever we feel needs to manifest, we have to do it now. We're seeing climate change is affecting us more than ever right now. We have to do it now. I can't really be distracted with ideas around moralizing a bunch of people. I just want to think about where we at right now. Right now, all I can think about is the planet. Girl, my birthday is in December and I was wearing a light jacket. It was a springtime birthday. It's freaking me out.

KA: Yeah it's messed up, a lot of things are off. I was thinking about what you said about ruling the world. There's this fruitless aspect of it, or it can be, because always hope within everything can be positive--but hope in what, for what specifically? I remember having a conversation in thesis talking about the idea of utopia and I realized I don't know if I even believe in that idea, or if I think it's a positive idea to uphold, because it's like you're chasing something that is forever moving... It can be good but it can also be bad when that target is constantly changing. It's never going to be what you

3

Formation by Beyoncé



4

Hidden Colors: The Religion of White Supremacy



strive for it to be. There's always going to be parts that you can't anticipate. I remember earlier, when we asked the question, if you ruled the world how would you still instill order? How would you still make decisions and judgments about penalties and how do you make people accountable for actions? All of those things are so negotiable and so up in the air but still exist in utopia. You can't get rid of them just because it's one person's idea of the world.

JB: It just becomes this thing of like, you don't fit into the vision or the mood board so you just get obliterated all together, and that's still really oppressive. So even if it's not like this crazy sci-fi thing, like everyone's wearing taupe and if you don't listen you gonna get like, lasered to death (totally Yeezy season 2). I would want less Yeezy Season 2 and more Jean Paul Gaultier in the Fifth Element. But that's just me. I want to give some orange hair.

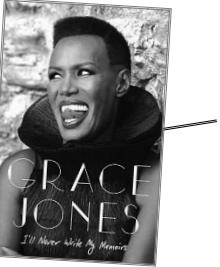
(UTOPIA) IS NEVER GOING TO BE WHAT YOU STRIVE FOR IT TO BE. THERE'S ALWAYS GOING TO BE PARTS THAT YOU CAN'T ANTICIPATE.

For me, what I can't help think about is like, if you and me got to A&R a newer version of this song--we are curating the experience of the song--if you and I got to reprompt this If I Ruled The World, then who would we get to be on the track and would it still be called If I Ruled The World? How would we frame it? Because you can't just get some 2016 artist and just be like "if I ruled the world," that's just so reductive. Who would we get and what would they be called?

KA: I guess you have to think, there are so many levels to music that people listen to. Would they be mainstream artists that you're considering or just people that you know of that you love? Like would Rihanna be

5

I'll Never Write My Memoirs by Grace Jones



6

Black Rage by Lauryn Hill



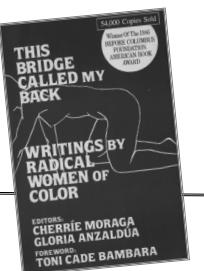
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The Last Angel of History by John Akomfrah



8

This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color edited by Cherrie Moraga & Gloria Anzaldua



on the track?

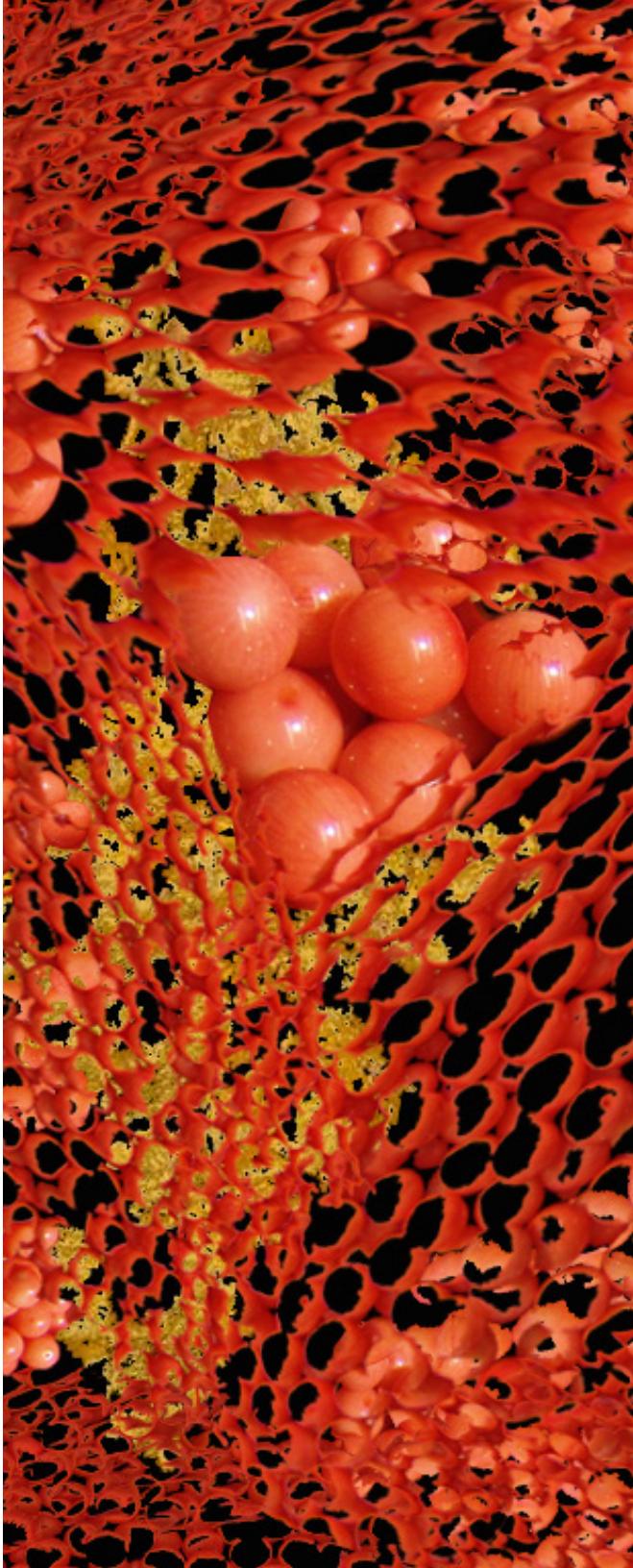
JB: Did you just say would Bono be on it?? Oh my god. Bono would definitely not be on it. Oh my god. Hell no. Nor would Jidenna. No Bono. No Jidenna. No way. Hell no.

KA: Have you seen those memes comparing him to The Game?

JB: I remember The Game was him for Halloween and looked so much better as Jidenna than Jidenna himself! I love The Game for so many reasons right now. Just go on his instagram, girl. I'm not gonna say anything else. Just go on The Game's instagram and turn all the way up. Seriously. You know, I feel like the song title would be like, If I Was Actually In The Present...What Would I Do?? I don't know if would have to be words. It wouldn't have to be this didactic like, this is what we have to do... I would definitely want Erykah Badu to be scatting or something on there, a little bit of vocal. And maybe there could be a bunch of different chapters of this song we're talking about. It doesn't have to be like a three-minute experience. It could be like part one, part two, part five hundred....

KA: It would be a 10 minute long song. I would want to hear Jazmine Sullivan's voice on there...I really like her voice.

JB: I'm here for Miss Sullivan for sure. I feel like what's so awkward about If I Ruled The World too, is that the song and the idea, it's still very like, oh, "I wanna be here for the people, woo woo woo." But it just seems like socialism is spearheading the conversation until capitalism is cleverly co-opted for whoever is benefiting in that discussion and at that moment. I mean it's like yeah Nas, I'm sure you care about the people, yeah Lauryn Hill I'm sure you care about the people, but let's talk about how the music industry is still just an industry that's about that coin, the numbers, the show... What does it mean if you're still, at the end of the day, walking back to Tribeca, to your loft, with the checks that you're getting? I mean, I don't know how you get your coin, but the huge elephant in the political room is why is it that socialism is just a distracting conversation until the girls figure out how to get that Capital Coin? Why? What's the issue? What's the t? Why aren't people really going there? It's such a trending topic right now. Or maybe it always has been, "to be here for the people." When you're so far removed from the ground level and from the people who really internalize your words... I don't feel like I can contact Lauryn Hill if I really need to



dream and float and reach someone who understands me spiritually. I would have to pay. I would have to pay to even have a minute of her time and that would probably be all my savings.

WHY IS IT THAT SOCIALISM IS JUST A DISTRACTING CONVERSATION UNTIL THE GIRLS FIGURE OUT HOW TO GET THAT CAPITAL COIN?

KA: I feel like with a lot of celebrities, especially when it comes to social issues and the entire conversation about Black celebrities being there for black communities, and being voices of change and inspiration in times of need and even in "non times of need," although when those are, really I'm not sure, that conversation always comes up about how are you using your funds to help the community and why so many of them feel trapped within the identity of celebrity and no longer know how to reach out or use their money as a source to educate themselves even further on what needs to be done?

JB: I was thinking about this conversation my family was having about Bill Cosby being a man that can be revered for being a humanitarian, which is like, yikes! You know, whatever that means, considering... But you know, being that Black figure that's like, "Black men, pull your pants up, Black men, be better," but you [Cosby] were driving around Philly in a limo. What would it have been like for you to have been accessible to the people you were trying to communicate with in the first damn place? Having commencement speeches, getting paid by Harvard... This is what I'm talking about. Everyone is "here for the people" but what's the shade, though--the people that you were talking at, not to (!), didn't really have access to you like that. And when they did, you were driving around in a limo! You weren't getting out the limo. What does it mean to really step out of the celebrity and really be present with who you are

speaking to?

KA: And that's like, you're a hypocrite and all this shit anyways.

JB: You know what, while we're talking about violent men... On some level this song doesn't really sit right with me anymore, when you find out that stuff about Nas treating his baby moms i.e. Kelis--I live for Kelis--I'm sorry, I don't know if those things are real but who needs to lie about stuff like that? I really hope those things aren't true. But someone talking about how Black people need to be better, but then you're being violent to the mother of your child? That's kind of freaky to me. I'm tired of celebrating that kind of celebrity right now. You're such a good person because you're doing this or this, but behind closed doors your treating people like shit? Humans are humans, I get it, but that representational self-congratulatory exceptional human being I'm just disillusioned by right now...

KA: I feel like that idea is just always being constantly broken every time you turn on media, every time something happens. We're constantly hearing about how another celebrity or something being brought up from the past about someone who is revered in society that, is challenging the image of who they are and who people want to believe that they are. I think that's such a main idea for people, not being able to separate their emotional attachment from people who play characters on television and who those people really are. Or just people who have musical personas--you know, being out on stage performing is a different form of self than just being at home with your spouse. And the way that you handle that intimate relationship, all of that, there's so many different levels to people's lives so to even believe for one second that the celebrity person that you see is that person 24/7 is ridiculous. Being attached to it when they die is kind of ridiculous to me too. I know people have emotional relationships with celebrities but I've never been like emotionally shattered when some celebrity has died cause I don't know them...

JB: Well that's where your wisdom comes from because I am one that, I always... I don't know where it comes from... My first relationship to someone on that caliber, like many others, is Michael Jackson. As a kid Michael Jackson was so magical to me on every level. You know what's so interesting, he has his sentimental moments and "We are the world" kind of moments, but him just being--I can't remember how I was processing race, but I think on some level because I listened to so many eras of his music I knew he was a Black person--but,

none the less, the way that he took up space in pop culture, it informed me that I could also take up the same amount of space if I wanna do that. I can totally do that, if Michael Jackson can do that. Maybe it's a midwestern thing, Gary, Indiana is not too far from Chicago, and I've driven through it plenty of times. It's a literal shit hole. Meaning it smells, it's factory, it's very abandoned, and the morale is low, but for his entire family to stay afloat and stay with their eye on some sort of prize, it's always inspiring on some sort of level. All the scandals of him being a pedophile, it really did disrupt his legacy for me because that was also me learning for the first time what those words even meant. I was disturbed for a while, I was so heartbroken, or I think I just have a really specific relationship to pop culture. I do love it, but I wasn't seeing the performativity in the way that I see it now. But I am guilty, I be getting upset sometimes when I find out stuff about people, I be like, really?

KA: I do too. I mean, I'm talking about extreme fandom, like really breaking down? Just being so romanticized and extreme. But, I mean, when Amy Winehouse died, I was sad. I had a little moment in my room, I lit a candle and I played her album.

JB: Yeah, I feel like it's one of those conversations that has to be going back to the performative... Sometimes existing and just living out how you wanna live is a prompt enough for folks and you don't have to do the didactic work, like serving them. I feel like Michael Jackson, just by being him and being so fantastic, in my opinion, so perfect--he danced well, he was stylish, and his videos were amazing... That's probably my relationship to moving image because of Michael Jackson on some level, but just being great, it made me think about what being great means for myself and defining that for myself. So regardless of these allegations of him being a pedophile, because in no way am I trying to defend if that's real or not real, I have no idea, you know, but like his presence being enough to challenge or make me think about what's great for me is so much more of a role that a real king--I hate using that language--but that royalty can really do, as opposed to just being like, well when I die, and you have the opportunity to rule, what are you gonna do? That's very Beyoncé on some level. I'm the queen, none of you guys are shit, and that's a very specific thing too. But I feel like maybe being great out here is just being who you are and prompting everyone else to do that too? Ruling your own world and coexisting together? Or maybe that's too romantic...

KA: Everything's too romantic, everything's not too romantic, everything should be romantic, and everything

10

Black Boy by
Richard Wright



9

Kirikou by
Michel Ocelot



7>

shouldn't be romantic...

JB: Is that because we're both fire signs? We're both passionate girls...

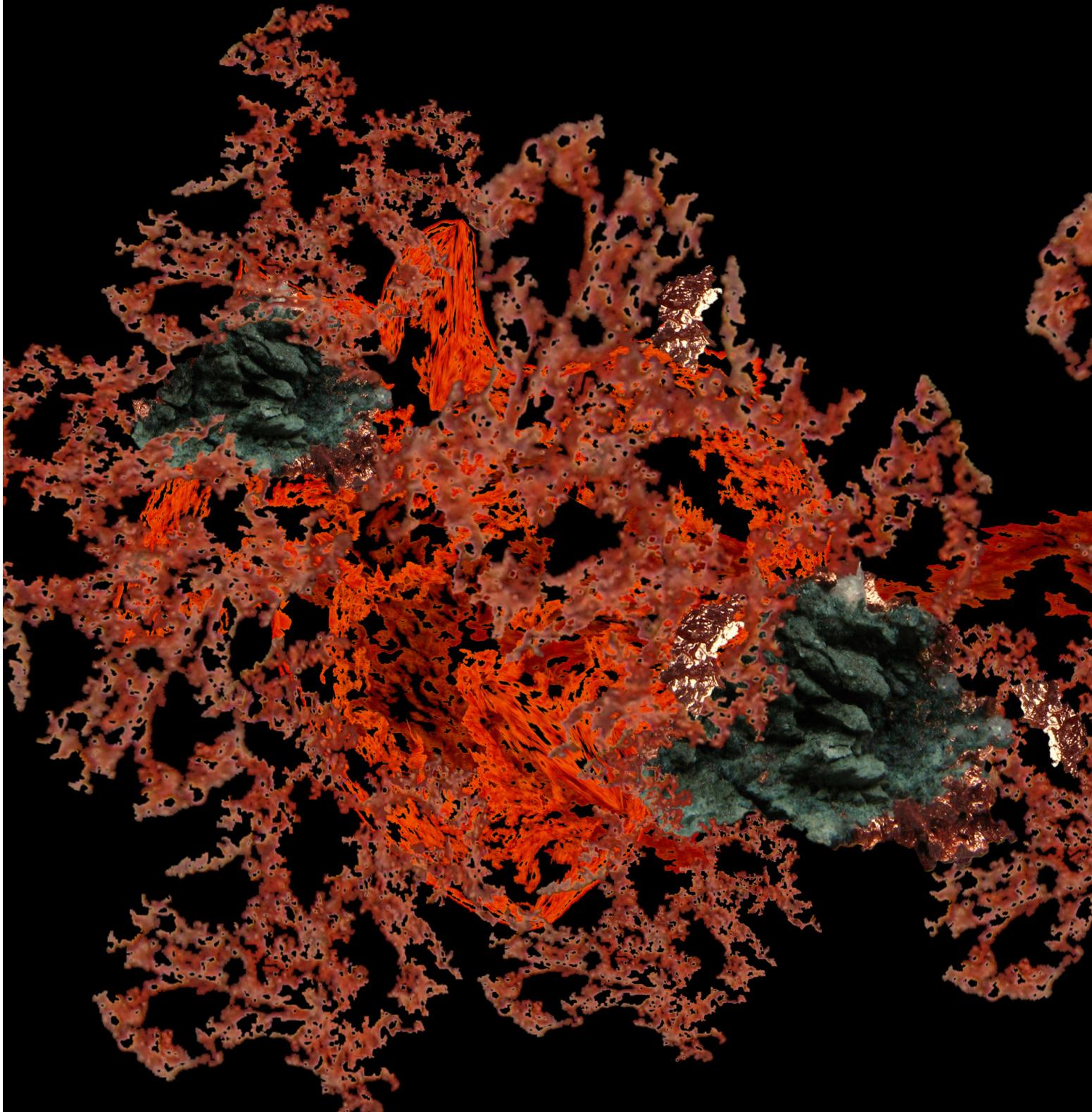
KA: I mean, I think that's beautiful still... To admire him as a person and allowing him to inspire the idea of change within yourself. That's what I think celebrities should do. That's the positive impact that should happen when they see other people achieving their goals and setting Black excellence standards for people. In general, even if that's not what it's recognized or marketed as.

JB: I feel like the best I can do right now in these streets, honey, is make sure I am moisturized and I'm treating my body nice and I am just radiating the kind of love that I have for myself and hope that other people can get into that for themselves. It just takes up too much headspace to think about if I ruled the world it'd be like this way, or that way... I mean, I can write a manifesto, but I just feel like who am I to even write that right now? I would just rather show you...

KA: Because that's time still just taken away from actually doing it...

JB: Maybe it does feel like the world might end at any moment and I need every minute I can with the stars. I need every minute I can get with my life and I feel like sitting in and thinking about if the world was different... I wanna be in the present, the future is now; me taking up space, people remembering seeing us walking down the street, that just feels more important than any intellectual property I could create, but maybe I'm carrying. I don't know.

KA: Any intellectual property you do create is still a part of that journey. You have the right to take up that space.



about the authors

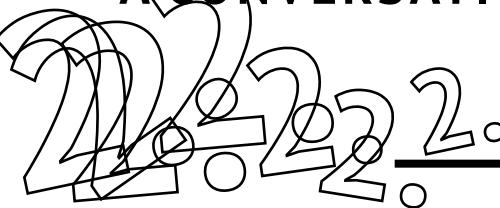
KHADIJA NIA ADELL

Born and raised in Miami, FL, transplanted to Baltimore in 2011, Khadija Nia Adell is a young multi-media artist, curator, writer and scholar invested in social activism and entrepreneurship. Through the many mediums of the arts, her combined written and visual arts practice aims to provoke our human consciousness through discussion, contemplation and action. Through the layering of contextual memory, African Diasporic history and manifold visual expression, her works acts as a response to the intricate relationships entangled in the geometry of the colonial and precolonial histories of now.

JARED BROWN

Jared Brown was raised in Chicago, Illinois. In May of 2014, he received his BFA for Video and Film Arts from the Maryland Institute College of Art. Through text, sampling, video, photography, installation, performance and sound, he re-purposes fragmented data to construct mythology about his origins and existence while creating archival content to serve as proof of existence. Dj sets, social media, short videos and guerrilla style performances are all vehicles he uses to navigate the extremities of existing as a black celestial being in a post-apocalyptic Western civilization. Jared Brown currently lives and makes work in Chicago.

COOPERATION IS A FACT OF LIFE A CONVERSATION WITH PERSON ABLACH



(28/GNC/Waverly) Person likes cooking for friends, making clothes and independent scholarship. They also enjoy email correspondence and long form journalism. They're available at personablach@gmail.com.

Kimi Hanauer: What are a couple things you say 100% Yes to?

Person Ablach: 1. That every prisoner is a political prisoner and all prisons are the result of cycles of patriarchal violence and need to be abolished.

2. That that every single part of the prison industrial complex, forced psychiatric institutions, homeless shelters and Child Protective Services bring additional harm into any given situation regardless of the original circumstances of that situation, in the way that they are structured currently, which specifically, is under the control of the police.

3. That every bit of wealth belongs in common to all the denizens of the world.

4. I think that everyone should get a citizen's wage or basic income. Anyone who's taking care of themselves should get paid and each citizen wage should be increased if people are working for others or working to take care of another person, like being a mother, for example. All forms of traditionally unpaid caretaking-labor should definitely receive compensation in a way that's honorable.

I think that actually covers everything. All politics should be concerned with is identifying the root causes of harm, abolishing that harm and enacting reparations for the harm that was caused.

KH: What is something that makes you feel free?

PA: Things that make me feel free are when I'm embraced by others, when I have my hands on a tool that's restricting my movement like a pencil or an instrument. Because the restriction produces finesse; a delicate

precision is articulated... When I don't have to worry temporarily about getting fed or making rent as soon as I'm locked into a contract or construction job. I guess a sense of freedom can be easily attainable, but that depends on having the opportunity to attain it. So impossible.

WHEN I THINK ABOUT SOMEONE ELSE'S FREEDOM OR ITS OPPOSITE, THEIR HELPLESSNESS, I CAN'T HELP BUT CONSIDER THE FREEDOM TO NOT BE OPPRESSED, HARMED OR EVEN PUNISHED..

KH: How would you break down your definition of freedom? Can you speculate on what it looks like?

PA: That's a hard question because I don't want or even value freedom. Freedom is an absurd idea. Freedom should be alien, it should be threatening. It's an obscenity, actually. Who is free and what are they doing?

I believe in censorship for example, which I know is a touchy subject, but it's because I think censorship protects people from others who use their freedom to abuse people.

In a way I don't know enough about being actually free to answer. But when I think about someone else's freedom or its opposite, their helplessness, I can't help but consider the freedom to not be oppressed, harmed or even punished..

