

A Multicultural Community of Practice in Creative Writing

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This article shall argue that learning arts (creative writing) and becoming an artist is best understood as a process of immersion. Lave and Wenger's Community of Practice will be used as a framework along with the concept of *nyantrik*, an apprenticeship in arts within Javanese culture, which gives a deeper meaning to the process of immersion. This article will also show how such learning processes may be re-shaped and occur across spatial and cultural boundaries, with the help of modern communication platforms. Using a/r/tography as an approach for arts-based inquiries, the article aims to describe the dialogic learning process of becoming a creative writer through immersion into an online multicultural community of practice, *Project 366*. The study is accomplished through an examination of the interactions, reflections and creative works (poetry) of the participants, as well as how such exchanges also affected the researcher's own creative process.

Keywords: a/r/tography, community of practice, creative writing, dialogue, *nyantrik*

Introduction

On April 15, 2002, an article titled "Can Art be Taught?", published in *New Yorker*, posed a challenge for the teaching of art in universities, colleges and schools of art. Calvin Tomkins, the writer, sides with the "artist is born" faction by contending "[t]here is no way to know if it is a good idea to understand something that works by not being understood." In response to Tomkins' claim, Trutty-Coohill (2008, p. 124) posits that teaching and learning in art should not be understood rigidly as structured instruction. Rather, it should be viewed more as setting up the environment where the learners can have creative freedom while getting support from the conducive surrounding. As the teacher (or mentor) becomes part of this environment that the learners are being immersed in, art is thus taught through immersion.

The concept of learning art and becoming an artist through the process of immersion is in itself not a new idea. This system has been around for centuries under the form of 'apprenticeship', or *nyantrik* in the Javanese

tradition. The experience of going through this learning form is generally seen as instrumental in shaping the creative capabilities of the *cantrik* (the learners in the *nyantrik* process) and allowing them to become accomplished artists. As this article will show, through modern communication platforms, such learning processes are re-shaped and may occur across spatial and cultural boundaries.

This article aims to describe the dialogic process shaping the author's learning and becoming a creative writer by a technology-mediated *nyantrik* process through an immersion into an online multicultural community of practice, namely, *Project 366*. The study is accomplished through an examination of the interactions, reflections and creative works (poetry) of the participants. Moreover, it will explore how such exchanges also affect the researcher's (my) own creative process. The result is presented through a method / approach for arts-based inquiries, *a/r/tography*, which takes form in the combination of produced artworks and theoretical discussions.

From *Nyantrik* to Community of Practice

In the Javanese culture and society – which has shaped my relation to creative practice – learning to become an artist is not solely achieved through formal education. While diplomas and acknowledgement from formal institutions – such as art schools and academies – can play important roles, more emphasis and value are ascribed to the informal method commonly known as *nyantrik* (Hutomo, 1979; Christianto, 2008; 2009; 2012; Sugiarto *et al.*, 2017). Unlike its formal counterparts, the educational process within *nyantrik* is not bound by time or a fixed curriculum. As an example of informal education, the structure of *nyantrik* is more difficult to discern and describe. However, this does not make the learning process any less exacting than those of schools or academies. On the contrary, the lack of time constraint in *nyantrik* makes it more demanding in terms of allotted time and the learners' dedication. Unlike a structured formal education and its limit of 40 hours per week, *nyantrik* is a full immersion in the life of an artist.

To give a brief historical background, the practice of *nyantrik* dates back to the era of Hindu-Buddhist Java. During that period, *resi* (Brahman clerics also well versed in the arts and literature) generally lived surrounded by *shastri* (students who took care of their master's daily needs in exchange for teaching and guidance). When the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism began to wane within Javanese culture, the term *shastri* slowly changed into *cantrik*. This change was not just one of form: it also opened up the possibility for masters from non-religious background – including practicing artists.

Christianto (2009, p. 80) described *nyantrik* as education in art and culture given by an established artist to a person who requests to be part of the artist's household. Consequently, this arrangement creates a bond that goes beyond

the relation of master and learner. As a part of the household, *cantrik* (the learner) should also be willing to act as both a child and an *abdi* to the master (p. 87). As the term *abdi* is equivalent to ‘a loyal retainer’, a *cantrik* is also required to follow the master everywhere.

Since Javanese artists commonly also have another job, such as farming, and the *cantrik* is also expected to help in this aspect. The master will, in return, teach the *cantrik* everything he/she knows about this other job. If the master is also a farmer, for example, then he/she will teach the *cantrik* everything about farming, ranging from how to read nature to the rituals of farming, along with their significance. Through this participation, a *cantrik* is given an opportunity to understand the natural and social phenomenon that take place in the master’s life and how they affect the art creation process. As one of the few researchers on the topic, Christianto (2009, p. 88) argues that *nyantrik* is based on the premise that man is a social being and thus knowledge and skill should be acquired in and through related social context.