I would also say we could all be a lot freer than we allow ourselves to be too. And we would also probably be freer if we had fewer options...

KH: What do you mean?

PA: For me personally, I'd rather have a very structured existence than chase around a naïve notion of freedom of choice in whatever form. I don't want to merely survive under capitalism but I'd rather work with members of my community and have that be permanently available as an optional way that I could support myself. Even if it wasn't a choice, I'd rather be forced work alongside members of my community if the only alternative is competing against them under capitalism—Even If it's not freedom... Even if it is a Gulag, I'd rather be sent to the Gulag.

Fuck freedom so long as a few are free to exploit others under capitalism rendering most people *not-fucking-free*. Fuck the freedom to enjoy the spoils of capitalist exploitation: theft. What are we talking about? Coal mining? The cheap houses getting flipped in Baltimore. Fuck the freedom to not engage in what should be mandatory war with the people who are destroying the earth. Yeah, I don't need that shit.

KH: So, we've been talking about these things for a few months now, but I wanted to ask you if you could walk me through what your very initial thoughts were when I approached you about If I Ruled The World.

PA: Well, my first thought was, if I ruled the world, obviously no one would have any power over anyone else, which is to say, maybe no one would rule the world, but then there has to be some way of enforcing that...

I don't know why anybody tolerates any authority at all though. We only have so many needs.

Different people describe those needs in different ways. Every time there's an authority figure in the world, in any relationship, there's somebody who's standing or threatens to stand in the way of those needs being met. We only have so many strings to pull, so every flavor of control looks like these predictable ingredients.

I'd like to see a movement that tolerated none of these for any type of person.



Sadly, I'm not located in a community that can unanimously identify the local authority figures and deal with them, the cops, judges, state legislators, the racist governor, CEO's etc. With that said, I wish I lived under an anti-authoritarianism, or what I think of as a prettier tyranny. We don't live in utopia. Since we live under a totalitarian government that lapses into democracy one day every 4 years, wouldn't you prefer a soft totalitarianism?

I think socialism would be a much prettier tyrant than monopoly-feudal-capitalist-deception-olympics,-or cryptofascism or whatever our current national politics is called. Socialism is literally the only part of government that furnishes our society with infrastructure, especially if there was meaningful democratic control. Please relieve me of the my burden of the free market commercialization of my own starvation, death by exposure etc.. If I ruled the world would I still experience the freedom to have all of my money, time left on earth, loved one or my own life stolen by cops?

I think, from what I can tell, every major socialist democracy still struggles with being controlled by the capitalists within and the people who hold the wealth and hire all the cops. Maybe abolishing or evolving beyond capitalism is enough but I think it needs to be both. A positive or creative politic of socialism and a negative or destructive politic or anti-authoritarianism. Overcoming oppression always meant the same thing as taking care of each other.

KH: Do you think there's meaningful ways of operating outside of capitalist structures while existing within them?

PA: No. I think you are either ready to see capitalism go, and to suddenly take on, what would be an incredibly high-stakes project (which is keeping everything going in spite of the end of capitalism) or you're a conservative. There's no liberal, much less a neo-liberal to be seen under capitalism. They're all vicious imperialists. There's no social justice warriors under capitalism without a demand to see all the prisons empty; and any capitalist knows that's the end of capitalism. There's no meaningful social work under capitalism until the end of the theft from most of the global population of the world, that funds the possibility of that social work for a local community. Like I said, you are either ready to see it go, or you're a conservative. You're a conservative or you're braced for the crisis of all of history to come crashing down suddenly.

That said, it's just as important to fight to keep the lights off at night in the penitentiary so inmates can sleep proper hours as it is to close the prison all together. It's fair to say working to improve humanitarian conditions is working "in the system." I would argue that stopping any part of the total dehumanization and destruction of human life is stopping the system in degrees. I think a lot of people's careers are built entirely on how well they can hide how hard they work to keep the system going.

I think that's the scariest part of capitalism, is that on the inside, if you behave like a good, white corpuscle and defend the system that nourishes you, suddenly, your life matters. On the outside however, everyone is a pathogen.

I think we should think about after-capitalism instead of inside or outside. Like, we all definitely know there's nothing out there except police and drone-strike assassinations. I personally want to stay focused on how the cooperative structures could look in any given post-capitalist future. I think being caught up on getting the work right is actually good, but it's just as important to see how the system currently limits our imaginings of possibilities.

KH: What is special to you about Baltimore?

PA: So, I moved to the United States from Cairo when I was four years old and I grew up mostly in Tampa. Without going too much into detail, a lot of my experience was so mediated by the violent, racist, white people I lived around. In my travels to different states, I immediately loved Baltimore. Mostly because there were fewer white men and even fewer large groups of them. There

were other reasons I loved Baltimore too. I love my small overlapping communities. I love the sense of history and what I can see at any given day.

It has a rich preindustrial, and fucked, colonial history. A few blocks away, on Saint Mary's for example, you can tell the enslaved peoples quarters by the rarer 10 foot width of the row homes. Somehow, since coming to Baltimore, I can understand myself as pitted in a moment, in a city, in a time with such clear and gripping historical footprint that I often feel lost in other cities.

I also should say that it's my privilege to come to a city struggling with so much institutionalized violence and feel that I'm "safer." It's a privilege to be an immigrant in a sanctuary city within a nation that's hostile to immigrants. I'm thankful for Baltimore. I believe that if Baltimore can overcome the structural violence that's facing it, anywhere in the United States could also overcome it.

SINCE COMING TO BALTIMORE, I CAN UNDERSTAND MYSELF AS PITTED IN A MOMENT, IN A CITY, IN A TIME WITH SUCH CLEAR AND GRIPPING HISTORICAL FOOTPRINT THAT I OFTEN FEEL LOST IN OTHER CITIES.

KH: What would be your most positive vision of Baltimore?

PA: There are a lot of things on my mind.

I would love to see a program that would put anyone who wants a job to work at any capacity renovating the vacant houses. I think it would be great if folks worked as close to their home neighborhood as possible. It's more feasible than the developers say, on account of *they-are-lying* about repair costs to justify tearing them all down indiscriminately. They say building entirely new structures is cheaper so they can get paid for more

work—that's all.

I would like to see a dollar-housing program on all 32,000 of those freshly eminent-domain-ed and community renovated vacants. Basically it should be specifically for reparations for chattel slavery, Jim Crow, and redlining.. The process definitely needs to be about as easy as a phone call. I think it would be nice if at least 10,000 of those homes we families of 3 or more.

I think it would be a good idea for the city as an entity to seize the money and properties from banks and developers that was stolen from people or acquired through any questionable or corrupt circumstances. Baltimore's homes need to be given back and the water and energy utilities should be publicly owned. I think of the many elder black women that are losing their homes over taxes and water. It's only one example of home theft and displacement which needs to be fully elucidated. They are already paid for, but because of late water bills as small as \$250, these folks are evicted, only to see their houses flipped at a courthouse on the east side to real-estate investors. All these abusive practices should be documented and every home and cent returned.

Also, I think there should be a publicly accessible accountability database for the full bureau of government agencies and corporate entities everywhere. In it, there should be a discrete list of accounts given by individuals who can point out an entity that benefited from stealing from people, corruption, abuse of power, etc.

I think about much less realistic things too. Like how Baltimore should reduce its roadways by half and in its new "real-estate," we should grow 100% of our food locally. Just a fantasy.

Also, on a more personal note, I would like a job that isn't freelancing or working construction. I'd love to spend all day canning locally made food. Or manufacturing glass and recycled metal lids for those cans, but there needs to be some other jobs. Specifically, I think Baltimore should have job opportunities as part of large-scale projects including environmental remediation, reforestation, soil production/methane and co2 sequestration and anti-climate change/reverse-terraforming (that needs to be a job).

KH: Do you think that artistic thinking can play a socially transformative role or is important to creating change?

PA: I'm not saying that an art project can't have the vi-

sionary capacity to deconstruct or rebuilt a subject, a concept, an industry, a market or a society. But it seems that most arts funding is for making real-estate development visible, which is, I think, a huge tragedy.

Fuck the labeling of arts districts, the annual festival thrown so the people don't riot, the whiteness of DIY spaces and implied supremacy of the highly visible consumerist producers; "Makers?" fuck'em. They're all tragic.

If you're an artist in this city with any institutional relationship, whether that's the Maryland Institute College of Art, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts or Station North Arts and Entertainment District, who among others are collaborators with PNC, Wells Fargo and the rest; or if you work with artists that do—you're a tool being used by PR firms and you'll keep being just as counter-revolutionary until you challenge and break ties to those institutions.

If you have the chance, take the money, grants, whatever but don't get it twisted. It's all blood money.

MOMENTS OF ARTISTIC, BUT MORE APPROPRIATELY, CREATIVE-INTERVENTION, ARE WHAT CAPITALISM WORKS AGAINST...

KH: Conceptually, you're saying, an artwork can be influential in some way, but that often artworks just work in cooperation with existing problematic structures in order to exist in an accessible scale?

PA: Some art projects aim for different things beyond their metaphor. An art project, in how novel a form it can be, or in how interdisciplinary the form is—through overlapping relationships with the physical, the psycho-social spaces between us, our relationships with ourselves, or with science or engineering can change the world, yes. This kind of intervention in the world looks like a disruption of the ways we've taken advantage of or alienated from one another. That, or its being made for and by those who don't have to worry about it. Those moments of artistic, but more appropriately, creative-intervention, are what capitalism works against and it's

what arts funding intentionally avoids granting. We get "Light City," not "Real-Livable-City." If artists actually start inventing how we could live in a free-post-capitalist context, then soon enough, artists will be called terrorists.

KH: Overall, this project deals a lot with utopian thinking... Do you think there are ways in which utopian thinking can be productive?

PA: I think that you can't really have a utopian view of a system. And you don't want it, get rid of it! What you want is to have a utopian view of people, a community and society. And that is the only utopian dream. And that doesn't mean by you and for others. It means by people collaboratively. If you can't find it between you and another person, you're going to be at war over whatever form "utopia" takes until it's over. When I think about utopianism, or idealism, which is really maybe at the root, I think of Viktor Frankl, specifically talking about Goethe. The notion is that if you take someone for who they are, you make them worse but, if you take them for what they can become, you incite in them possibility and you make them better. How we arrive at "utopia" without structuring that relationship and somehow also avoiding the creation of fascism seems a bit challenging. It's worthy of the real work. And I don't mean through some type of morally superior "social work," but through the tragically diminished labor of real relationship building and then building on that, through sustained partnership, collaboration and interdependent survival.

The folks who are developing Baltimore are doing it with a utopian aesthetic. A whole generation of elite-maker-artist-business-creative-professionals... keep that shit out of here! I want no part in any utopia that doesn't start between all people. For the good that it would do, to have people empowered and trusted to do good by one another.

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That's another reason I like the citizen wage; it gives everybody some degree of capacity to turn inwards to take care of themselves and to have the time to spend with one another. That basic social support should be everything. It should provide benefits that could be felt throughout the rest of whatever else is left.

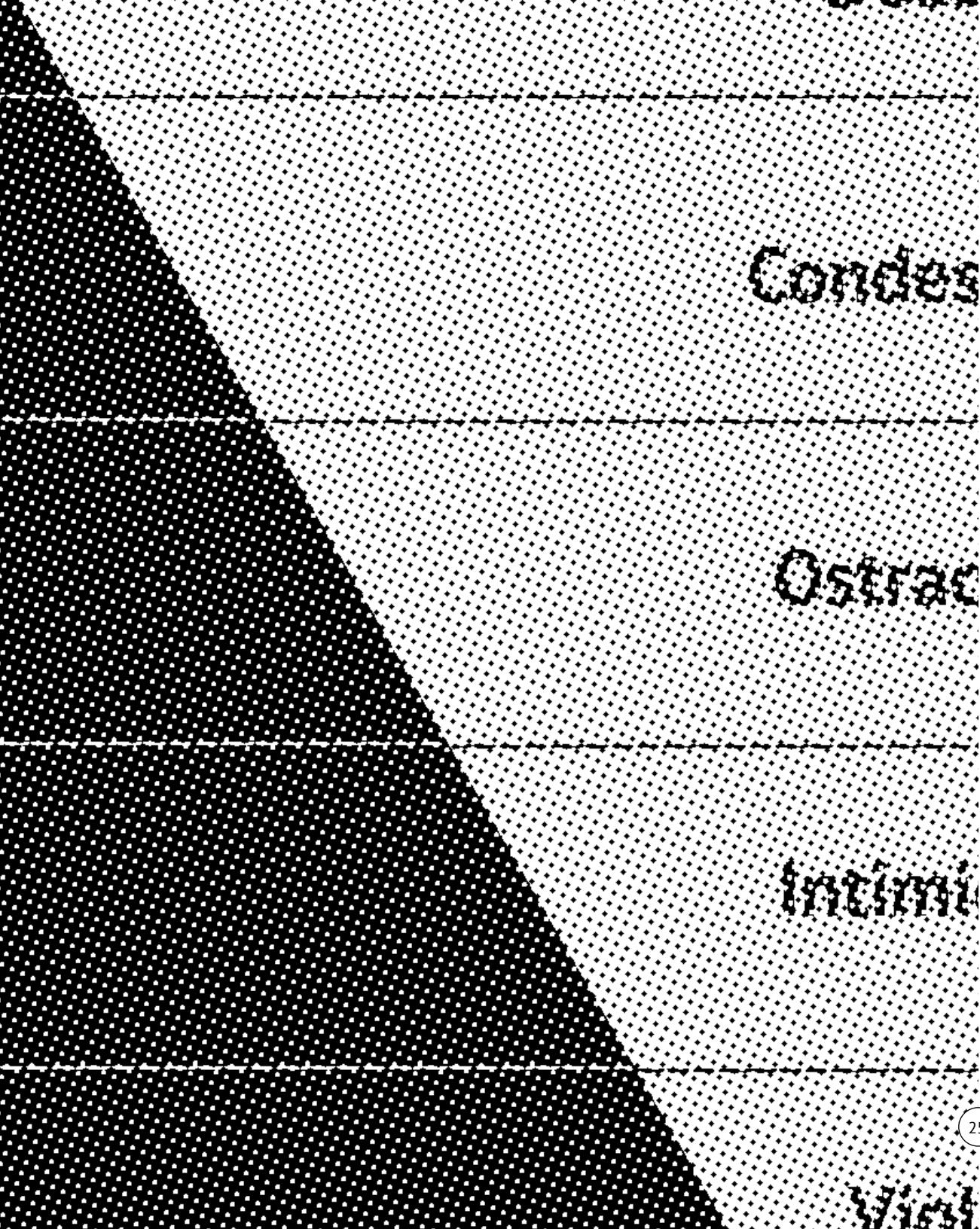
KH: What motivates you?

PA: I think the main thing that motivates me is cooperation. And what a miracle it is when any number of people can come together, forgive and set aside the harm they've caused one another; and with all of their needs met, they fulfill some type of common objective, from the dirty dishes to addressing the ancient and future architecture.

KH: What if you (no one) ruled the world?

PA: Its funny that I should be so shy to answer the question of if I ruled the world, because I know that if I had power, I would use it very aggressively. It would be a mess. Keep it away from me. Seriously. Everyone would be in roving bands harvesting and planting vegetables; and tending to a nationwide interconnected garden, bird and insect sanctuary along the highway. Mobility and accessibility tools would be provided. Participation would be mandatory. No exceptions.

I would say if we all ruled the world, I would like for there to be a system in place, specifically designed for empowering people committed to cooperating and working with one another, with the resources to be able to do so; cooperation and committing to sustaining the corporation or collaboration. Our society doesn't have enough structure that looks or sounds anything like that. Which is to say that maybe it could look different in a hundred years, after we dedicate our energy to building those structures, whether participation is mandatory or not. Cooperation is a fact of life and, in that way, your participation with others in this world crafting it is mandatory.





LAVENDER BLUE SKIES

LAVENDER BLUE SKIES

amy reid
+ greydolf

HOW TO BE THE BEST VERSION OF YOURSELF

This manifesto explores our understanding of how to be the best version of yourself based on practicing activities together that we both identified as promoting holistic health including meditation, swimming, walking, communal meals, sharing creative ideas and collaborating on creative projects. These practices resulted in a mutually supportive relationship with one another emotionally and creatively. The goal of this chapter is to extend what we learned in hopes that we will be able to help you become the best version of you.

1 Give things the time that they deserve.

Prioritize. If something is inspiring you or you feel like you need to focus your energy on a certain aspect of your life, do it.

2 My thoughts are tangible: Plant thoughts in your mind that are in alignment with your purpose.

You have the ability to control your thoughts. Manifest your ideas and release them into the universe. This will allow room for growth and new thoughts as well as solidify ideas that reflect your drive, purpose, and passions.

3 You can't appreciate the honey without getting stung.

Embrace moments that may seem negative, such as: loss, sadness or feeling alone. Those feelings are real, be inside of them, make them and remember that they will only make you stronger. With those stinging experiences, you will be able to appreciate honey even more when its sweetness comes your way.



4 Some things never change. It's up to you to be the change!

As the latest trends come and go, history repeats itself. It can be easy to get caught up in the hype that leads to complacency in a section of your life. You have to be the change. You have to do something different in order to create growth and change for who you want to be.

5 I can't hear you... no reception.... I'm in the Fiji islands.

If someone or something isn't serving you in your life, filter it out. This is difficult because you are not an island. You do not exist alone; we rely on other people and possessions. Make the necessary changes to eliminate the negative forces working against you.

6 Release yourself on vinyl, cassette tape, CD and as a digital download.

You can exist anywhere in any form you want to be. If you feel like you'd benefit from moving to a different place, climate, job, career, lifestyle, or need to be surrounded by different people, do it.

7 It takes a Village.

Collectiveness is crucial and can be very rewarding when you diligently share experiences with individuals on the same accord as yourself.

8 You are your own steering wheel. You can only be in control when you are in the front seat.

Take responsibility and ownership of your actions. The more you are in touch with yourself, who you are and what you need, the greater your chances will be of placing yourself in positive situations that are beneficial to you as your unique, beautiful self.

9 Give thanks instead of apologizing.

You are an imperfect person. Instead of apologizing for your flaws, give thanks to those who accept you and let them know you appreciate them through words and gestures.

10 Don't watch QVC and turn off advertisements.

Stay away from and choose *not* to be a part of the systems set in place that keep us separated, divided and that do *not* promote holistic health. Feeding into these distractions will only hold you back from being able to celebrate the characteristics and the people that make you a unique individual. These distractions act like advertisements that attempt to brainwash us into believing that we must fight against each other instead of learning about the experiences that we have to share; experiences we can use to inspire one another. The more beauty we are able to see in ourselves, the more beauty we will be able to see in one another. This results in a more powerful exchange of support and appreciation.



about the authors

AMY REID

Born, raised and based in Baltimore, Amy Reid is an active musician producing and performing as 1/2 of Chiffon as well as solo, djing as DJ Amsies and participating in other cosmic performances. Through envisioning and manifesting GRL PWR parties, Reid works towards celebrating underground self-identifying female, trans, genderqueer, and non-binary musicians, DJs, producers and dancers.

GREYDOLF (BRAYAIRA SIMMS)

Greydolf, Baltimore's up and coming music artist, young mogul with not just an artist mind but a health and business mindset, plans to use her talents to enhance Baltimore as a city through spreading positive vibes and health through her collaborations with other artists in the city and abroad, smoothie pop up shops, community events and gatherings.



4 LEARNING YOURSELF TO YOURSELF A CONVERSATION WITH BONNIE JONES

Bonnie Jones is a Korean-American writer, improvising musician, and performer working primarily with electronic music and text. Born in 1977 in South Korea she was raised on a dairy farm in New Jersey and currently resides in Baltimore, Maryland. Bonnie creates improvised and composed text-sound performances that explore the fluidity and function of electronic noise (field recordings, circuit bending) and text (poetry, found, spoken, visual). Bonnie has received commissions from the London ICA and has presented her work in the US, Europe and Asia and collaborates frequently with writers and musicians. She received her MFA at the Milton Avery School of the Arts at Bard College.

Kimi Hanauer: What is your radical improvisational approach to music and sound and all about?

Bonnie Jones: I think this is a discussion that most people are still having, what does it mean to make political music, or have radical action inside of music?

My approach to improvisation didn't come from being a jazz or electronic music scholar, or even a trained musician. I came to this music through the people who were playing improvised music in Baltimore in the late 90's and early 2000's. People like Dan Breen, Catherine Pancake, Andy Hayleck and many others involved in the Red Room and High Zero Festival community.

When I started improvising more heavily, what was immediately special about the music was that there was almost no barrier to entry, no requirement to be "virtuosic" on your instrument and very little hierarchical structures. Also the music was largely focused on collaboration. It's one thing to have an improvisatory practice on your own, but shifting that into a context with other musicians and live audiences felt like a really radical way of producing music. I can't think of many forms of contemporary art-making that have deeply established and active communities with these particular characteristics.

KH: What is the relationship between the inherent qualities of improvising and the capitalist system we live in?

BJ: What drew me to improvised music initially was how disruptive the practice was to the process of establish-

ing value, determining criteria and creating cult of personality; all things that work to create reproducible and valuable products. Also, because I was always improvising with other people, something about the collaborative nature and the ever-changing musical partnerships that were formed, disbanded, mutated, etc., really challenged the centrality of the musician, band and song.

WHAT WAS IMMEDIATELY SPECIAL ABOUT THE MUSIC WAS THAT THERE WAS ALMOST NO BARRIER TO ENTRY, NO REQUIREMENT TO BE "VIRTUOSIC" ON YOUR INSTRUMENT AND VERY LITTLE HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURES.

Something else that I was really interested in was how improvised music de-emphasizes the individual, or at least sets the self in a really interesting relationship with the other collaborators. Because there are no established roles for each musician to perform, the as-

sumptions about how the self and the group work independently and together seem very different than in traditional composed musics. There was so much to be understood about selfhood and grouphood in this context.

I always thought collaborative improvised music was a really interesting place to examine the history of the ego in art. I know that "experimental" music from the 60's was very much into eradicating the ego, removing the expressionistic and subjective from sound—and to a certain extent this is what really attracted me to improvised music when I got started. Today, I think about it differently. My sense is that the practice of improvising is about the self in tandem with collective identity. I think an individual self, and not just their musical self, but their self-self, can be both influenced by the improvised music collaboration and also insert that identity back into the music—almost as if one's identity becomes a compositional strategy. I see a lot of benefit in the individual performing their idiosyncratic self within an improvised music collaboration.

Also I get a lot of joy in exploring the free form, indeterminate and not pre-defined shapes of my collaborative improvised music as a way of understanding of my non-white, female identity.

I GET A LOT OF JOY IN EXPLORING THE FREE FORM, INDETERMINATE AND NOT PRE-DEFINED SHAPES OF MY COLLABORATIVE IMPROVISED MUSIC AS A WAY OF UNDERSTANDING OF MY NON-WHITE, FEMALE IDENTITY.

KH: Yeah it's totally fluid...

BJ: I think that's why I felt it was radical because it was a music that felt as fluid as the fluidity of my identity.

KH: Totally. There are many dominant structures that exist that are, like most aspects of our society, made for a certain people, and if your identity doesn't fit into this rigid standard, well you might not as easily fit because it's not really made for you anyways.

BJ: I can't imagine trying to be a classical musician or trying to make rock music, trying to build towards the value systems of those genres. They always felt too specific, too rooted in particular people, places and ideas that didn't always resonate with my own idiosyncratic self. Not to say they didn't influence me and drive my musical development, and not to say I don't like a lot of different kinds of music, but improvisation as a practice gave me a chance to play with those forms both as disruption and a homage. It allowed me to hack the code of genre with the idiosyncrasy of self. To be honest, sometimes being yourself in this way, inside of art-making, can feel very radical.

KH: And it's super connected to who you are.

BJ: Yea, it feels connected because the process of playing music in that way is much more tied to a process of self-understanding. Making the music becomes the same thing as understanding what the music wants to be.

KH: One of the reasons I wanted to talk to you was because something about your approach, as I've understood it, feels disruptive, as you say, to traditional power structures. I think it's something that I sense in what you produce but also in your other projects like TECHNE and your curatorial type of work.

BJ: I think the things that really disrupt power structures are being reminded of the totality of the existence of things you don't know anything about. The things you have no clue about can be very humbling. I usually find that people who aren't in power are more curious or more interested in change. For people in power, the unknown is the thing that is the most fearful, it threatens the stability of their position, possibly the validity of their existence. Which kind of proves that those people in power tend to have a superstructure that makes them feel as if whatever they know is the actual reality of all places and all people.

If my creative work disrupts power structures, it's probably somewhat inadvertent. What is intentional with my organization TECHNE though, is making situations where people's reality comes at you, versus your reality at them. Technically, I'm not making space for anybody,

everybody is there, but I have to lessen how much space I take up in order to let someone else's reality come at me a little bit more.

KH: Is that an approach that could also be applied to collaboration more broadly? Are there other ideas that guide your approach within TECHNE?

BJ: Yea, I think that's a good way of working in general, both creatively and educationally. With TECHNE, I'm asking myself, "What am I doing in this room? Who are these kids? What kind of service am I doing? What kind of presumptions are being made about who they are or what they know? Or what they don't know? How do I make sure I'm short circuiting that, changing that?" We can't make presumptions about other people no matter how much we want to. You just have to see, hear and listen to who they are, meet them on that level; say this is your world, and my world and maybe we can have a conversation.

KH: That's beautiful. I think one of the struggles that immigrants face (and is one of the driving principles of institutionalized racism); is always having to show the world that actually, big surprise, but you are a complex human being like everyone else even if your not a white American.

BJ: I will say that I'm an unusual type of immigrant because though, I am ethnically Korean, I was adopted by a white family. I do have two other adopted sisters who are also non-white, as well as three white brothers and two white parents. So it's a transracial adoption situation—something that was really common after the end of the Korean War. It's interesting, because I can definitely see the privilege of growing up in what was a white American family in cultural and economic senses, though of course, race dynamics within my own family were definitely complicated. However, when I go out into the world, I am not a white person. I mean, I can't pull that off no matter what my family background is.

In the US, non-white folks are reducible, one-dimensional, without the privilege of full human subjectivity. Often, they are assumed to not have lived the complex beauty of human experience simply because they don't speak English or are not white. Our country has created this situation. Our media provides very narrow representations of different kinds of people. Our liberal education often represents only certain subjectivities and not others in the art, literature, music, history, science and politics, we study, we absorb, we align ourselves with.

Something I've been thinking about a lot is what tools can we use to remind people that human lives are very similar in so many ways—the way we experience loss, joy, pain, confusion—these are all so similar and part of being human. Individual experience may differ but we are all very complicated and unique subjectivities. We are the full range of human consciousness! We are all humans!

INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE MAY DIFFER BUT WE ARE ALL VERY COMPLICATED AND UNIQUE SUBJECTIVITIES. WE ARE THE FULL RANGE OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS! WE ARE ALL HUMANS!

KH: You have a background in English and writing so I wanted to ask you about how that influences or plays a role in your work.

BJ: When I was a kid, I was always really into reading. Language was something that came easy to me. I talked A LOT, like incessantly, often to myself, I liked writing, I liked thinking about my experience of the world through words. I didn't learn about Korean language until I was in my 20's—so English is my first and native language.

KH: Do you think the language(s) we speak play a role in defining our identities?

BJ: We assume that language is somehow innocent, but in learning a language we are being conditioned to communicate things in a "right" or "wrong" way. There's a value system to how you speak a language and how you present yourself in that language. I don't think language is about expressing some authentic self, rather, I think the language is often teaching you who you are to be—it has a lot of agency.

Which is why music is so important to me. When I was living in Korea in 2014, I played a lot of music with different collaborators and I rarely spoke that much English. Actually, since I wasn't fluent in Korean, I rare-



ly spoke at all in Korea. When I came back from that trip I started writing these prose poems about Korea, my grandmother, about the future and the past—if they were the same thing, and I realized I was also writing about my feeling that the English language had led me astray from myself in some ways. I thought, what if the vibrations of the Korean language had resided in my body for 27 years instead of the vibrations of English? How different would I be? Would I be more myself?

During grad school I learned about the design of the Korean script hangul, which is completely fascinating. It's really like no other writing script. It uses what they call a featural alphabet, which means that it attempts to visually represent the sounds of the language. You could completely map out all of the different alphabet characters in the throat, mouth, lip, tongue, etc. It is truly an alphabet that is intrinsically tied to sound and body. I always thought that was so fascinating—that hangul was designed to make the body make meaning in a very specific way.

Language is more than just an outward tool—it has a lot of impact on your body. There was something interesting about wrestling with that feeling in Korea while I was taking a break from English. It's like you are a different person in a different language. You might even be a different person with the same language in a different place.

KH: Totally. Language is much more than just verbal communication, but even within just verbal communication there are so many variables and nuances depending on where and how you learn the language. There are so many different modes and versions of English, just depending on the context and culture you learn it within.

BJ: And those different versions, no matter how fluent you are, are used to judge you against the standard of US English. So even within the same fluent language space—there's a xenophobia built into US English—ways to notice if you're "not from here." I think a lot about how Americans judge intelligence, experience, aptitude based on the way a person speaks English. The way that language is used to make decisions about you, your access, your ability to take care of yourself or your family, your safety... it's pretty fucked.

Sometimes I'm glad that I started getting into music because it offers some relief from how tricky it is to spend all of your time from thinking about language. I feel like I learned an entirely different way of being

through music.

LANGUAGE IS USED TO MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT YOU, YOUR ACCESS, YOUR ABILITY TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF OR YOUR FAMILY, YOUR SAFETY...

KH: What's the all girls learning environments like with TECHNE?

The thing that I found to be useful about an all girls workshop environment, especially with the high school and middle school ages, is that the conditioning around how women are around men, even taking sexuality out of the equation, rather the general cultural conditioning that comes from media, school, peers, family, etc; all that stuff changes how these young girls interact with technology.

I mean there's other power dynamics, race and class dimensions, and a lot of other stuff going on, but that kind of knee jerk conditioning that leads girls to look towards a male to know what to do, or even just this silent censorship to stop girls from saying what they want or asking what they want to ask. I notice that even just one guy in the room can shift the way that the girls are in that room. I've seen this time and time again, and I always find it really amazing and curious how easy it is to change the dynamic by just having it be all women. That it really allows something totally different to happen. When people say to me, "Why have a workshop just for girls?" it's because those spaces have so much possibility for difference and seeing yourself differently. Whatever you need to do in this classroom, you are capable of doing it and you don't have to think about anything else, or at the very least any gender stuff that gets embedded into technology classrooms. Because the project of building a contact microphone itself is almost always new to everyone in the workshop, there's usually no natural assumption that we're supposed to have this specific expertise, it can sort of un-gender the experience of working with technology. There is something very necessary about self-sameness in certain contexts that allow women to talk about or have certain experiences while having a level of ease so that you're

not spending all of your time being triggered by things.

KH: I'd love to hear about your time in Baltimore and your experience of it over the past years that you've been here.

BJ: So I've been in Baltimore for 17 years, and I remember thinking about this when I had been in Baltimore for just a couple of years; the thing I found so important about Baltimore is that it feels like a city that lives on the surface. It's pretty porous in a lot of ways. All the permutations of human existence are right there, visible. It's a really transparent city in that way. I think people who live here for a while become the types of people who have a hard time pretending that things outside of their experience and understanding don't exist, don't impact them every day. You just can't do that so you just don't. And so there's a groundedness to not pretending that I think is extraordinary. Obviously, it's not valuable to have violence, racism, crime and regret, and that's not a situation that anyone wants, but it does produce something that other cities often don't have, an extraordinary resilience.

THERE'S SOMETHING TO BE SAID ABOUT THE FACT THAT MARILYN MOSBY AND BALTIMORE FILED CRIMINAL CHARGES AGAINST COPS WHEN FERGUSON AND NYC HAD FAILED TO DO SO.

I saw this resilience a lot during the Baltimore Uprising. There's something to be said about the fact that Marilyn Mosby and Baltimore filed criminal charges against cops when Ferguson and NYC had failed to do so. And that after the Uprising, I heard so many stories about folks going out into communities and really changing their thinking about their role in that community, how they could help and what it means to do community work in general. I was seeing a lot of difference in how Baltimore rebuilt and responded. It felt the way Baltimore often feels to me, raw and humble, angry and productive, truthful and resilient.

KH: Do you think that being an artist here is different from being an artist somewhere else?

BJ: In Baltimore I've always experienced that stark reality that reminds me that while arts and culture are great and all—people are dying—nearly every day. And I think that does have an impact on artists in this city. I don't have a lot of pretense of specialness or superiority in what I'm doing as an artist. Growing my creative life in Baltimore really changed what I saw as the artist's role. I mean, I make my work and I want to be successful at it, and I have extremely high aesthetic standards and aspirations, but at the same time, I have to be a person that is doing something, I feel like I can't just see the artwork as the art work, if you know what I mean?

Ever since grad school I've been trying to answer the question, "What's the point of being an artist?" I do think that artists have the capacity to present difference in experience, which I think is a vital way to actually change oppressive power dynamics. So artists have the ability to do that if they're given space to do that, and to project different experiences out into the world and have them received. But the other part of my art practice is acknowledging its role in understanding myself. I think about what Ralph Ellison's character in the Invisible Man says, "When I discover who I am, I'll be free." So that's something important to me; *self-understanding = art practice = freedom*. All the things I do, curating, organizing, teaching—I'm learning how to be free.

Improvised music making had such a key role in that process—because it's intuitive and collaborative and it's about throwing out any preconceptions about stuff. My electronic instruments are so unusual to begin with, so it's about interacting with an object in such a way that the process of interacting with an object is the process of understanding your music, and is the process of understanding yourself all at the same time. Improvised music coming from wherever it's coming from, it's just expressions of different ways of being in the world...

KH: What do you say 100% yes to?

BJ: 1. 100% yes to validating and giving shape and reality to anything that I encounter that I don't know or understand. If I don't know it? It's bigger than me..? 100% yes. You don't necessarily need to learn it, I mean sometimes people learn things in order to control them. So I don't even need to learn it to say yes to it.

2. 100% yes to, finding non-verbal ways to inhabit other experiences. Music was the one that I picked.

3. 100% yes to completely re-configuring anything that you think is a "canon," or to anybody who wants to completely change the idea of what should be learned in the history of art, for example. Essentially what I'm saying 100% yes to is fucking up history.

4. I definitely say 100% yes to Korean BBQ. I could totally eat that right now!

5. 100% Yes to young people kicking ass and using their privilege, power and skills to do bad ass creative and social projects!



leelieb
March 14, 16

*Cing
Kim*

Mang S. Huai

Sang

Dimmy San Pham

Lun



5°
5°
5°
5°
5°
5°
5°
5°
5°

**kim, dimmy, mang,
lun, sang, huai +
anonymous others**

A writing intensive at the Catonsville site of Baltimore City Community College
Refugee Youth Project in collaboration with Press Press team members: Kimi
Hanauer, Bomin Jeon & Valentina Cabezas.

A NOTE FROM THE PRESS PRESS TEAM

Over the past two years that the Press Press team has been in residence at the Catonsville site of Baltimore City Community College Refugee Youth Project, we have had the pleasure to collaborate with and learn from the many young writers and artists of the program. During our stay, we've been able to publish a range of works together and investigate various themes pertaining to our young writers' lives, many of which have roots in Myanmar. The multi-cultural space we built, which is made up of entirely second-language speakers (all of the Press Press facilitators present are also second-language English speakers), attempts to combat traditional classroom power dynamics by creating a situation where each member of the group is both a facilitator and a learner. As group members, we are supportive of each individual's way of expression, rather than assimilating into accepted American-English speaking models. We believe that the artwork we produce exists within the time and experiences we have together, rather than singularly existing in our published written works.

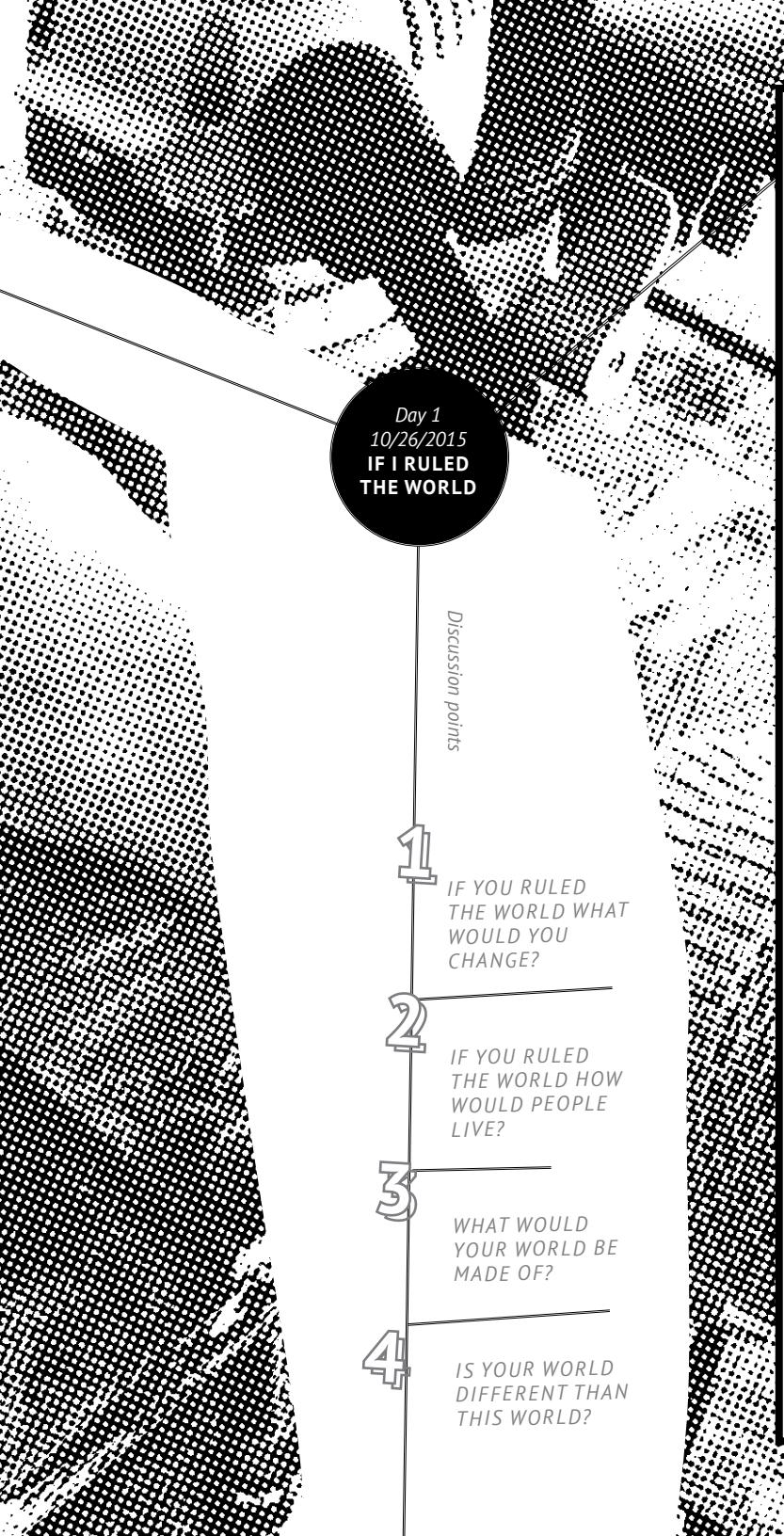
In our on-going conversations, similar themes reemerge, such as our hopes for the places that we come from, or rather, the places that we left in order to find more fruitful lives in Baltimore, as well as our hopes for Baltimore, for our families and friends. In reaction to these on-going conversations, we attempted to thoroughly investigate what our ideal, collective world would look like in a three-month intensive writing retreat that took inspiration from the prompt If I Ruled The World. In an interview with Dan Paz (Shifter Magazine, Issue Nr. 20) Tania Bruguera notes, "Education is the moment when you know yourself as a social being, of the inescapable situation of your role to come as part of society." Inspired by this mode of thinking, and while witnessing a historic moment in Burma's evolution into, what we hope will be, a truly democratic nation, our conversations were constantly shifting between real-time happenings, our futuristic aspirations and our roles as active beings in the world we envision.

The following pages include a timeline of the conversations we had as events in Burma unfolded and selection of writings that group members produced. We hope you are able to share in some of our experiences together through this collection of works.

Kimi Hanauer, Bomin Jeon, Valentina Cabezas & the extended Press Press team

"You have to allow yourself the freedom to imagine how you want things to be. Social codes are such a burden. I understand there are certain limits. I always say that laws are designed for the abnormal moments instead of the normal moments. Laws would not be necessary if education was good. Education is in part propaganda for the legal system. Education is futurity."

- Tania Bruguera



A BRIEF HISTORY OF MYANMAR

Myanmar, also known as Burma, is the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia that is bordered by Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand. After three Anglo-Burmese wars over a period of 60 years, the British completed their colonization of the country in 1886 and administered it as a province of India. The British government ruled primarily among the Burman populations, and had less involvement in the affairs of the rural ethnic minority groups. This disproportionate control of power deepened the existing divisions between the Burman population and the minority groups, which include Karen, Chin and Rakhine.

In the beginning of World War II, Aung San, a student activist, and 29 others, known as the Thirty Comrades, fought alongside the Japanese who invaded Burma to overthrow the British rule. However, Japan did not follow through with the promise of returning Burma to its people and Aung San negotiated with the British to push the Japanese back out of the country. After years of Aung San's work towards independence and after his assassination, Burma was finally granted independence on January 4, 1948. Unfortunately, Burma still struggled to establish a democratic government as it was challenged by a civil war that was lead by communist and ethnic groups.

General Ne Win, one of the Thirty Comrades, staged a coup which allowed his new Revolutionary Council to suspend the constitution and institute an authoritarian military rule. By replacing the parliament with a military dictatorship, jailing opponents of his party and cutting off contact with the outside world, Ne Win established a one-party country, heightened tensions between ethnic groups and eventually completely drained the nation's economy.

Since the initial years that Ne Win took power in 1962, there were many sporadic protests against the military ruled government that were brutally suppressed. However, in 1988 demonstrations broke out across the country in, what was known as, the 8888 Uprising.

This uprising was started by students in Rangoon and was motivated by a frustration with the military rule, police brutality, economic mismanage-

SHADOWS OF TOMORROW
by Madvillain

Today is the shadow of tomorrow
Today is the present future of
yesterday
Yesterday is the shadow of today
The darkness of the past is
yesterday

And the light of the past is
yesterday

The days of yesterday are all num-
bered in sum
In the world once
Because once upon a time there was
a yesterday

Yesterday belongs to the dead
Because the dead belongs to the past
The past is yesterday
Today is the preview of tomorrow but
for me

Only for my better and happier point
of view
My point of view is the thought of a
better or try
Reality is today of eternity
The eternity of yesterday is dead

Yesterday is as one
The eternity of one is the eternity of
the past
The past is once upon a time
Once upon a time is past

The past is yesterday today
The past is yesterday today
While we're searchin' for
tomorrow

Discussion points

2

**WHAT DO YOU
ENVISION FOR
BURMA'S
FUTURE?**

11/8/2015

**"EXACTLY FIVE YEARS TO THE DAY
SINCE AUNG SAN SUU KYI WAS
RELEASED FROM HOUSE ARREST,
HER OPPPOSITION PARTY HAS WON
THE MAJORITY OF SEATS IN HIS-
TORIC ELECTIONS IN MYANMAR...AS
OF SATURDAY, AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S
PARTY, THE NATIONAL LEAGUE FOR
DEMOCRACY, HAS WON 247 SEATS
IN THE LOWER HOUSE AND 131
SEATS IN THE UPPER HOUSE, FOR A
TOTAL OF 378 SEATS IN THE ENTIRE
PARLIAMENT. THAT NUMBER IS WELL
BEYOND THE 329 VOTES REQUIRED
FOR THE PARTY TO ELECT THE NEXT
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNTRY."**

(BBC World News, November 13, 2015)

"To view the opposition as dangerous is to misunderstand the basic concepts of democracy. To oppress the opposition is to assault the very foundation of democracy."

- Aung San Suu Kyi

ment and complete corruption within the government. On July 23, Ne Win announced his resignation of BSPP party chairman and warned civilians, that "When the army shoots, it shoots to kill." Protests continued to escalate until August 8th, when troops began a four day massacre, firing into crowds of civilians, from monks, young children, students, doctors and housewives, killing thousands. At least 10,000 demonstrators were killed across the country, although Burmese authorities only formally acknowledge 350.

After giving a speech urging civilians to find peace through non-violent ways in front of a crowd of 500,000 at the Shwedagon Pagoda on August 26th, Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of independence hero Aung San, became a symbol of the struggle for democracy in the nation. When she returned to Burma, Aung San founded the National League for Democracy (NLD) and this summer became known as the Democracy Summer. However, on September 18th, 1988, control of the country was handed to a 19-member State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). Only a few months later, on July of 1989, Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest for "endangering the state."

On May 27, 1990 Suu Kyi's NLD party swept to victory with 82% of the vote of multi-party election but SLORC refused to acknowledge the election results and has retained its repressive grip on power. Aung San Suu Kyi remained under house arrest for almost 15 years, from July 20th, 1989, until her most recent release on November 13th, 2010. Due to all of these years of heavily militarized rule, close to half-a-million Burmese people have fled their country of origin. Most refugees reside in neighboring or nearby countries and approximately 98,000 live in the U.S.

On November 13th, 2015, the NLD secured the required two-thirds of the contested seats in parliament to win a majority. Burma is looking forward to upcoming presidential election and its way towards a peaceful and authentic democracy.

Day 2
11/2/2015
**REFLECTING ON
THE PAST**

Discussion points

1
WHAT IS
SOMETHING
THAT YOU HAVE
STRUGLED WITH?
2
HOW DID YOU
GROW FROM THIS
EXPERIENCE?
3
HOW DOES THIS
EXPERIENCE INFLUENCE THE
NEW WORLD YOU
ARE BUILDING?

1

2

3

A

ABOUT AUNG SAN SUU KYI

"Every thought, every word, and every action that adds to the positive and the wholesome is a contribution to peace. Each and every one of us is capable of making such a contribution."

- Aung San Suu Kyi

Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize awardee, is a Burmese opposition politician and chairperson of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in Myanmar. Inspired by the non-violent campaigns of US civil rights leader Martin Luther King and India's Mahatma Gandhi, she organized rallies and travelled around the country, calling for peaceful democratic reform and free elections. During her 15 years of house arrest, from July 20th, 1989 to November 13th, 2010, Aung became one of the world's most well known political prisoners and was nicknamed "the Lady." In a historic moment for Myanmar, on November 13th, 2015, the NLD secured the required two-thirds of the contested seats in parliament to win a majority and are working towards establishing a true and authentic democracy for Myanmar.

Discussion points

1

HOW DOES AUNG SAN SUU KYI DEFINE DEMOCRACY?

HOW DO YOU HOPE AUNG SAN SUU KYI'S NEW POSITION WILL CHANGE BURMA?

Day 4
11/16/2015
MAPPING CHANGE IN BURMA

11/9/2015 - 11/12/2015

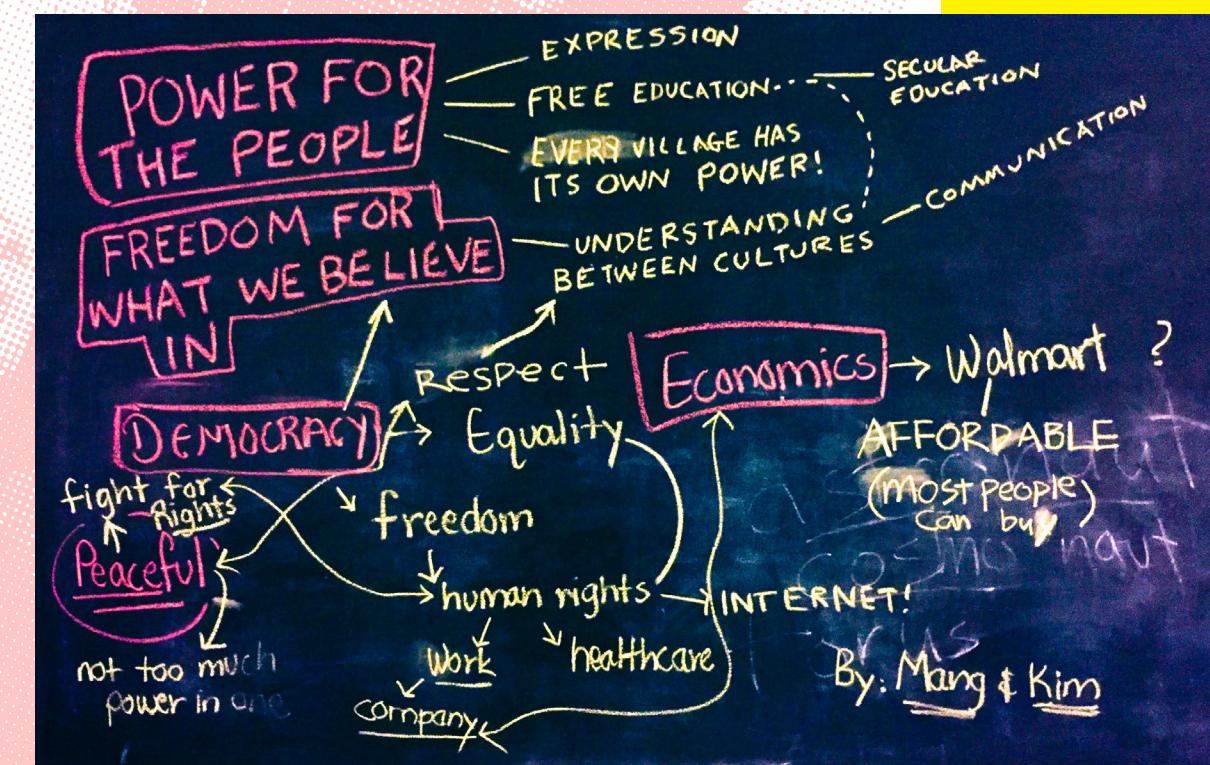
"URGENT UPDATE BY THE SHAN HUMAN RIGHTS FOUNDATION: BURMA ARMY SHELLING AND AERIAL BOMBING OF 6,000 CIVILIANS IN MONG NAWNG TOWN ARE WAR CRIMES.

THE SHAN HUMAN RIGHTS FOUNDATION STRONGLY CONDEMNED THE BURMA ARMY SHELLING AND AERIAL BOMBING OF MONG NAWNG TOWN IN CENTRAL SHAN STATE BETWEEN NOVEMBER 9 AND 12, 2015. THE FIRING OF SHELLS AND BOMBS DIRECTLY INTO THE CENTRE OF THIS DENSELY POPULATED TOWN OF 6,000 PEOPLE, DAMAGING HOUSES AND CAUSING CIVILIAN INJURY, MEETS THE DEFINITION OF WAR CRIMES, AND MUST BE DENOUNCED AND ACTED UPON BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY."

(Shan Human Rights, November 20th, 2015)

MAPPING CHANGE IN MYANMAR

chalkboard manifesto #1



Discussion points



1

WHAT IS A
HUMAN RIGHT?

2

READ AN
EXCERPT FROM
THE UNIVERSAL
DECLARATION OF
HUMAN RIGHTS.

3

DO ANY OF THESE
SEEM IMPORTANT
TO YOU?

4

WHAT WOULD
YOUR OWN
DECLARATION
LOOK LIKE?

11/22/2015

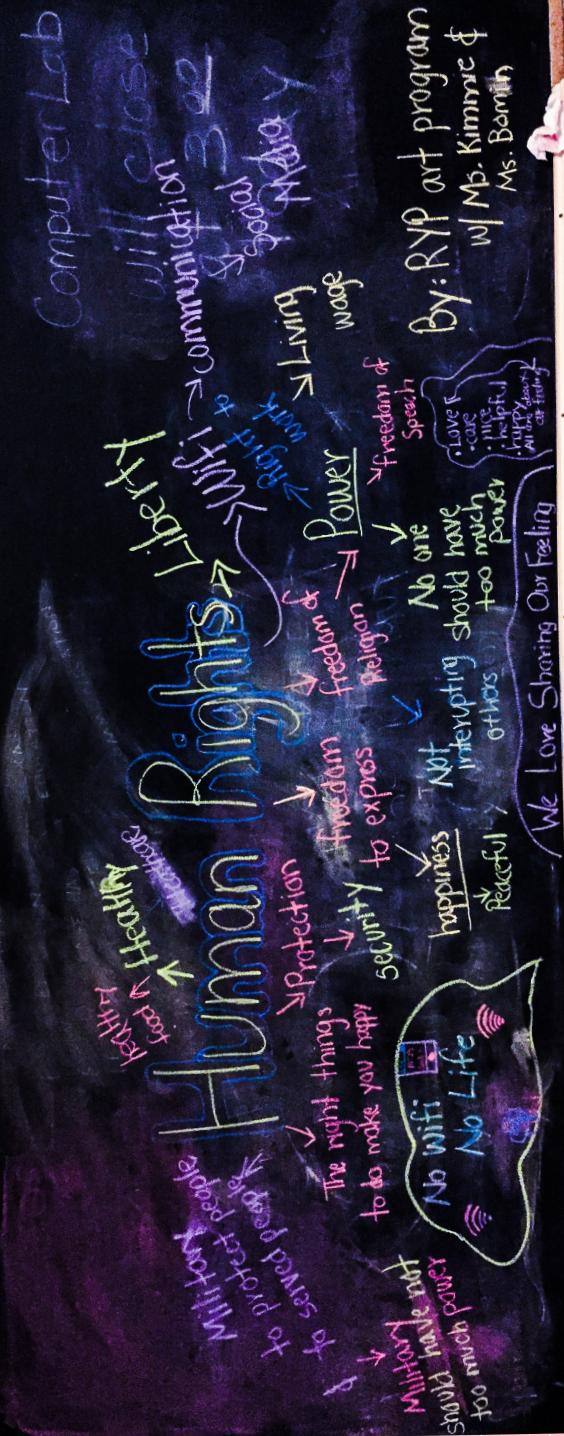
"ALMOST 100 PEOPLE HAVE DIED IN A HUGE LANDSLIDE IN A REMOTE JADE MINING AREA OF NORTHERN MYANMAR, OFFICIALS SAY. RESCUERS WERE STILL BATTLING TO DIG THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS OF LOOSE RUBBLE AT THE SITE IN HPA-KANT ON SUNDAY, AS SEARCH TEAMS CONTINUED TO FIND BODIES IN ONE OF THE DEADLIEST DISASTERS TO STRIKE THE COUNTRY'S SHADY JADE INDUSTRY."

(Aljazeera, November 22, 2015)

Day 5
11/23/2015
DECLARING OUR
HUMAN RIGHTS

MAPPING OUR HUMAN RIGHTS

chalkboard manifesto #2



UMAN RIGHTS DECLARATION UMAN RIGHTS DECLARATION

1 All humans are born free + equal! **2** Everyone has the right to do what they want without interrupting others! **3 No slavery!** **4** “Rule of Law” you have to follow (even the president must follow the law)! **5 Equal protection to all!** **6** President cannot act without the people! **7 All humans should have the right to vote!** **8** Freedom of religion! **9 Public services (transportation, firefighters, magnet-**

ic trains)! **10** Social order (good police)! **11 Free healthcare + good doctors!** **12** Public world wide WIFI (right to social media! No wifi no life)! **13 Right to work for a living wage!** **14** Military that protects the people! **15 Freedom of religion–free to worship your own god!** **16** Freedom of speech and expression! **17 No violence!** **18** No war! **19 Peaceful protest!** **20** Freedom of secular education! **21 No racists in school + no bullying!**

ABOUT BALTIMORE CITY COMMUNITY COLLEGE REFUGEE YOUTH PROJECT

Baltimore City Community College (BCCC) provides outstanding educational, cultural, and social experiences to the citizens of Baltimore, the state of Maryland, and surrounding areas. For nearly 30 years, BCCC has provided English language training to meet the critical needs of more than 5,000 refugees who have settled in the Baltimore metropolitan area and statewide. Its range of programs for refugees includes English language training, citizenship preparation, and job skills training. The Refugee Youth Project (RYP) is one of the College's unique refugee programs.

The RYP is fully grant-funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement's School Impact Grant. This grant is distributed and monitored by the Maryland Office of Refugee and Asylees which provides support and services to refugees to ease their transition into American society, and serves as a resource to the governor and general assembly on refugee and immigrant policy. The RYP currently serves more than 300 refugees between the ages of 4 and 21 from over 17 countries.

Learn more at www.refugeeyouthproject.org

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THE FOLLOWING IS A SELECTION OF WRITTEN WORKS BY MANG, KIM, LUN, DIMMY, HUAI & SANG

WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?

The morning comes in
don't know what will happen.

Thinking back about yesterday
a lot of tears are full with me

The days are started
the times, the second, minutes are keep moving
don't know what will happen

Learn in the day but none of works is in my mind
the period, the day, the mod of our time
are changing one by one

Still don't know what happen
people chasing me and bullying me

What happened? Still don't know
nothing in my mind even to think about work
& school stuff

Times to go home don't feel like it
because don't know what happens

What if I get home and mom's welcome me
with a lots of tears & sadness

What would I do
I'm still young, how can I help my mom

Days goes by and comes the night
hearing about yelling & shouting

What's wrong with me?
why this happened to me?

Acting like a good, nice person

But why inside of my heart always full with
tears.....?

PEACEFUL OF POLICY

The policy turn into peaceful means.
That make it-up a new laws: For ex.

Freedom of Speech

Freedom of Religion

Freedom of Assemble and

Freedom of Express.

Will turn a freeze place to a warm
place for a bright world.

People were feel free to worship their own God.

People can vote with their own decision.

Help each others with no comparison.

To have a beautiful world and peaceful
as a park that full of colors.

SILENT WORDS 1

The world that I can't spoke out loud
But spoken from bottom heart

I cried out from inwardly

No one could understand or hear, but me
just because of

Don't want to contraries others' opinion,
Also no one would feel

Any harassment as well.

Just for refusing contrary.

Desperately hurt form inside,
What had been retraining to speak.

"...a time to weep and a time to laugh
a time to mourn and
a time to dance..."

(Bible: ecclesiastes 3:4)
That is life.

But the rustle of leaves
send me back to normal
Ultimately deeply cried inside and

IT'S FUNNY HOW THINGS CHANGED

Now's already turned akid
Time had been passing by
as fast as words could fly

CUPLE:

The relationship between boys and girls
were not firming as ancient.
No stronger than the string.
It is not spontaneous between
the relationships no more.
Everything's concealing to each other.
Just spending time
as a free time to each other
Don't waste people's heart and
their time with nonsense.

FAMILY:

Everyday was different from the past.
As the develop country,
there's no time together with family.
Had much focusing on their goal
as forget the time as normal.
When they're gathering,
they thought it's funny
how things changed.

ENVIRONMENT:

People thought time goes usually, but
they laughed as they thought.
Some were lived their life
with doubtful future.
Changed your loneliness life
to a bright future.
Don't waste your time
meaningless.

UNTITLED

What make me happy?

- > Play soccer
- > Listen to music
- > Watch movie
- > Pray together with family
- > Play with friends
- > Sometime go to school
- > Sometime go to church

Thing that I know but I can't doing?

- > make teacher happy
- > make friends happy
- > make parent happy

Why are student fight?

- > their parent

Why people want do bad thing?

- > rich or poor
- > their parent

1. What is most the important thing in your body?

- > your heart

2. Why are christian people different form other people?

- > all christian people one person

3. Why people don't want to go church or school

- > teacher
- > student
- > to hard
- > too lazy

SEE / SEA

Someone ask me
did you see at the sea?
I was like, will you
repeat me again?

WORK / WALK

When I learn english at the first time
and they teach me like
I walk to work.
I was like
work to work
so they don't understand me

WAR / WORLD

At my history class and she taught me
and she told us like this "Now we will talk about
the second war in the world" and she told me
to read so I read it but my voice is not clear
so she made me to clear so pronounce this letter
"War of World," and I did, but for me, the sound is the same
but for them, or for who are really good at English
it is different.

BUY / BYE

My friend told me again
Will you buy for me some chips
and my friend to me *bye*
and I'm so upset so I ask them again
will you repeat me again pls....

DAD / DEAD

In the breaking news
I heard one thing that I've never forgot
YOUR DAD IS DEAD I was like
WHAT I didn't get it.

BEACH / BXTXH

Base on my friend that I heard
We will go to some nice place on vacation
and I ask them *where?*
They told me
We will go to the Beach and right there
there's a lot of Bxtxh, and I was like
OMG....Really! I don't understand
what you just said.

FOOT / FOOD

I ate food and ppl ask me the middle of I was eating and then said kick that but with your foot and I was like Hey! No. I'm eating the food that's impossible. They be like hahahaha.... this guy is so dumb.

GAS / GUESS / GUEST

I visited to some of my friend and they told pls...will you turn on the gas cause the guest will hungry and starving and I said huh and my friend said I guess that's all thanks buddy I was like OMG!....

BUT / BUTT

Apologize this sound like creepy, but just wanna explain how I confused to speak those words. I chill out with my friend and my friend told me "some fat people is so big and their ass... I mean ass is butt, but it sounds for me confused when I read those words like but and butt.

AMBITION

When I will grow up and I will graduate my school.

I want to be a doctor, then I will be take care of my family and help poor people.

But now I can't speak English very well but I try too hard to speak English very well.

I was try to success my goal.

That's what I pray for God.

I need to achieve my ambition I need hard working more than my friend.

That will be my goal ambition...

TAKE CARE OF MY FAMILY

My family will not never live city. Then if I will got job kind my ambition, I will send them to city. I will be like morning sun shine of my family. I bring them my hope with happiness.

MY IMAGINATION

Every chance I get, I think of you.
 I imagine scenes that I want for it to happen.
 I want to do so much with you.
 Even just imagining of us being together is so soothing but
 after all these, it's just an imagination.
 It's not reality and it's just in my head

YOUR ATTENTION

I want your attention on me.

LIFE

As you have already learned,
 Life is unfair
 It doesn't always go as you plan
 but know that God has his way for us.
 so don't worry and have faith in him.
 Life have something for you.
 There is a reason that you're here today.
 Always be happy and grateful that you are here today.

UNTITLED

Time go by itself
 Life go by fate but
 it has limited like stop as death.

yesterday is closed door
 Today is experience and seeing or struggle
 Tomorrow is your time need to prepare
 Never forget when you're succeeded.
 like how you got to the top cause
 everyone started from the body.

Singing is my appetite
 Listening is my feeling

IF I RULED THE WORLD

If I rule the world, there would be peace.

There will always be plenty of food so that no one will ever be hungry again.

It would be poverty-free because it breaks my heart to see people without home.

It would be safe for everyone.

There wouldn't be a big difference between social classes because I don't like seeing poor people.

There wouldn't be bad things or bad people who influence good people to follow their foot step.

I would influence every person to do good, be happy, be loving, be considerate, be kind, be helpful, be trustworthy, be caring, and all the good qualities.

I would enforce laws that doesn't allow violence, drug, and other bad things people do today.

LIFE IS UNIQUE

Life is Unique in each and every way
It isn't about all the happiness but

It's also about the failures

Failures are things that make you success,
Makes you stronger, makes you
Become a better person. That's how life is,
All you need to know is that you should
never

Up, just like Thomas Edison once said;
Our greatest weakness lies in giving up.

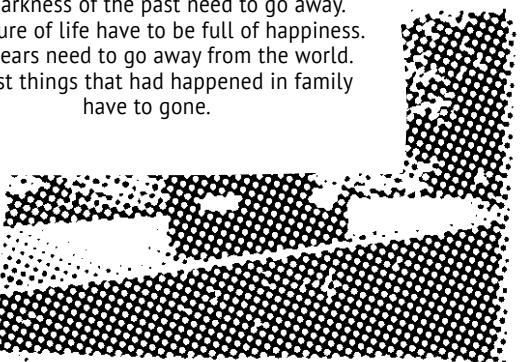
The
Most certain way to succeed is always
To try just one more time.

ENVISIONING THE FUTURE

My life will be so bright as a rainbow.
 It will fill with a colorful on me.
 When my dream was come true,
 It will be like a blue-sky and
 It will be different from the past.
 I will leave my shadow as my past.

UNTITLED

The darkness of the past need to go away.
 The future of life have to be full of happiness.
 Mom tears need to go away from the world.
 Hardest things that had happened in family
 have to gone.

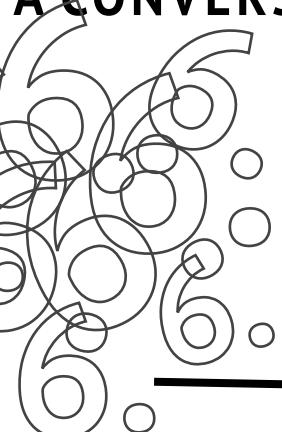


FRIENDS

Having fun with friends / squad was
 the fastest time spinning by.
 Create some memories was
 the fastest time passing by.
 Don't know why the time that much fast.
 Happiness is the best moment but
 don't let the people on the top of you
 Use your time so faithfulness.

Time'll never waiting, but we wait.
 This world keep on spinning.
 Use your time wisely as
 you will never regret.
 Dance by yourself and
 Get a new lesson every day.
 Fight your life as you wish to be.
 Life isn't easy but
 there's a way to fight for it.
 Think the things as positive.

NUMBER ONE IS EMPATHY A CONVERSATION WITH KURSTEN PICKUP



Kursten Pickup has coordinated BCCC Refugee Youth Project (RYP) since 2009. Throughout her tenure she has expanded after school programming to serve more than 300 newly arrived refugees per year. Prior to joining the RYP team, she obtained a Master's in Community Arts from the Maryland Institute College of Art, where her studies focused on using art as a tool to create social and cultural change. Ms. Pickup strives to support English Language Learners by using art and education to meet her participants social, emotional, and academic needs.

Bomin Jeon is an educator at the Catonsville site of Baltimore City Community College Refugee Youth Project and is a member of the Press Press team. She is a multidisciplinary artist born in Seoul, South Korea and now resides in Baltimore where she is pursuing BFA in Interdisciplinary Sculpture from Maryland Institute College of Art.

Bomin Jeon: What were the beginning stages of RYP like? How did it start?

Kursten Pickup: RYP began as a program of Baltimore City Community College. They had free English classes for adults and parents really wanted a support system for their children because they couldn't read English or help them with their homework. Really, it was just the college responding to a need based on what the community wanted.

It started off with 10-15 kids meeting volunteers at a library and it just grew from there as the program received more funding. Something that it does that I really appreciate is that it adapts to meet Baltimore's resettlement needs. When I started we had 40-50 Meskhetian Turks out in the Reisterstown area, and we ran an after school at Millbrook Elementary for three years. After they had integrated and were doing really well in school and their community, we were able to start over to serve a different population in Northeast Baltimore. RYP has grown and changed in a lot of different ways over the years. Community arts has become a larger priority in my time as the coordinator.

BJ: Do you have any significant moments that stand out to you from the years that you've worked with RYP?

KP: Oh yes, of course! There are so many important moments. There's a lot of challenges that the youth

face and you have to help the families get over them, and for me, I think one of the most important things is providing consistency. Watching them overcome their challenges and witnessing their progress is an amazing process. Two years ago, one of my first students received a full ride to the University of Maryland. At the time of her graduation, her dad was a bit sick so he wasn't going to go. They gave me an extra ticket and I said no, I'm not going to go if you don't go. And at her graduation she was awarded an additional scholarship that no one knew about! At that moment he turned to me, crying, and he was like, I wouldn't be here unless it was for you pushing me to come. I saw him this week and he was like you are the second mom to my kids, you are part of my family. Even though I haven't gone through their experience as a refugee, people can still make an impact just by being a consistent, caring community resource.

Kimi Hanauer: Are moments such as this, when you see kids really overcome challenges, what motivates you to do the work?

KP: Yes, the moments where our participants overcome their challenges and are proud of their accomplishments. I mean they have been through so much, but they are so resilient...so it's beautiful to be part of their journey.

KH: They are so resilient! Is there something that you would say that you've learned from a specific person or

over your time with the families?

KP: I think the number one thing I see often is just the opportunity for free education. Our students are so appreciative of educational opportunities and they want to take advantage of what the system has to offer. It's really inspiring.

BJ: I feel like some kids, you can see they have a commitment to themselves to do better, to be excellent in whatever they do. It's really cool to see that in young kids.

KP: We had a student who really broke the mold at Patterson High School—who was the salutatorian, spoke at graduation, and went on to a four year college. He really inspired other kids, like hey I can do that too, and two years later, another RYP student became the valedictorian.

BJ: RYP is really a space for people to motivate one another. Just in general, I'm really amazed by how they help each other learn something and there's really no shame. Is it difficult to work with so many different sites? They probably all pose slightly different challenges?

KP: The sites are so different—one consistent thing we do is really trying to create this safe space where everyone feels like they can make mistakes and learn at their own pace. The catch with having so many different after school program sites is that the need is so different. High school and middle school students need more support with employment training, homework, and college prep. Probably the biggest difference is also the age range, the K-5th kids need so much more structure, plus there's like 90 of them in one room! We also try and integrate community arts into all three sites to meet the emotional and social needs of students.

**TECHNIQUE IS
IMPORTANT BUT IT'S NOT
AS IMPORTANT AS THE
PROCESS THAT TAKES
PLACE DURING
ART-MAKING.**

KH: How has your art background affected or prepared you for this type of work?

KP: I think the biggest way that my background has affected my job at RYP is just basically the foundations I learned from community arts. I think for me, as a trained illustrator, I really focus on the craft and technique itself. After graduating from MICA with an MA in Community Arts, my practice and beliefs changed. As a facilitator, I still believe technique is important but it's not as important as the process that takes place during art-making. And so, if there's a dialogue that takes place that changes the way a student views the world or another person, then most often, that change is more important than that end product created. I think using art as a tool to bridge cultural differences or explore challenges is a perfect fit.

**THERE'S SO MANY WAYS
TO USE ART CREATIVELY
TO TACKLE SOME OF THE
CHALLENGES THAT THEY
ARE GOING THROUGH,
WEATHER IT IS BULLYING,
DISCRIMINATION,
IDENTITY ISSUES,
CONFLICT RESOLUTION...**

KH: One thing Bomin and I have been talking about is trying to create a space where individuals in the group feel free to envision the world they want, say whatever they want and use the language that they want to use. And that's definitely something we sense more broadly in the atmosphere at RYP.

KP: I think there's so many ways to use art creatively to tackle some of the challenges that they are going through, weather it is bullying, discrimination, identity issues, conflict resolution, any of that coming all the way down to just expression or language itself. Art has really become RYP's universal language. Through the process of expression, it doesn't matter what their level of English is, but through the process of expression, we can have this alternative way of communicating with one another.

KH: There's so much potential for ESOL and learning

English to be an alienating experience, but at RYP it's really prevalent that that's not happening. And you also seem to work in a reflexive way, responding to specific needs and having to change the structure as different needs become more prevalent...

KP: One thing we have been asking ourselves is if we are an educational program that has these other components, or if we should become a completely arts-based organization? And I think right now, since English and homework help is such a big part of what we do, we will always be education-based.

Honestly, sometime in the near future I will probably be leaving RYP. Someone with a bigger vision or new skill set will take what I have established and make it even better. That's a beautiful thing. When I accepted the job, I was so excited to hit the ground running to implement new programs. My hope is that someone else with new ideas can take it even farther.

KH: What would you say are a few of the elements that make for meaningful education?

KP: A lot of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teachers have amazingly big hearts and are willing to go above and beyond to do things for their students. I mean, they bring the students clothing, food, assist with finding community resources, shelter and more.

Having a safe space to appreciate and celebrate diversity is really important. I think finding relevant topics to the youth, and making subject matter student-centered and engaging is also important. Energy and enthusiasm has to be really high!

BJ: In order to be consistent and to be grounded, you have to constantly be responsive to whatever is happening in the city or with the places the youth come from. How do you keep yourself grounded personally?

KP: Occasionally, I take a break from my normal RYP duties and lead relevant workshops for the youth. I think finding a way to overlap my passion in developing those workshops or giving the youth a platform to raise their voice helps keep me grounded.

When the media exploded with images of the refugee crisis and the debate began, some our students really took a hit because of their religion or their backgrounds. So instead of isolating that population to do a project, we facilitated a bigger conversation with a larger group

of high school students. After small group discussion, they designed t-shirts that were more about inclusion for everyone; the design had a circle with a peace sign in it saying *culture and knowledge, culture is knowledge and knowledge is culture*. One student was really adamant about keeping *get to know people* and he just kept saying, you just have to get to know people. He spoke about people withholding judgment and forming relationships. They are incredible humans and I was thrilled to be part of a powerful moment. I think that kind of work, even though it is outside of the scope of things I should be doing, is really what keeps me going. I think when you know that your meeting a community need but also doing something you really love—it's not really work.

KH: How do you deal with cultural tensions within the program itself?

KP: When we started our Moravia site, we were so excited to have this new program, but what we didn't realize is that there would be as much conflict within our own space. It was kind of a wake up call for us to realize that when you combine 20 different populations, you still need to give them that space to get to know each other. Helping them understand that their stories are unique, but that they also have commonalities, helped build empathy and understanding. Also, RYP has over 250 dedicated volunteers each year. They play a crucial role in welcoming, supporting and teaching our youth as well.

KH: What do you think the artists' role is within creating social change or whatever it is that needs to happen in general?

KP: I think first and foremost, the artist should respect the community's needs and make sure that your agenda is completely aligned with theirs.

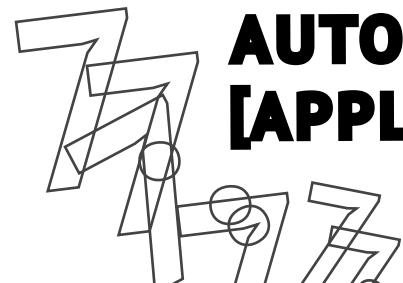
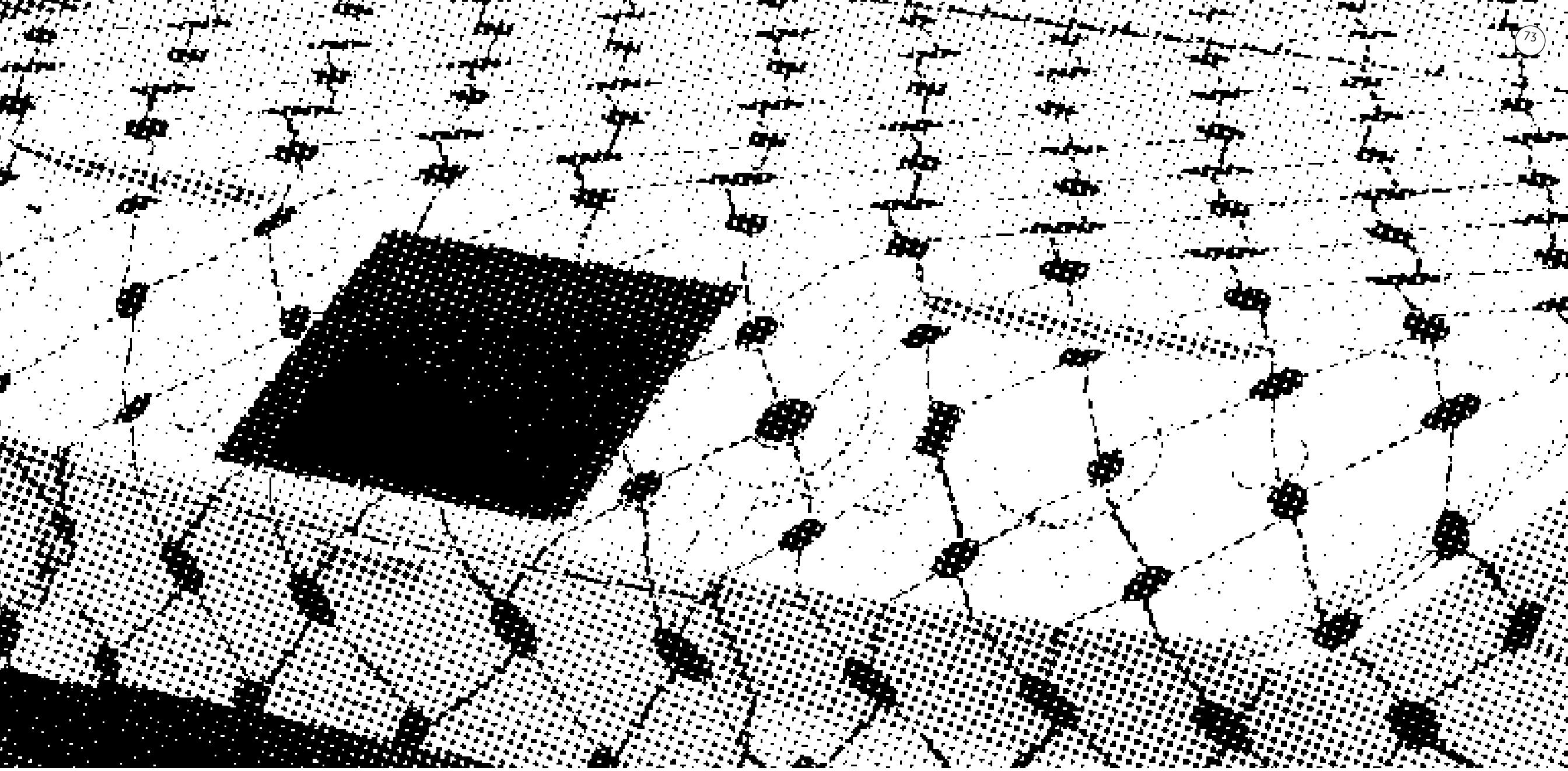
I also think of the artist as more of a facilitator. They are there to ask questions and generate information and ideas from the community. Part of their role to be there to provide expertise in technique while using it to lift up and highlight the community's voice.

THINGS DON'T HAVE TO BE "BEAUTIFUL" TO BE GOOD...

BJ: Last question... What would you do if you ruled the

world? What would ruling be and what kind of world would it be?

KP: If I ruled the world, I would wave a magic wand and spread a little more empathy. Living in a more compassionate and empathetic world would be ideal for me. Thinking about a recent trip to Cuba, I know things don't have to be "beautiful" to be good. I think being open and accepting, promoting empathy and understanding of the good, the bad, and the ugly... is number one. And gosh, more equality!! I really agree with a lot of the things our youth wrote in that manifesto. They are brilliant!



AUTOMATION, [APPLICATION]:

**besan khamis
+ rahul subhash shinde**

BESAN + KIMI TALK ABOUT PALESTINE & PRINTING FREEDOM:

Kimi Hanauer: What are a few things you say 100% yes to?

Besan Khamis: Colors, Black power, and 110% YES to rolled grape leaves.

KH: Amazing. I saw you using this phrase online, so I wanted to ask, what is your vision of an artistic Palestinian intifada?

BK: I think, first of all, this is just inherent to resistance: everyone says 100% NO to occupation. Not everyone is an artist, but everyone under occupation is creative in some way. So an artistic intifada demands change through being creative and embraces art as a medium for change. I think art can be used as a representation for people's own infinite possibility as humans. Over there, people have accepted that art can be therapeutic, but I think people need to embrace art as something that's more than that, something that's valuable in and of itself. I believe in resistance on all fronts, but I do want to push art as another viable resistance medium.

KH: So what do you think is the importance of metaphor and imagination within the conflict? Is it important at all?

BK: Yeah, it totally is. I think that symbols and metaphor are omnipresent in that land... like walls, guns, keys, the kufiyya, birds... they all enter in and out of the land of metaphor and reality. Walls exist in real life but then they are used in metaphor interchangeably. And then symbols are everywhere. They also get misused and mistreated. For example, if an Israeli flag, with a Star of David, is fluttering attached to a bulldozer that crushes your house, that's a messed up use of symbols. Symbols are everywhere and they are used and misused all the time.

KH: Is there a productive way of using metaphor and symbol?

BK: They both sustain lives and sustain people's imagination and, of course, imagination is crucial, because I think it's the imagination of the colonized and occupied people that really keeps them living against all odds. It allows the people to question; what if there was no watchtower? What happens if I do get justice? How do I get around this checkpoint? What if co-existence? That's all imagination. It's all crucial.

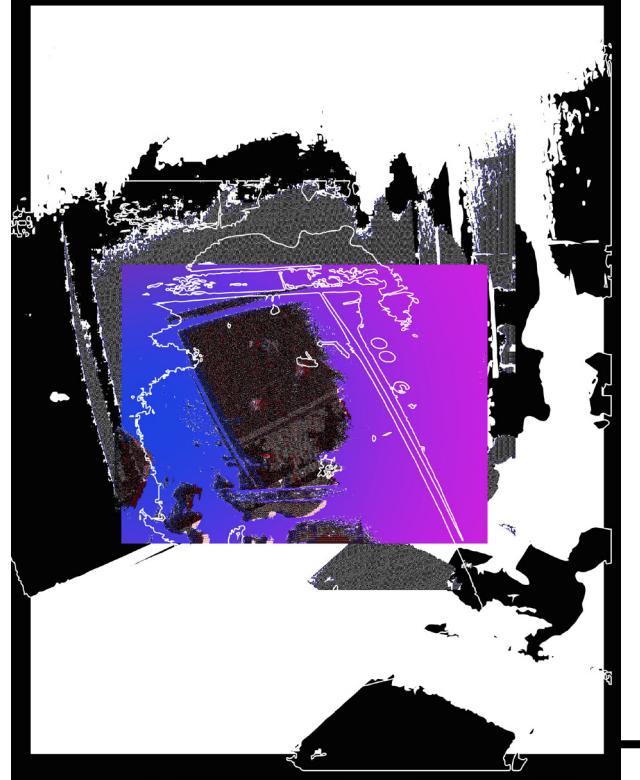
74

© Introduction ©

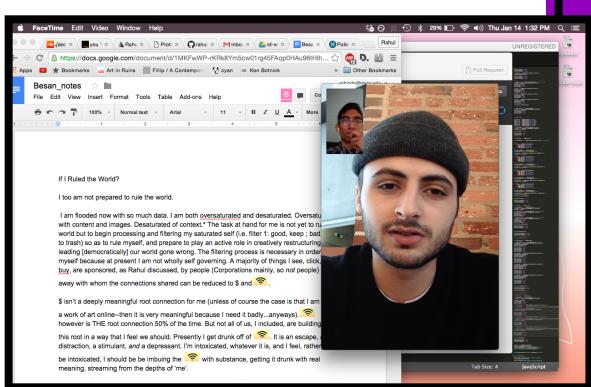
Rahul Shinde: I was approached by Besan Khamis late in November 2015 to participate in this publication. Prior to this project, conversations and debates about the Palestinian fight for independence with both Besan and his family brought to light the necessity of my practice to start becoming more politically and socially conscious. It became clear to me, that the way in which I achieved a certain level of self definition, has come from a deeply rooted concern for ethics and its application. As I move into a working space that exists in relation to larger systems of power, it is becoming more important to shape my practice in relation to this concern and its implication on my own state of being.

I'm a first generation American, the son of parents who both came from India to pursue higher education. My father was the first and only member of his family to leave the country at the time. Because of this, I've always felt the necessity to be very careful in what I say and who I say it to. Our position, both socially and politically, after

(Python Experiment 1.6, Rahul Subhash Shinde)



75



my parents were settled in America, was seen as something very fragile, or at least, that is the impression that I have been left with. As a result, my work has taken a primary interest in formal experimentation. This is a place of safety for me, rules broken in the realm of the abstract (imagery) have no bearing on what we define as concrete, what we see doesn't necessarily have to correlate to what we experience and behind this mask is where I take shelter.

Images included in this project were generated with the help of a computer program I wrote early on in the project. The program, titled "Image Outliner," is a small image editor written in a programming language called Python, and was originally meant to replace my reliance on Illustrator's live trace function. The script also allows batch editing and conversion which greatly expedites my production process. Image Outliner takes an inputted image(s) (fig. 1) and retrieves the RGB value of each pixel that makes up the image. When the script first starts, it asks the user to set a range of values (a number between 0-255) for the program to check for. If the pixel matches the user-defined parameters it changes the pixel to black, otherwise it sets the pixel value to white (fig. 2). The script then loops through each pixel of the newly generated image (fig. 2) to see if they are black and, if they are, checks to see if they have a white pixel adjacent to them (which would indicate that this pixel is an edge pixel). If the pixel meets the aforementioned parameters, it is kept black, if not, the pixel is changed to white (fig. 3).



fig. 1



fig. 2

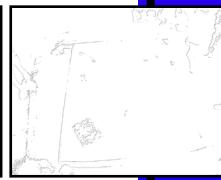


fig. 3

KH: Metaphor, symbols and imagination are also tools that artists use—how do you think artists can play a significant role in the conflict or social movements in general?

BK: There's tragic and inspiring art language, like poetry from Mahmoud Darwish and puns and jokes. Everyone tells jokes and plays with tongue twisters. Lots of rappers now are just messing with the words of occupation and daily life. That's what I think art is; those jokes and tongue twisters. The role of the artists is to tell our old stories in new ways so they don't get stagnant. To reuse symbols and not let them become stagnant. Posing questions and just making things that are inspiring. I don't think it's the artist's role to answer the questions, people put all that pressure on artists, like what's the solution, what do you propose? I think artists need to be aligned with a left-wing progressive political movement.

IT'S THE IMAGINATION OF THE COLONIZED AND OCCUPIED PEOPLE THAT REALLY KEEPS THEM LIVING AGAINST ALL ODDS.

KH: It's really easy to get stuck in the impossibilities of reality—imagination can be a useful tool when you decide not to accept the situation as it is and decide to work for something better.

BK: It's also our role to be positive, but always just keep poking and being playful no matter what our situation is.

KH: Yeah, that's really one of the tasks of this project; envisioning something that critiques by way of being positive.

BK: There's this book called the "The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist," written by Emile Habibi. Habibi uses humor and satire to skewer the Israeli occupation and pry apart its absurdity. I see myself as a pessoptimist... Palestinians are pretty hopeless. We are pretty hopeless about the world. Shit's been wrong for 70 years and for 70 years we've known the lie of progress. And we have seen no change. But at the same time, we are able to be satirical and creative with what we've been given and I think that's how a lot of artists are too.

KH: You've talked to me a bit about being dedicated to 'the peasant.' What do you mean by that?

login: Fri Jan 15 10:03:43 on cons
ls-MacBook-Pro:~ rahulshinde\$

GB This shits fucked up
Noah 2:33 PM
N ?
Shaleena 10:31 AM On my way! Order without me if you haven't already :P
CM connor muething 9:53 AM yeah yeah, I'm getting back tomorrow
Josiah Yesterday word yah, all of the stack exchange forums that I found...
Marrisa O Yesterday cool cool, also, thanks again for having us all over the o...
Andrew 1/12/16 Yo come chill at Marisa o's
A

76

make a phone call but do u wan
I'm heading home, I'll hit u up in a few hours
You
W

77

BK: I mean that my art-making is rooted in a particular history. I come from hard-working farming people, even on my U.S. side—my mother's father comes from a farming family in Nebraska. That is my heritage and I don't intend to leave that behind. I'm not in the art world to mingle with the bougie crowd. I haven't fully figured out how to do those fellahi roots justice through art, so I just can say that everything I do is dedicated to them and I'm thinking about them.

A peasant—I guess that just means, brown person trying to survive... white person trying to survive... everywhere, all over. I think about Hispanic men and women selling flowers on Northern Parkway. I think about my grandmother who lived a humble life and raised seven children and that was her life.

(Freedom Printer, 2016, Besan Khamis)



KH: What makes you feel free? Can you tell me more about the Freedom Printer?

BK: I think just me being in motion, and moving. And I'm lucky to be able to move freely as a Palestinian. When we say "free Palestine," a significant portion of that freedom we are talking about is just movement. Being able to move from the town to the city just to work. When you ask a lot of Palestinians how they are affected by the occupation, they will say they just can't move, they live in tiny con-

The content below borrows its form, loosely, from that of a play, or physical performance, with sections subdivided into different "acts." All of the writing was initially generated over a one week period while I was living at my parents house in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The writing was developed alongside intermittent conversations over facetime with Besan that would usually be in response to, or later inform, the writing from the previous or for the next day. The text as it exists now feels as if it begins and ends in transition, ideas were loosely pursued and expanded upon based on impulse. Even now, writing this introduction, I find there to be many problems in my logic (many gaps in its transcription as well), coming from either ignorance and/or arrogance. However, I do feel comfortable leaving this as a document to record and archive my thoughts on the subject at this point in time.

◎ Act 1 Definitions ◎

Establishing a theoretical framework and language for the documentation of exploratory research work.

DEFINITIONS (primary definitions taken from dictionary.com):

Abstraction: Freedom from representational qualities in art and the quality of dealing with ideas rather than events.

OR the absence of comprehension in relation to what we perceive as concrete.

Ahistorical: Lacking historical perspective or context.



OR to work ahistorically may refer to the desire to work in ignorance of the linearity of production, influence, and ideas conception, etc.

Assimilation: The process by which a person or persons acquire the social and psychological characteristics of a group.

OR perhaps better described through the metaphor of the physical theater. Assimilation is the process of constructing a costume or mask to be worn by the actor.

Automation: The use of a device or process working by itself, with little or no direct human control, in a system of manufacturing or other production process.

OR in this case, automation implies a type of independence.

Convenience: The state of being able to proceed with something with little effort or difficulty.

OR a crutch, without thought, what do we define now as inconvenient?

Community: A feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.

OR foundations, our tie to a physical reality, self definition

(Flag Burn, 2016, Besan Khamis)



fined spaces, they can't leave.

Also, just making things makes me feel free. Making art. Because I can imagine anything I want to do, and just make it real, and it is real...

Like the Freedom Printer, for example, it's a printer that I painted with the Kufiyya pattern and called it a Freedom Printer. A printer, you just send it a file. And if it's a good printer, it makes your file a reality. If we say we are printing our freedom, and it's happening now, then that's what's happening.

KH: Isn't it kind of a futile object? The object itself is a metaphor, that's printing more and more metaphors...

BK: The reason I'm painting it, is because I want to reawaken our symbols and reuse them. It's just a printer painted, it's a mundane printer-object, but everyone has to say 100% NO to occupation. Resistance should be everywhere. It should be in every object we use, the telephone, everything. They should all be resistant. All Palestinian objects should be in resistance to being occupied. It's also a metaphor for us, for Palestinians, demanding our freedom now. We are going to get rid of this occupation. We're going to print it out, no matter what.

EVERYONE HAS TO SAY 100% NO TO OCCUPATION. RESISTANCE SHOULD BE EVERYWHERE. IT SHOULD BE IN EVERY OBJECT WE USE, THE TELEPHONE, EVERYTHING.

KH: So what is your positive vision for Palestine?

BK: My positive vision, is my only vision: Jews and Arabs living in that land under total equality. And it should be secular. Like Malcom X always said, religion should stay at home.

KH: Do you think a resolution is actually possible?

BK: I mean, I think it's the only thing that is realistic at all, I think a two-state solution is impossible, it would just prolong. I think it is possible. We can make it realistic, it's what young Jews and Arabs can make happen. It's the only possibility, one state, all of us together, Palestinian refugees come home. It's

my most positive vision.

KH: Israel is an example of the failure of nations. The whole concept of nations in general is just not fitting for the Middle East.

BK: That's a huge reason the Arab world is in shambles; because Europe came tore it all up with arbitrary borders that pitted ethnicities against each other. But the whole world is made of nations at this point, so I don't know how else we could think about it.

(Flag Burn, 2016, Besan Khamis)



KH: What do you think happens when such intense violence is the norm?

BK: Well, you get kids with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), kids who are amputees, kids who only know violence their whole lives. They think it's the only way because it's all they know. You get people who are completely hopeless. When you are brutalized all your life, it becomes easy to just end your life and take another one's with you. When you are surrounded by violence you can become violence.

WHEN YOU ARE SURROUNDED BY VIOLENCE YOU CAN BECOME VIOLENCE.

KH: It just breeds hate.

BK: Yeah, but like I said, I am a by-any-means-necessary kind of guy. I don't necessarily condemn the violence of people who live under occupation, but I just don't think it's the only way, and I don't think people need to be killing themselves. That's why I think art needs to be taken seriously. I do think it gives hope and is a viable form of resistance. We kind of have to make a spectacle of ourselves for the west in order to gain sympathy. And that's a way to do that, by making art—it's a very viable resistance.

18

through a network of relationships.

Democracy: Control of an organization or group by the majority of its members.

OR what we ultimately have to share, a projection of, what should ideally be, our collective will, marked by a sensitivity and sense of responsibility towards the individual.

Family: A person or people related to one and so to be treated with a special loyalty or intimacy.

OR a starting point, conception in relation to ideology, values, ethics.

Freedom: The power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint.

OR simply replaced with the word, autonomy or independence.

Reality: The world or the state of things as they actually exist, as opposed to an idealistic or notional idea of them.

OR reality, when modified by digital or physical, differentiates between digital spaces (the internet, screen based media, etc.) and physical spaces (spaces in which our physical presence).

Think: To have a particular opinion of.

OR in this context, an expression of doubt (e.g. I think that...), a means to place and acknowledge the limitations of the author.

ASSUMPTIONS (Automation):

- **In application:** (1) The process of automation can be applied to the manipulation of data in digital space. And, (2) the process of automation can be applied through the introduction of robotic/mechanized hardware to create some sort of change in physical space.

- **There is a necessity for automation in the pursuit of symbolic abstraction.** We need to reclaim symbolic space from commodification. Our visual language is a form of social currency, a small reflection of our capacity for self-determination i.e. do we have control over what we see while in public space? There is a necessity for the democratization of visual space.

- **A mark's significance can become apparent if it is able**

79

to be quantified or replicated i.e. computers construct images through purely numerical data. Each image is composed of a matrix of data points storing color values for each pixel that makes up the final image. Numerical abstraction presupposes a more concrete end, given that concept is being abstracted to numerical quantities that have more concrete physical representations vs. just keeping an idea in a purely theoretical space.

- **The process of automation inherently aids in the speed of production.** One of the main advantages of working in a digital space is the ability to automate repeatable actions. While I do believe the human hand, thought, or expression can never be truly replicated, it's important to question the limits of our capacity for production.

- **The process of automation comes with the possibility of reproduction and iteration.** To distill an idea down to a logical series of instructions gives a process the ability to be reproduced by individuals outside the initial production phase: the sharing of an idea will potentially be more clear.

- **Dynamic (or responsive) automation allows for the artist to become cognizant of the relationship that she/he has with the medium, implying that the practice of art making is a two (or more) sided conversation between what is being made and the maker.** This relationship contains many metaphorical qualities that may be exploited given the specific intentions of the artist.

ABSTRACTION/FREEDOM.. THE REACH (Besan Khamis)

1. **Shift:** Shift reality slightly, into a realm of metaphor and the impossible.

2. ***A fragile opening:** This shift to the imaginary leaves a fragile opening between reality and fantasy.

3. **Reach:** reach inside, grasp freedom.

***The Fragile Opening (Existing in the Eyelash Moment)**

Eyes open: With eyes open we can take what we see



KH: There is a lot of room for something like that, whereas violence just keeps repeating itself.

BK: But that's not to say that people haven't been resisting nonviolently for years, but the news just doesn't put that out there. There could be a hundred non-violent Palestinian protests in one week and people don't broadcast that. They only broadcast explosions.

KH: Yeah. That's another thing we can talk about, how language works to frames the conflict?

BK: Language is everywhere and it's how we understand the world, what we know is what we hear and say.

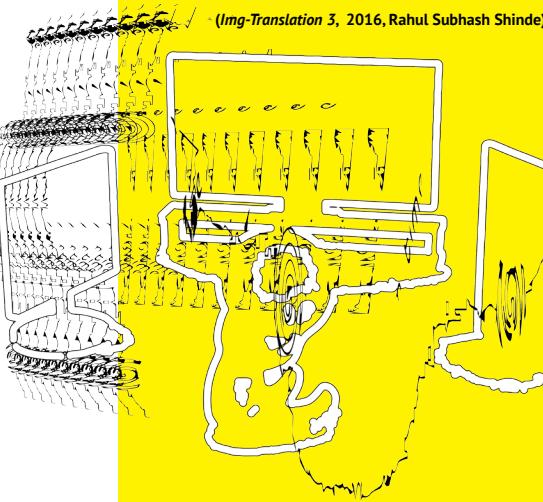
KH: And it's how we come to understand ourselves.

BK: Language cleans everything up. It makes the occupation "ok" because Palestinians are "militants, backwards-minded terrorists" who are "hate-filled" and violent for no reason. And Israelis are "soldiers" and bridge the gap between the west and the orient, and there's this Orientalist language that makes Arabs backwards and Israelis modern and they can be related to. So it's ok to bomb Palestinians.

And then there's other blatant racist language just in Israeli government. You probably heard when Netanyahu said something like 'we have to put up a wall to keep out the wild beasts.'

KH: It's disgusting that it's not even shocking anymore. Do you have any thoughts on how language then frames how we understand ourselves?

BK: I'm no psychoanalytic expert, but, I think for example, Arabs can even live up to Orientalist representations of Arabs. When you're told that's how you are and the only representation that you see of yourself is that on TV, then you learn to identify



with a certain image and idea of how you should be.

80

KH: As a Baltimorean-Palestinian, do you feel there is a relationship between the struggles both Baltimore and Palestine face?

BK: There totally is. They're obviously not the same struggles, but we can recognize similarities between each other and find solidarity. I say this phrase, "the hood is occupied." I consider the police presence and the surveillance as an occupation in Baltimore. I think it's equally brutal. I see neighborhoods devastated here, some looking in worse shape than in Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank. And then the racial inequality here is so blatant and the rich/poor divides, so real and abrupt, there might as well be 30 foot tall walls here like in Palestine. There's refugee problem here too – people getting kicked out of their homes. Those are refugee problems.

around us to be our concrete reality, however absurd our reality may be.

Eyes closed: Strands of light + color, faces + figures float past. Our surreal--or at least the surface of our surreal.

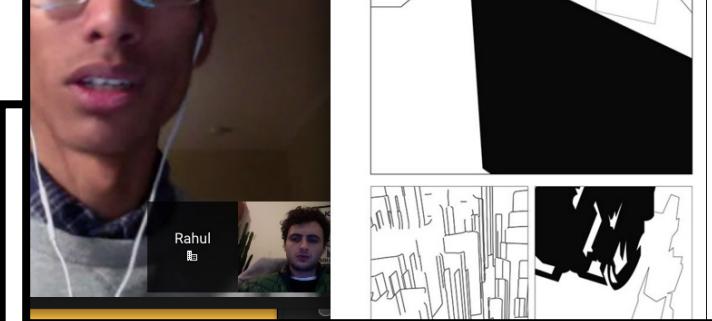
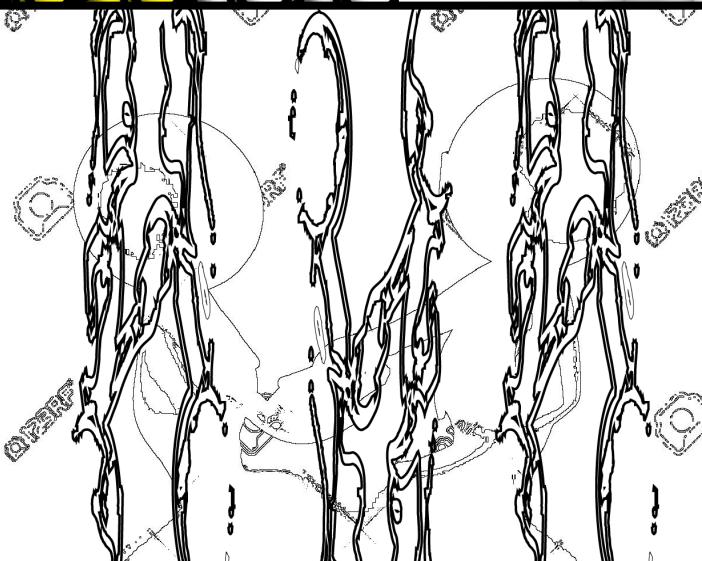
Blink: Eyelash Moment.

When we blink, for an instant, the concrete reality is obfuscated. But our eyes are not closed. Our eyelashes collide and create a haze, wherein those phosphenes of light, color, form (free shapes) are infused with the forms of our daily life. Reality is refreshed.

It is not possible to freeze this moment, but perhaps to exist creatively in it [If I ruled the world].



(Img-Translation
5, 2016, Rahul
Subhash Shinde)



◎ Act 2 Initial Responses ◎

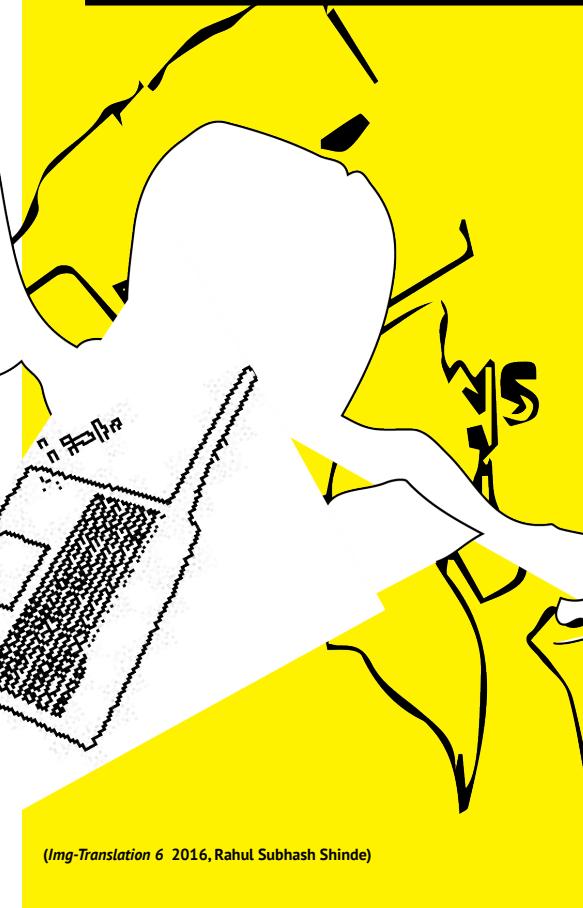
Initial responses, anxieties and misunderstanding, only through anonymity can I become truly vulnerable.

01.10.16

If I ruled the world? Maybe I have a hard time answering this question because I'm not familiar enough with myself, let alone the world that I am currently living in. It seems as though everything moves too quickly to string together logical relationships between the events and images that I am constantly exposed to. I've recently noticed, within my own practice, that I've been attempting to look at the world a-historically (or at least that is how I've become comfortable talking about my practice). Being a graphic designer, my work is primarily interested in the creation of form: design is applied in the service of content. An older idea (which is still taught today) suggests that the designer must be invisible, a crystal goblet, "what must the content do?" In this way, storytelling becomes the perfect metaphor for the purpose of graphic design, or, perhaps, it is better described as "the art of storytelling in the absence of a story," (our content becomes design itself). Perhaps an a-historical approach is meant to be a parallel for the rejection of content and the elevation of the viewer (individual / collective). Or maybe, to be more specific, a-history, the absence of time, isolates content in a way that makes it more conducive to form building.

In the absence of identity:

Not to be interpreted as: I have no identity, but instead: I only think that my current perspective is primarily de-



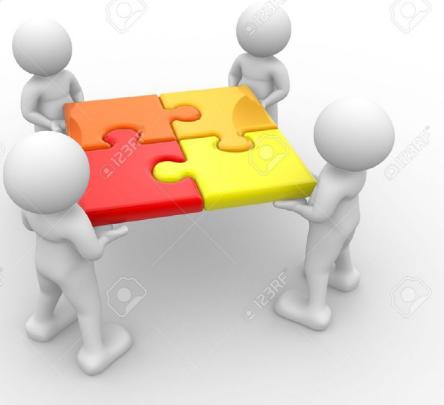
(Img-Translation 6 2016, Rahul Subhash Shinde)

fined through things that I have been exposed to externally.

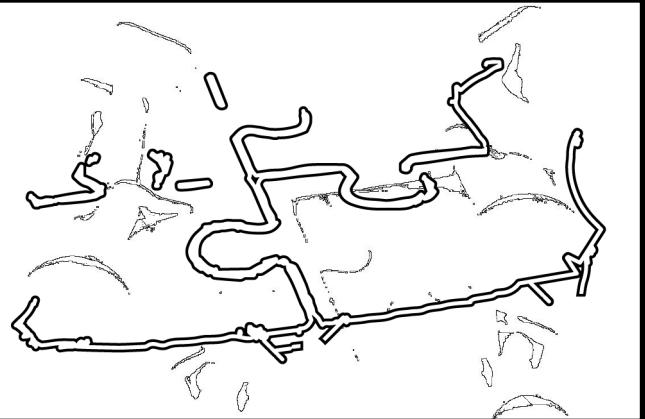
(maybe the definition of assimilation is closer to what I'm looking for.)

I have caught myself searching for where my home could be. As if, the color of my skin, my parents' country of origin, should affect my character.

Ethnically Indian,
Indian man,
Indian American,
American boy.

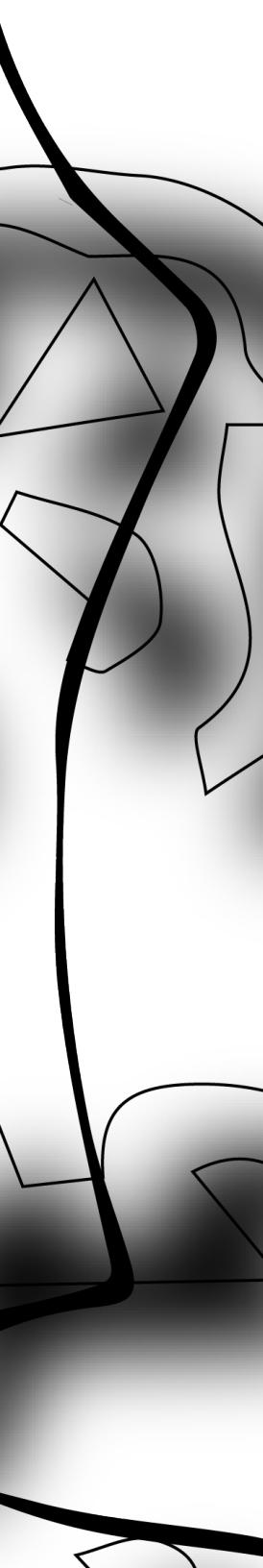


(Img-Translation 9, 2016, Rahul Subhash Shinde)

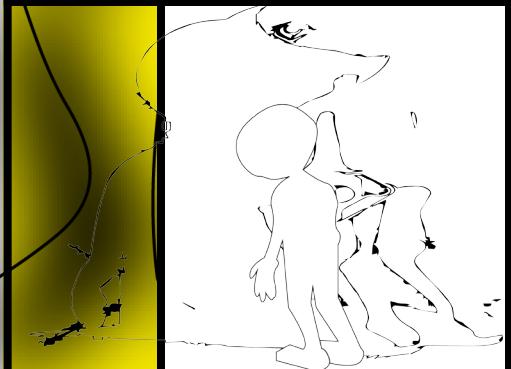


This is a list of things that worry me:

- It worries me that issues of conflict involve two sides who define the middle in different places.
- It worries me that I am unable to take concrete stances on political/and social issues (publicly).
- It worries me that I am sometimes able to justify violence in my mind but posture as a pacifist. I don't know if I feel comfortable elaborating on this any further.
- I have always thought of my work as a means of escaping contemporary realities. Is art inherently defined and justified historically? Is that even relevant anymore? It seems like context supersedes an artist's intention. Perhaps this has left me more confused than anything.
- I'm worried that my ideas, what I think is right, is informed in part by the privilege that I benefit from. In a way, I'm scared that my ideas come from ignorance.



(Img-Translation 8, 2016, Rahul Subhash Shinde)



(Img-Translation 7, 2016, Rahul Subhash Shinde)



What does compromise look like?

◎ Act 3 Landscapes ◎

Defining contemporary landscapes, internal, and external.

01.12.16

Established (or pre-existing?) media come with inherent limitations. By design they are meant to serve a specific function. While there is still room for creativity and alternative use (reality television as a platform for performance art) everything produced either exists inside of or in opposition to constraints defined by the medium. The internet provides a decent illustration of these limitations. While in theory the internet has an infinite webspace, its indiscriminate storage of information allows only for expansion not evolution. By this I mean that what we have internalized as truth on the internet will never change, it is a static relationship, all movement is lateral. However, regardless of whether or not my observation is true, there is still a large population that does not have access to this tool and, given the nature of tech-evolution, probably never will.

As a point of focus: I've always been very critical of the profession that I have chosen to become a part of. Graphic design, as it has existed/thrived in America, has primarily been produced in service of larger corporations which obviously come with private interests. While I don't think it is fair for me to completely denounce the private sector, given that this is probably where most of my paychecks will / have came from and the fact that it contains a lot of the start-ups and small businesses that I really admire, I do think that it is important to question why / what / how we are normalizing visually through advertising (better described as the visual promotion of private interests).

A while ago (2 years) I wrote that I thought design had become stagnant. I thought at the time that graphic designers should stand autonomously, as external commentators providing visual critique in a vein similar to what you see from groups like Metahaven or Art in Ruins. But now I feel as if this (my interpretation of these methods) is a passive approach to the issue, that in pur-

suit of these models, I am not seeking evolution but instead an escape. There is no responsibility in the realm of the theoretical, there is only concept, which, in most cases, is devoid of content. I was seeking the safety of academia while ignoring the inherent relationship that I have to capital interest.

Is it naive for me to think that people will react positively to sincerity? Is it possible to make the consumption of applicable information easy? I take so much of the shit fed to me for granted. I haven't read the latest apple terms and conditions. I've stopped looking for information on the drugs I'm taking. All I do is consume. My own habits have become (always were) antithetical to what I believe in.

01.13.16

I think it's easy to tie digital media to overconsumption purely through its speed and accessibility. I don't think it's fair to place a value-judgement on this fact, but perhaps it would be good to acknowledge that we are constantly being exposed to content that is advertised (or promoted). I think, of the hundreds of articles from Facebook that I consume during the week, at least 90% (this is a hyperbole) of the content that I accessed from my iPhone was "sponsored." Why are we slowly losing control of what we are exposed to?

For example, the other 10% (continuation of above hyperbole) of my feed is comprised of opinions backed by sources that I have trouble verifying. I've lost sight of the individual, the physical counterpart, the body connected to these opinions. Now I don't think this is necessarily a bad thing. The internet is and has been the future of the way we organize together as communities, share ideas as individuals, and celebrate our capacity for creation and collaboration, regardless of what defines us physically. This distinction is what has always fueled my interest in establishing and exploring the connections between digital and physical realities. What are we capable of when we translate our thoughts into the logic of pure data? What levels of expression will we soon be able to access?

But with this idealism, I still see so much frustration. The anonymity of the internet leaves the individual vulnerable. At the end of the day, interaction with the screen is one-dimensional. We exist in isolation; our access points are separated by time and space: where does empathy exist in this relationship?

I don't think the issue is with the content itself - it

seems to move too quickly to have any effect except for maybe to validate a set of externally constructed beliefs. But maybe it is important to activate and engage the individual. This person is consuming information on their own. I assume that the internet is kind of like a disembodied mob. To isolate that individual, to really speak to them on a personal level, I like to imagine that this would yield something that is both positive and productive.

◎ Act 4 Future Spaces ◎ (hypothetical)

01.14.16

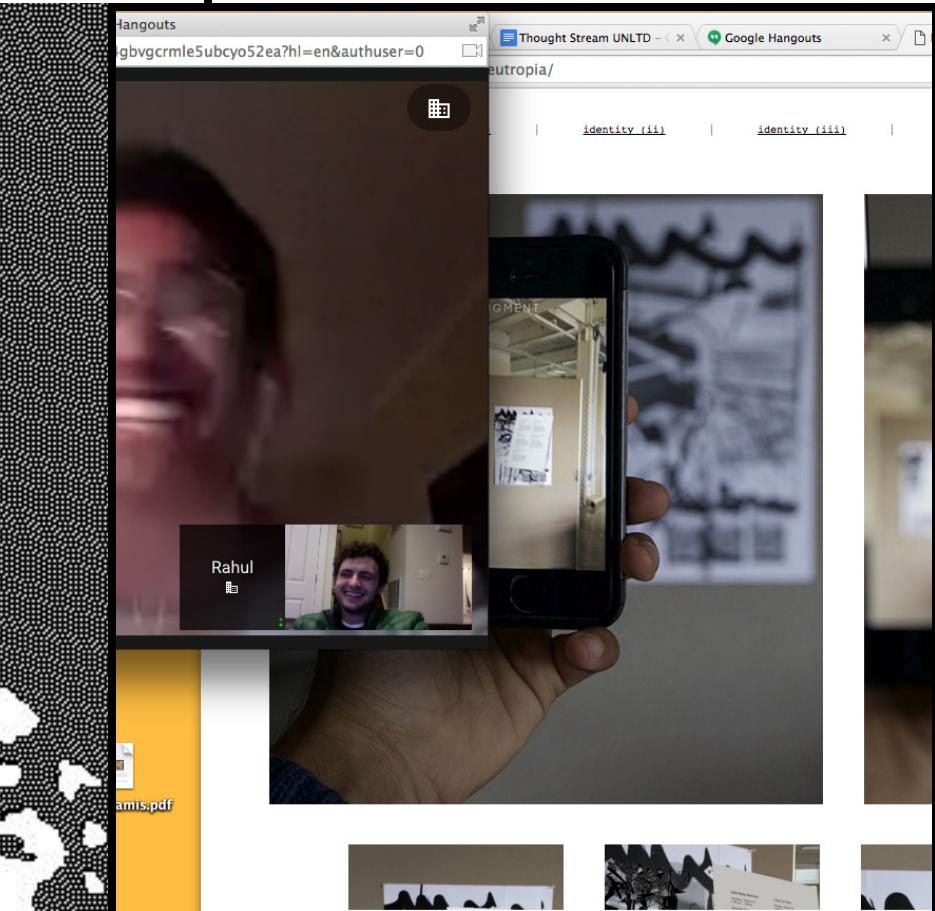
Many physical mediums inherently reduce the amount of senses activated, such as photography which both eliminates our binocular vision and leaves our sense of smell to be determined by the place in which the media is viewed (the same can be said of any of the other senses, besides sight. In a way, many modes of perception are deferred to chance simply because it is convenient). The same is true for digital realities. As of right now, we are still only capable of accessing its visual state through the screen or as projection. It is also possible to see data translated into physical action through robotics, and motion detection hardware/software is allowing for various experiments in haptic interfacing (see zero ui).

I think that this is important because there needs to be a continuous growth of positive creative spaces on the internet and emerging digital platforms. Not only that, but we must be ready to adapt to changes in technology that are integrated into disciplines outside of art / design. Inversely, we must also be in control of media evolution, defining uses for emerging technology and contributing to its creation through visual, physical, and digital experimentation. It is important to get ahead of the privatization of open distribution channels like the internet, which is slowly being monopolized into an arena for the propagation of oppressive, consumption based services. We must advocate for an open source system of sharing and documenting information. This is never going to be a call for censorship, but instead, one that emphasizes the responsibility of the individual

to contribute honestly. I don't think it is naive to think that the amount of compassionate individuals who exist can overwhelm corporate interest through sheer volume.

I've always imagined open source software to be something like a hardware store in which everything is sold for free. Through this method of distribution, you are not directly solving problems, but you are slowly giving the communities that you have chosen to contribute to more and more agency as they continue to develop their technical skills. Of course, parallel to this development, there must be direct action, supported by both physical and digital communities.

I think it is important for us to leave as many fully developed ideas for the next generation to easily digest and either move forward, or away from. We are at a period of transition, on the cusp of an overwhelmingly digitally aided age. I feel I have part of the responsibility to make sure this transition exists in its most accessible and honest form.



about the authors

BESAN KHAMIS

Besan Z. Khamis (b. San Francisco, 1994) is a Palestinian-American artist living in Baltimore. Currently, he is a senior at the Maryland Institute College of Art. His artwork consists of paintings, sculptures, performances, and musical compositions. His recent painting exhibition, *Father And Son*, was displayed at the Jerusalem Fund in Washington D.C.. He is currently working on multiple musical collaborations and a series of theatrical art performances called *Bird's Eye View of the Occupation*. Concerned about the treatment of his people, the Palestinians, Besan is focusing on the creation of a political artists' movement that specifically addresses Palestinian grievances.

RAHUL SUBHASH SHINDE

Rahul Subhash Shinde (b. 1994) is an Indian American graphic designer. His work has been shown locally in Baltimore and internationally in South Korea. He has participated in / initiated a series of collaborative design research initiatives, the latest of which (*or-maybe.info*) is serving as a nomadic design studio, collaborative research space, archive and publishing platform. He is currently finishing his BFA in graphic design from Maryland Institute College of Art.

FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT TO DREAM

A CONVERSATION WITH BRYANNA JENKINS

Bryanna A. Jenkins, B.S., M.A. is a Transgender Activist and Advocate based out of Baltimore, MD. She is the Founding Member and Executive Director of The Baltimore Transgender Alliance. Under Ms. Jenkins' direction, The Baltimore Transgender Alliance organized #BaltimoreTRANSUprising and The Baltimore Transgender March of Resilience in 2015. She will be relocating to Chicago, IL in Summer 2016 to attend DePaul University College of Law in order to obtain her J.D. degree.

Kimi Hanauer: What are five things you say absolutely 100% yes to?

Bryanna Jenkins:
 1. Treating myself to heels.
 2. Traveling.
 3. Eating delicious food.
 4. Encouraging other trans women in their successes.
 4. Binging on good television shows.

KH: In a video online, while speaking about following your dreams you said, "You have to fight for your right to dream. Fight for your right to be great." What does it mean to fight for your right to dream? What is the power behind and the risk of dreaming for something?

BJ: Fighting for your right to dream to me looks like eliminating negativity and negative people from my inner circle. It means taking risks to advance myself even when I am unsure of how things will pan out or the lack of confidence that I experience in seeing my dream to its fruition. The greatest power behind following my dreams is that I am in control of the narrative that I put out to the world.

KH: What does it mean to be free? Is there a moment that you can share that you felt a strong sense of freedom?

BJ: Freedom for me is being in relationship with myself. Freedom for me is me reclaiming my spirituality. Freedom for me is owning my truth and telling my own narrative. My strongest sense of freedom occurred when I began the journey of my transition. I knew that I was on a path that would ultimately lead to me learning to love all the things I liked, loved, hated, or found questionable about my life and lived experiences.

KH: Being a public figure is also like being a target. How do you protect and take care of yourself in difficult situations while also navigating your position as a strong leader and role model for so many?

BJ: I surround myself with people that love and care for me and ones that have consistently demonstrated friendship and loyalty to me. I also give myself permission to step away from activism and focus on different passions that fulfill me as a person. I love listening to music and I love traveling to new places and enthraling myself in the culture of the location.

PROVING PEOPLE WRONG BRINGS ME GREAT JOY.

KH: What is something that brings you joy?

BJ: Proving people wrong brings me great joy. I'm a Sagittarius so please excuse my sarcasm, but all of my life I have been used to people counting me out or trying to downplay my natural talent or abilities so I enjoy being successful to just remind people that they should be careful how they treat people because you never know the magnitude of the calling on someone's life.

KH: What are some of the challenges that you are faced with as a trans woman of color living in Baltimore?

BJ: While I have been able to do so many things in Baltimore, I have so much trauma here. Navigating life as a young queer black boy who grew into an adult trans woman has not been the easiest road for me especially in Baltimore City. Safety is one of the things that is constantly on my mind. Access to employment and educa-

tion is something I constantly worry about. I know that despite my achievements I am not exempt from being a statistic. That is one of the reasons why I advocate so fiercely.

I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SUCCEED BUT I AM ALWAYS AWARE THAT IT IS IN SPITE OF THE SYSTEMATIC OPPRESSION THAT I WAS BORN INTO.

KH: What changes do we need to make in order to build more equitable and inclusive communities?

BJ: I know this is something that no one wants to address or they conveniently avoid but the communities of privilege have got to address and actively work to counteract the racism and poverty that directly impacts how a society could be more equitable and inclusive of other oppressed communities. Yes, my lived experience as a Black Trans Woman is the result of living in a society that has a history of racism towards black people like myself and a society that uses income inequality to uphold and enforce racist ideologies. I have been able to succeed but I am always aware that it is in spite of systematic oppression that I was born into.

KH: What if you ruled the world - what would 'ruling' mean and what is your most positive vision of our world and of Baltimore?

BJ: If I ruled the world I would erase people's hatred of "Gayness." Now let me explain. I do not identify as gay. I do identify as a heterosexual trans woman. However, I know that it's people's hatred of gayness that it makes them almost impossible to accept trans people and uplift issues that impact my community. Gay is something that is "othering" and gay is perceived as weak. Femininity is also viewed as a weakness. If I were to erase the hatred of gayness then it would also make perfect sense for me to erase the hatred of women as well. It boggles me when I see or experience women discriminating or being hateful to the LGBT community because LGBT people are shunned because we are perceived to possess the same qualities that society signifies as

weaknesses and problems with women and femininity.

KH: To quote another one of your videos, "Goals without challenges is unrealistic." How do you stay brave in challenging moments?

BJ: I go through life now knowing that I will be tested. Life will always present obstacles and challenges and you can't evade them, avoid them, or neglect them. I always pray for endurance and I do a lot of self reflection where I intently try to understand what was I meant to learn from hard situations or what did this particular situation reveal about my character.

KH: What was your experience of the Baltimore Uprising in the Spring?

BJ: I was gagging watching the TV. Just seeing Baltimore, my city, in disarray like that left me speechless. I work downtown near City Hall and I remember being terrified seeing the National Guard lined up across all of the major downtown streets and news crews overflowing out of War Memorial Plaza. As much as I was outraged about the Freddy Gray situation I was still hesitant to join any actions because I fear for my safety on many levels. Will I be targeted by police? Will I be targeted by other protesters for being trans? Then I thought about where was all this rage when Mya Hall was murdered by the NSA. I still have many mixed emotions but the youth of Baltimore has definitely been activated and been given the visibility they need to bring the important issues to the forefront.

KH: What is your experience of Baltimore post the Uprising?

BJ: I still feel it is too soon to assess my feelings post Uprising because I feel like in the past couple of months pieces are being put into place for something even bigger to happen in this city. I definitely can still feel that the spotlight is still on Baltimore. From the Trans Woman of Color perspective I feel that we are not united like a lot of the Black leaders whether they be radical, political, or religious try to make it seem. I feel that black people have too much invested into the status quo and racial based systematic oppression to have unity where we are shunning Black LGBT people, upholding rape culture, and shaming those of us who have not made it out of poverty. Some leaders have reached out to me trying to engage the LGBT community but I truly feel we need more than secret alliances and private encouragement in order to get the reform that everyone is fighting for.

KH: In a video you posted the day of the Super Bowl you said, "It's not about what they call you, it's about what you answer to." This video and that sentence really touched me and I wanted to ask if you would expand on how you came to this insight and what it means?

BJ: Being a 27 year old woman who is hitting 30 in a couple of years I think about things like love, relationships, and marriage. I would love to be in a healthy and thriving marriage with the man I am meant to share my life with. I am a loving woman and I would like to show that to the right man. However I will not disrespect or devalue myself to satisfy my desires. I am conscious to the fact that I am a black, trans, and fat bodied woman. Men see these things about me and try to use them against me to take advantage of the insecurities that they perceive me to have. Also a lot of closeted trans attracted men want to project their insecurities with their attraction and manhood on to me. I have been mistreated and I have put myself into foolish situations when I didn't have the clarity to value myself. My awakening began when I took on the responsibility to do the work of loving myself unapologetically for who I am and I had to practice how to actively and directly dismiss those who did nothing to add value to the quality of my life by being in my presence. I cannot lie. It has been a hard and lonely road but the respect that I have gained for myself at 27 is something I would not trade for anything. So there is POWER in what you answer to and how you show up in life, love, and business. There is also power in telling someone exactly who you are and I know who I am because I have done the work on myself and I am still on the journey. It never ends.

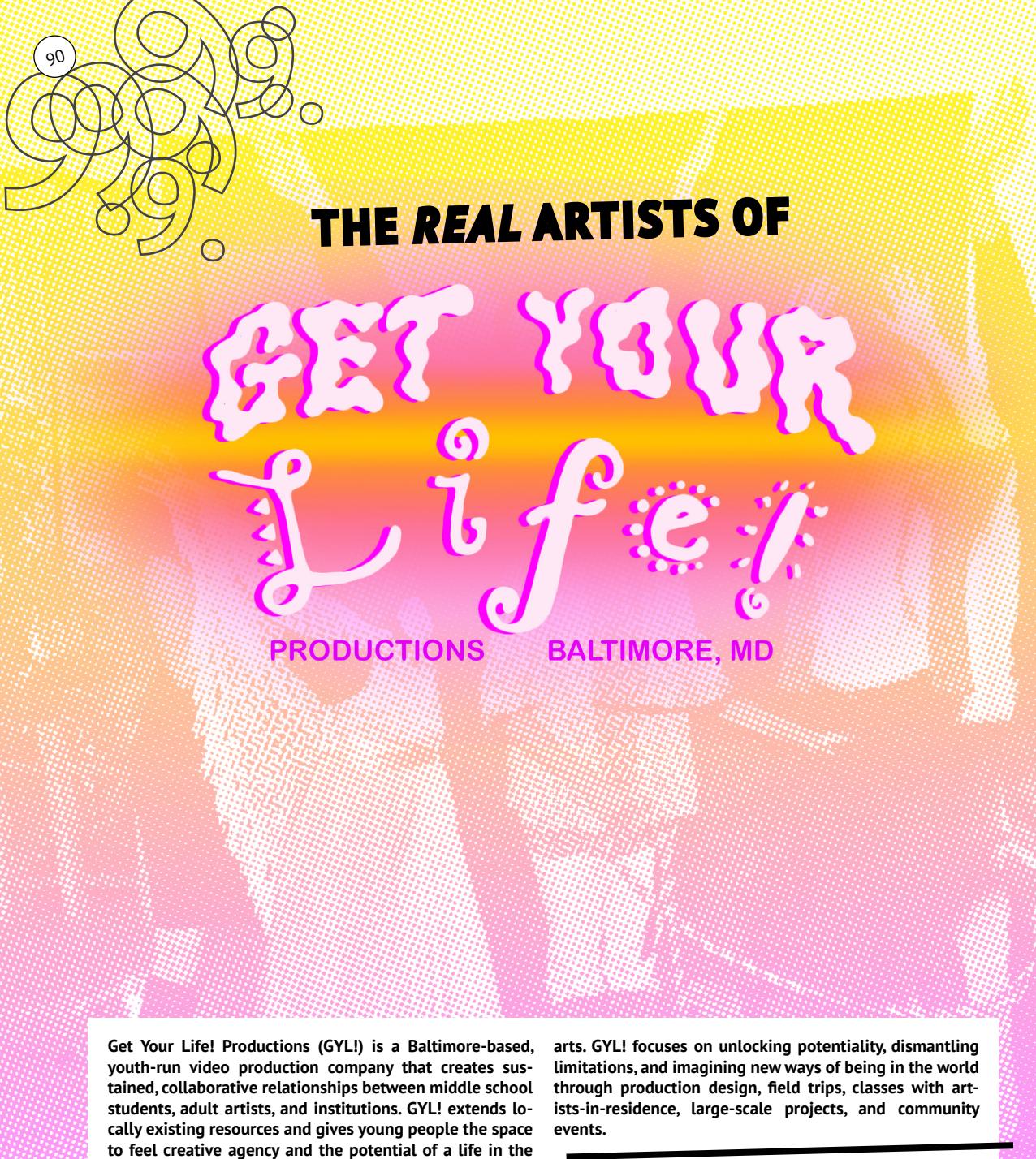
THERE IS POWER IN WHAT YOU ANSWER TO AND HOW YOU SHOW UP IN LIFE, LOVE AND BUSINESS.

KH: What is the most important thing you've learned from your activism work so far? Do you have any advice for young activists?

BJ: The first thing I have learned is that I am great, as I have always imagined I could be. Being on the front lines is more than just raising your fist or shouting chants. I have actualized so many skills and stepped into so many roles that I never thought I could do. I am

a scholar, an orator, an entrepreneur, a crisis manager, an organizer, a producer, a public figure, and a shit starter if need be.

To the younger baby activist. EVERYTHING IS NOT A PROTEST. Part of being a good activist is being able to discern how to most effectively approach issues so the greatest impact can be made for change. A lot of these younger activist are in it only for the fight and anger and they have no vision of what they want the world to look like after they have accomplished all of their goals. Also they have no idea how to move past the disagreement and incorporate those on the opposing side into their vision. There is an old saying in the black community that "all skin folk ain't your kin folk". That also applies to activism. I have found that not all of us are putting ourselves on the frontlines for the same reasons or even the same goals but it is my responsibility to know what my passions are and where my integrity lies so I can serve my community in the most beneficial way.



Get Your Life! Productions (GYL!) is a Baltimore-based, youth-run video production company that creates sustained, collaborative relationships between middle school students, adult artists, and institutions. GYL! extends locally existing resources and gives young people the space to feel creative agency and the potential of a life in the

arts. GYL! focuses on unlocking potentiality, dismantling limitations, and imagining new ways of being in the world through production design, field trips, classes with artists-in-residence, large-scale projects, and community events.

Crystal
Good-
man,
October
2015.



Jaida's room in
*THE SITUATION
ROOM* at Gallery
CA, November
2014.



I Want the
Author to say
that Xavier Wade
is there King and
that's me
Xavier Wade

92

WICHTIG!
WICHTIG!
WICHTIG!
WICHTIG!
WICHTIG!

GYL! auditioning actors for LIFE AS HOLLYWOOD, November 2014.



93



Still from *I Have Special Powers*, 2015.

“If I ruled the world... I would make so that everyone would have to read and learn Korean language because I love South Korea and how everyone will start doing everything like Korean. I would be the queen & South Korea love me. Thank you very much.”

- Malanda Jackson

“If I ruled the world... I would buy every chicken spot!”

- La'Daya Galloway

“If I ruled the world... ‘Let It Go’ from Frozen would be the national anthem and a chicken box and a half n half would be in every resturant.”

- Dalin Haleem



Still from *The Real Artists of Get Your Life!*, 2016.



By Jaida, the most wealthy, beautiful and powerful woman in Ethiopia of being a queen.

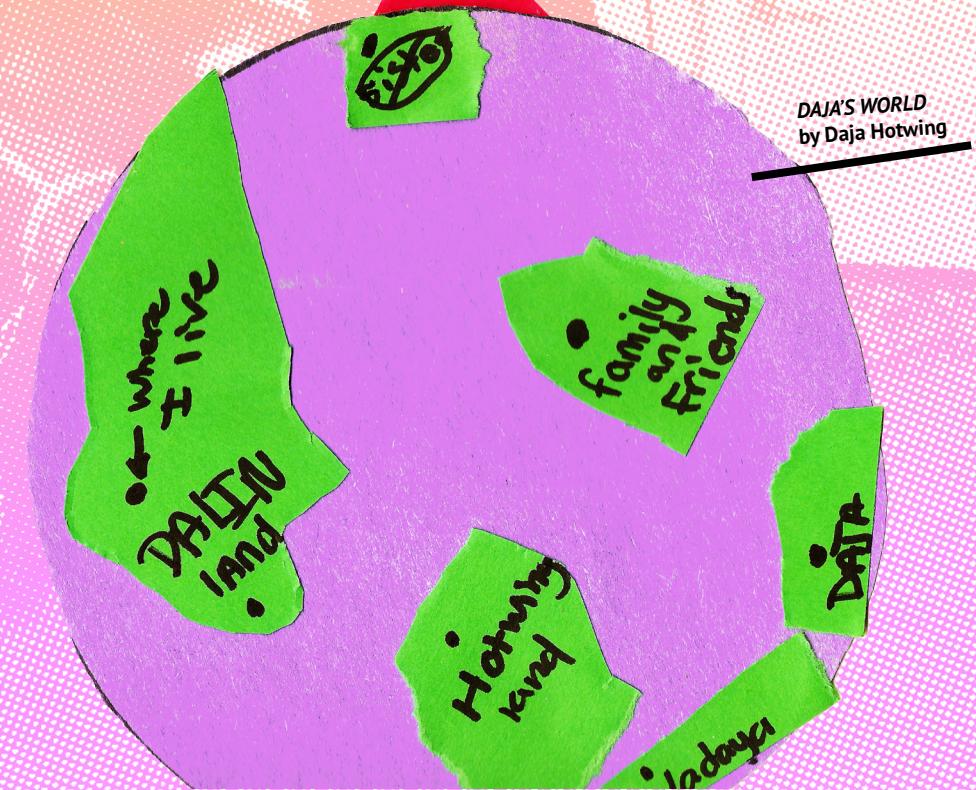


On set with
Champ the pony,
December 2014.



By Xavier Wade,
The King.

GYL! 2016 IS:



THERE'S NO NO! ONLY YES! A CONVERSATION WITH LORING CORNISH

Baltimore native, Loring Cornish, is a visionary artist whose work often takes the form of mosaics. He characterizes his practice as a form of prayer, as he constantly transforms and alters his own house as his work of art.

Kimi Hanauer: What are some things that you say absolutely 100% yes to?

Loring Cornish:

1. Do I want to make the best out of my life before I die? Hell yeah.
2. Do I want to try new things, even at this age in life? Hell yeah.
3. Do I want to transition from art into another career? Yes, Yes. Or do both.
4. Do I want to... everything is about my career! Do I want to try to make the best of my voice before I die? Yes. Oh yes.
5. Do I believe that Obama was a good president? Yes.
6. Do I think that every artist should own his or her own gallery space and building? Yes. Hell yes.
7. Do I think that artists should go beyond galleries and open their own spaces and forget the middle man? Yes.
8. Do I believe that artists should turn their living quarters into gallery spaces? Yes.

KH: That's a good list. I live in my own gallery too. It's kind of great. You can never leave your work, you're always there.

LC: Yes! You can never leave. And that's what propels you even quicker and faster in becoming a sustainable artist. When you are surrounded and when you don't separate yourself.

KH: That was one of my questions for you actually—one of the reasons I wanted to talk to you about *If I Ruled The World* is because I feel like your entire practice is about ruling your own world. What does it feel like to live in a house that is actually one of your artworks? Why is that meaningful?

LC: From the very, very beginning I've always lived in my work. When I first became an artist in California, I had a house and I immediately turned the house into a gallery space, the entire house, I forbade beds and furniture and chairs and kitchen appliances, I didn't give into any of that stuff. I turned everything into a work of art. Where I slept? I think I rolled out maybe a blanket and a pillow, so I could have that space during the day to have art on. At one time I had a replica of the Last Supper made of glass in my bedroom, and so I think what happens is, when I live in that environment like that, I'm constantly surrounded. And starting art as late as I did, I think acting like that and living like that actually has propelled me quicker, it's made me become more stabilized in the art community.

KH: There's something super in your face about your buildings, in a really good way...

LC: People say that's the whole pull of the place – usually the music is really, really loud. But you know, even when I came back to Baltimore and I got another house, I immediately turned that house into another artwork. Every knock and cranny became a canvas. And that's another thing, I think our environments should become canvases of who we are. I think, in this project, *If I Ruled The World*, I never even thought of that for myself before...

KH: That's why it's the question!

LC: Your perspective is that I do rule the world in my own environment. And that's exactly what I do. The house becomes my world and I take it and do exactly what I want with it. And even if other people don't understand your world, like, why would you put glass in front of your house?

KH: That's what is beautiful about being loud and putting it in people's faces—because many people probably don't and won't understand it, but that's the thing—who cares?

LC: Right. Who gives a fuck? You are absolutely right. People had so much opposition in the beginning, like what are you doing? Why are you glassing this house? Do you have permission? Who do you think you are?

KH: Did that opposition fuel your practice at all?

LC: Oh, well, I think what I do is I allow people to air out who they are and their opinions—because that's their world, but I don't let it affect my world. I be as nice as I possibly can to them, because I know in the end this is my house, and there's really nothing they can do about it except talk. And talk doesn't really affect me.

KH: The other thing about your work, and the way that you work, the type of energy you bring, is that everything about it feels really free. You give the feeling that you are really free.

LC: Extremely crucial. It's very important to be completely free and literally rip yourself with no holds bar, regardless of what people think or say. My whole thing was that I wanted to worship god full time without any interruptions. And so I quit the world of acting, I was on the movie set—I'll never forget it—I had this thought, you know, I wanted to worship him without any interruption and in my own environment. Which is crazy. But I still wanted to be free and at the end of the day, I quit. The next day, out of my worship came art.

And you know, my neighbors again thought I was crazy, and maybe for a moment I was, but actually to be free to do the thing that I wanted to in my own world, actually lead me to become an artist. I had no intention of becoming an artist. My degree is in mass communications! I had no intention of putting artworks together. And I also don't have a formal education in art—so I don't know the barriers, or what you should or should not do. Or the techniques, or how to come about this or that texture, I couldn't tell you about acrylic or oil...I just don't know!

KH: But that is part of what makes you free.

LC: Exactly. There's no no! Only yes! So if I get an idea, its yes. Its yes, let's do it! Let's see what happens.

MY NEED TO CREATE A WONDERFUL PLACE FOR PEOPLE TO ENJOY IS PART OF ME GIVING BACK SOMETHING THAT WAS SO FREELY GIVEN TO ME

KH: This project is also all about positivity, that's one of the reasons I wanted to talk to you. For me, I often feel like there's a relationship between positivity and frustration or anger—positivity is a tool I use to translate those emotions into productive energy. In your practice, do you ever have this experience of frustration and positivity fueling one another?

LC: You know, being an artist, we don't have steady paychecks. But the positive part of it is, of course, making a space that people can come into and love the work that you do. But then the other side of it is the actually making the pieces, getting the products together, and the process, the hard work, the time, the effort and the no sleep. And all the uncertainty of whether this is actually going to pay off—that's the frustration part of it.

I guess it all goes hand in hand, but sometimes it can be a little overbearing when you go like, what am I doing? I clean up, I make art, I mess up, I clean up, I make art, I mess up... but there is a leveling balance to being frustrated, and there is also a reward; that someone is touched, just by being in this environment...in my world. When you walk into this gallery, into this space, it's another environment, and there's a lot of work behind creating an environment where people can actually feel the energy of love, positivity, hope, empowerment and peace all around them.

KH: This environment, the positive space that you create, can also be read as a critique. Do you think there is a lack of this type of space, or maybe it's that there couldn't be enough of it?

LC: Well, I think my need to create a wonderful place for people to enjoy is part of me giving back something that was so freely given to me. When no one is in this gallery and I'm working on art and I'm worshiping God, it's the best feeling in the world. I'm in here for hours, just me and the music and the art, regardless of what's happening outside in the world. In the world that I rule,

there's so much peace and joy and happiness. Sometimes I'm crying because I'm so happy and I'm worshiping God to the top of my lungs, and I love the individual attention, just me and my God and the art. There's nothing else that I see or feel, no radio, no TV. So I don't know what's going on outside, I'm isolated, but it's not a bad isolation. This isolation, I deem it necessary to birth out this environment.

KH: And this environment also becomes really social at times.

LC: When people come into this environment—regardless of what's happening outside—in here, people become friendly, and they start talking to one another even if they are complete strangers and I love that.

KH: Totally. One of my favorite things is the social aspect of art happenings—people go just to be around other people, not just look at the art objects. The objects allow the social situation to happen... Speaking of context, do you think living in Baltimore affects your work?

LC: I think any environment you are in affects your work—it doesn't matter where you are. It affects what you do, how you work, how you live your life. You can't be separate from the environment you work in—if you have any type of feeling at all, you can't but help be affected.

I think here, recently with all the uprisings, with all the deaths of black men by police officers—that greatly impacted my soul. And it made me do this installation, kind of really, really heavy. I hung all these black dolls from my tree, hundreds and hundreds of them, with ropes hanging from their necks, in front of one of my glass houses. It dealt with the subject of these black men being killed.

KH: Was there a specifically meaningful moment you had experienced during the time of the Uprising that influenced that work?

LC: The most important moment from that time was me waking up, right after Walter Scott was shot in the back five times; I woke up this morning—and this was even before Freddie Gray—I woke up with this feeling of empathy for this young man. With this feeling, like, who was going to speak for him if he's dead? I felt like I couldn't go on with my life and not try to speak for him, not try to do something worthwhile. I compared, if his life was over, what was I doing with mine? Like, oh

my Gosh! what am I doing? This guy is dead, and what am I doing for his death? I couldn't let it go. I posted it on Facebook, tears rolling down my face, I got so many hits and responses, I felt this thing and I didn't know what I was going to do. And that was the moment, that thing right there, that's the thing I hold on to. Even the installation and all that, it was just the aftermath of the feeling that I got. And I still hold on to it, if something hits you that hard, it's like a seed has been planted and it's up to you to get the fruit from that seed and let the world see that.

I WOKE UP WITH THIS FEELING OF EMPATHY FOR THIS YOUNG MAN. WITH THIS FEELING, LIKE, WHO WAS GOING TO SPEAK FOR HIM IF HE'S DEAD?

KH: What is your favorite thing about Baltimore?

LC: Well, my favorite thing about Baltimore used to be, because I used to find trash and make art out of it, and Baltimore was such a trashy city! You could ride down the street and find piles of trash everywhere! It was just horrible! But I loved it because I could just find everything. You know, people saw trash; I saw art installations!

And what I love about Baltimore now, is that I can get from point A to point B in no time. Like especially late at night, oh my Gosh, I can get straight to my houses in less than 2 or 3 minutes on the freeway. I love that—the proximity of the places I want to go, and it gives me more time to create, to rule my world, to expand my world; more time to make my world really the best it can be.

KH: Do you have any advice for young people or young artists?

LC: Oh my Gosh. Hell yeah. Take your environment and make it your art gallery, right from the beginning, I don't care if you're in a room or an apartment, make that room your gallery. And don't worry about your furniture or your bed or the things that society says you need.

Live vicariously! Sleep on a pillow and a blanket. Get rid of the bed. Make your entire space your world. And you don't need things in your world that aren't beneficial to your career. Immerse yourself completely in it. As much as you possible can.

Starve! If it's the choice between food and the art products—get the art products!!! Starve! I starved for years! I ate out of dumpsters for years. That's what I ate, cause I had no money, but I was doing art. The longer you work, the harder you work, the quicker your ascension into your field.

I DON'T CARE IF YOU ARE IN A ROOM OR AN APARTMENT, MAKE THAT ROOM YOUR GALLERY. AND DON'T WORRY ABOUT YOUR FURNITURE OR YOUR BED OR THE THINGS THAT SOCIETY SAYS YOU NEED.

KH: Last question. So if you ruled the world—all of it! What would it look like? What is ruling to you?

LC: Oh my Gosh. If I ruled the world!!! I think Obama is doing a great job ruling the U.S. whatever he's doing, I think I'd do that. I'm going to leave it at that. If I ruled the world?? Oh my God. Whatever he's doing, I'd do that all over the world.



AFTERWORD

IF WE SAY THESE THINGS GO TOGETHER, AND THEY ARE GOING TOGETHER, THEN THEY MUST GO TOGETHER!

A CONVERSATION WITH KATE KHATIB

Kate Khatib is a co-founder and a current worker owner at Red Emma's, a cooperatively owned and operated bookstore, restaurant and events space on North Avenue in Baltimore. A former member of the AK Press collective, she has a PhD from Johns Hopkins and occasionally leads Right to the City bus tours, when she's not busy mentoring emerging coops and building community-controlled capital pools to support worker-owned businesses.

Kate Khatib: One of the things that I think that is interesting that came up a few times throughout this project is humor. I came into politics through Surrealism, and that's a big part of American Surrealism, specifically; the way that we use humor and cultural forms, and the way that poetry itself, can be forms of resistance. This project speaks to this question of, why make it so multi-faceted? Why bring in so many different elements? I think that's one of the things that is potentially revolutionary about it; the fact that it can transcend the boundaries of one medium.

Kimi Hanauer: I didn't want to limit the ways in which people could participate or the form they could participate through. There are obvious constraints of course, but opening it up as much as possible was one of the things I really tried to do. What your saying reminds me of my conversation with Bonnie Jones, where she talked a lot about how poetry is really good at confusing power through language.

KK: Language is one of the most powerful and terrifying realms that we have available to us. It's interesting because there's this question of freedom that runs through

this project as a thread, and one of the things that I've been thinking about lately, which I feel has some relevance here, is this notion that sometimes the most powerful act is the refusal to engage on someone else's terms. That came up for me because one of the things that we've been thinking through at Red Emma's; how we want to interact with people around the language that they use to talk to us and about us. Because we are a collective that has a lot of folks coming from different and many historically marginalized communities—folks who have traditionally been denied a voice in a lot of different contexts—one of the things we're dealing with now, is working on creating a space where we are able to define the way we are talked about and how we talk about each other. That's not something that can really be done easily when you run a public space that has a lot of people going through it. So that's something that we've been talking about—do you always have to engage? Or sometimes is it more powerful to simply refuse to engage?

KK: It's a way of taking back the power in that situation. Bryanna Jenkins also talked about that in here, about how there is power in who and to what you answer to.

KK: Exactly. One of the things that we have to remind ourselves is that we don't always have to answer to everyone. We can always say this is not a conversation we are interested in having.

KK: Yeah. When thinking about creating "safe" public spaces that are open and tolerant, the question that comes up for me is at what point do you say no? Being accepting and tolerant can also mean being accepting of things that are fucked up in all sorts of ways. So how do you know where to draw the line?

KK: I think it's the critical question we always come back to. When you talk about creating spaces that are free and safe, there's this one little problematic note that you always forget to sound; that a safe space to one person isn't the same to someone else. The things that one person might need to feel ok, to feel like they have power and respect, is sometimes totally antithetical to what someone else might need. I think it's a constant negotiation that takes a lot of time and it takes a lot of energy. This is something I was thinking about before this conversation, that, if I ruled the world, my vision for the world is that nobody rules it. It's that we manage to create structures that are both freeing and collaborative at the same time. But I always come back to this notion of how do you negotiate that contradiction? How do you build structures that create space for everyone to feel safe and start working towards building shared languages; while understanding at the same time, that if we are demanding that everyone uses the same language, we are also limiting people's ability to express themselves in a manner that feels most comfortable to them. It's really difficult and it's the central question we have to figure out as we work towards envisioning what a truly just environment in our world would look like.

KK: The first time I spoke to Jared Brown about the idea of this project, he said to me something like, "I love this song because it makes me feel like I have the right to think about if I ruled the world." So, in one sense, it's this really powerful thing because it can redistribute power in this way, but it's also so egotistical. Another one of the tying threads throughout the work is a conversation around trying to find a way to reframe the question itself and create a contemporary version of it...

KK: What's interesting is, I was looking at the manifesto for human rights by the Refugee Youth Project students, which I think is really cool, but what's totally fascinating is this line "The president cannot act without the people!" And part of my response to that is, well, do we need a president? I know this was produced with young

folks who are just starting to think through these contradictions, but for me, I think about how can we change our thinking enough so that we stop even thinking in these structures? It's not just that the president needs to answer to the people, but actually that is an antiquated idea. We have to conceptualize more contemporary forms of self and of governance. Maybe a good question for you is, other than wanting to think through this idea, what are you hoping this project is going to do?

THE THINGS THAT ONE PERSON MIGHT NEED TO FEEL OK, TO FEEL LIKE THEY HAVE POWER AND RESPECT, IS SOMETIMES TOTALLY ANTITHETICAL TO WHAT SOMEONE ELSE MIGHT NEED.

KK: I think a lot of this has just been intuitive. I think that imagination and art and positive thinking are powerful. And I think that by asking people these questions, it's another way of reminding someone that they are powerful and can take up space and think about such broad things as the fate of the world. I don't know what this project really aims to do specifically, but I think that when things are difficult, as they always are, that's maybe just what you have to do, imagine new ways of being. I think I also just didn't want to be alone in my imagination, I wanted to talk to people and think through what things could be like together.

KK: There's certainly something to be said about, well, you can't change the world if you don't know what you want the world to look like.

KK: Yeah, and you can't know what you want it to look like by yourself. Which is why the collaborative aspect of this project felt so important.

KK: But at the same time, I think this work is not just directed at the folks involved in producing it. This project has this very public aspect. It feels like it tries to reach as many people as possible with all of these different forms. So assuming everyone in Baltimore, one way or another, comes into contact with this project, what's the

potential impact?

KH: Maybe just more people imagining the world as it could potentially be.

KK: I like the fact that there are so many contradictions in this work. I think that's one of the things I like about multi-media work, is that it does kind of play in contradictions; it brings together all of these different mediums, a collage of images and materials that don't really go together, but by virtue of the fact that you put them all in the same place, then they must go together. Which is maybe calling back this thing about Besan's Freedom Printer; if we say that these things go together, and they are going together, then they must go together. ("If we say we are printing our freedom, and it's happening now, then that's what's happening!")

KH: Yeah, it's like the poetry again. It's confusing the standard rules of a type of language.

KK: For sure, poetry is one of these interesting things. Because it depends on what kind of poetry. Some poetry is all about just finding freedom in structure, but at the same time we also think of free verse as poetry. Poetry is a place to redefine rules and redefine the structure of language in the way that we find most inspiring. So poetry itself is a kind of contradiction. The surrealists were so enamored by the idea of poetry as revolution and revolution as poetry, which I think opened up these new spaces for understanding the world that we live in.

KH: I'm still trying to think about, what it means to ask someone some of these questions that I asked throughout, like *what makes you feel free?* and *what brings you joy?* I didn't really have a specific intention in mind when I started. I just felt like this is what I wanted to ask and what I wanted to be talking about.

KK: Just thinking about the Baltimore context, I think those sound like questions that we need right now. What's happened in Baltimore for the past year, is the result of a much much longer process of systemic oppression and devaluing of human life, on the basis of racial and economic factors. But even understanding that everything that's happened this year, exists in a much, much larger context, it's been a hard year for Baltimore. It's been an exciting year in some ways, but it's also been a terrifying year in the sense that everything changed and nothing changed. So maybe there is some power in just asking those questions, in opening the space up and just about reminding people that they do have the power to think about what a different

world would look like. I think that's what the Uprising was about. It reminded us that we do have the power to speak out, that we do have the power to demand a change. Even though demanding doesn't necessarily achieve that change. We made some small gains but there's so much more work ahead of us. So much of that work has to be done by people who have been denied their basic human right to existence. It's sometimes inconceivable how we might possibly continue with this work, but at that same time, I feel like there are so many new possible conversations, and so many conversations starting.

ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL ACTS IS REFUSING TO STAY IN THE BOX, TO STAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOODS, OR IN THE RED LINES THAT HAVE BEEN DRAWN THAT TELL US WHERE WE CAN AND CAN'T BE.

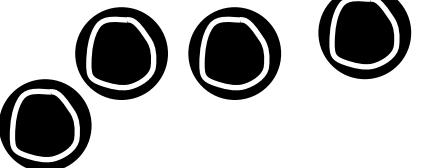
I think the Uprising helped us remember that the things that divide us are largely things that neo-liberal contemporary capitalism puts onto us. I think one of the most powerful acts is refusing to stay in the box, to stay in the neighborhoods, or in the red lines that have been drawn that tell us where we can and can't be. And that was one of the things that was special about the Uprising; for a minute, it felt like some of those imaginary and invisible lines had actually been erased. I think the question is how do we keep those lines away and banish them for good? And can we actually even do that? And certainly it's going to take a hell of a lot of imagination and utopian thinking to get us to that point.

I think this project is a step towards that place. It clearly is coming out of some of those same feelings, of maybe this is the time to ask this question and even if the question is problematic, and contradictory and we know that, there is still some power in just asking this question.

KH: So before we finish, I just wanted to ask you some

of these things I've been asking everyone in the conversations surrounding this project: What if you ruled the world? What brings you joy? What makes you feel free?

KK: I've lived in a lot of different places, and Baltimore, for me, is the place in the world that has the greatest sense of possibility. Which is something I've felt since I first came here. It's something so unique about this city. And it's a very melancholic possibility. One of the reasons there is so much responsibility is because there is so much abandonment. There is so much of the city that is underappreciated, and underused, and undervalued, and at the same time, there is an incredible resilience here. Every day I see this more and more in the area I'm in constantly, in Station North, which is a nice segway into the question of what makes me feel free, because that is one of the things that's been most inspiring this past year. Seeing the relationships that we've built through this space with the different communities here, and again, it is this reminder to me that there are these very unnatural lines that divide us from one another. One of the things that we've really sought to do is scrub out those lines, and not erase them—I mean you can't erase the pain and hardship that comes with them, but for me, there is this incredible freedom in walking through a space and seeing art students talking to elderly folks who live in the low income housing, and seeing those folks getting to know just everybody. That, to me, makes me feel free. It reminds me that we have so much power when we are together and when we refuse to be divided. I think that's also my vision... A world where we are able to exercise our collective power and we are able to find ways to do it that help us to build shared languages that are truly shared, not just one language that replaces others. That's thinking of language in the sense of English and French and Spanish, but also in the sense of the words we use, and the way we talk about each other; language in a more broad way of just ways of communication.



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thnx for reading <3



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109