What Christianto presents as the basic premise behind *nyantrik* echoes Lave and Wenger’s (1991) study of various apprenticeships. Through their study, Lave and Wenger concluded that apprenticeship provides certain advantages over top-down instruction. A novice in the system of apprenticeship will follow the master, at first only to observe but then later to be immersed in the master’s practice. Learning occurs when the novice “inevitably participates in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skills requires newcomers to move towards full participation in the sociocultural practice of a community” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29).

Wenger (1998, p.3) subsequently establishes that learning is a fundamentally social phenomenon that reflects the human capabilities of knowing; that is, learning is a large part of human nature that is both life-sustaining and inevitable. While overt instruction maybe given during both *nyantrik* and apprenticeship, the learning process is mostly a covert process as the learners attempt to adapt and adjust into their new communities. As the community where the learning takes place exists in an authentic, real world context, where control over events and situations cannot be exerted as strictly as in a classroom context, the learning process does not have a fixed end point. It is a continuous and loosely time-structured process of acculturation. Thus, learning is not merely a condition for membership of the said community but an evolving form of membership (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.53). Being a part of this said community allows the learner to practice the group’s common sense together, that is, how to act and react to certain situations as a member of that community (Wenger, 1998, p. 63). In doing so, the learner will be able to habituate and internalise these practices.

Despite apprenticeship and *nyantrik*’s seeming similarity, only differing in their east-west settings and framework, they operate through different degrees

of immersion. In apprenticeship, the novice is expected to immerse him/herself in the master's work in society. In *nyantrik*, however, the master's life outside of his/her main expertise is taken into consideration. Consequently, a *cantrik*'s immersion also needs to touch the other areas of the master's life according to the view that art creation is also influenced by mundane/non-art life experiences.

Being in an immersive situation, despite varying degrees in *nyantrik* and apprenticeship, allows the novice/learner to focus on other areas besides the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Reflecting on this, Christianto (2008, p. 113; 2009, p. 79) defines *nyantrik* as a cultural initiation process for those who want to be artists: a process of self-adjustment for the *cantrik* to think, act and speak like established artists. These new thinking processes and attitudes are embodied and internalised within the *cantrik* during his/her learning period.

Immersion learning also helps to build the necessary social capital. As the novice joins the master, s/he will be introduced and welcomed into the artist's circle. In this way, the apprentice gains membership of the circle while also building up his/her networks of influence and support. S/he also acquires recognition as an artist (in-training) through this process.

As a concept of learning, community of practice acknowledges the existence of multiple and varied elements in skill mastery. Instead of focusing on one subject at a time through rigorous top-down instruction, the learning process takes form as a centripetal move that addresses multiple bases at a time. Mastery is thus not gained through in-depth study but through repetition and habituation. In this way, the learner will both acquire skill and forge an identity as an artist at the same time. The result of this process, as Christianto (2008, p. 113) argues, is the internalised practices in the learner's habits and attitude. Consequently, when the learner finally becomes a fully-fledged artist, s/he will present him/herself as being innately talented. His/her practices will look very natural and unhindered despite their acquisition through a long process of habituation.

Because learning is viewed as an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 35), both *nyantrik* and community of practice do not aim to be an educational model nor a teaching technique. Formalising this learning practice would be to betray one of its main premises – that knowledge is generated from social practices. Isolating learning from its social practices would result in decontextualised knowledge. The danger of transmitting decontextualised knowledge (ibid) is learning without understanding – or what Freire (1985, p. 4) warned us of as “the banking education”.

Wenger further develops the concept of legitimate peripheral participation into a more modern understanding of community of practice: “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in their area by interacting on an

ongoing basis” (2002, p. 4). Through this (re)definition, Wenger attempts to transform the concept of apprenticeship into a less-formal and more communal dimension, thus removing the distinguishable power structure of master-apprentice. Without this hierarchy of power, both learners/newcomers and the established artists can go through learning processes together since ‘learning is an issue of engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities’ (p. 7).

Considering the more holistic and less formal relationship in *nyantrik*, Wenger’s transformation of apprenticeship into a community of practice recalls the concept of *cantrik* but with more people getting involved. The community in which the *cantrik*(s) participate will also gain benefit by way of refinement of practice and membership regeneration (p. 8). Comparing Wenger’s concept to Javanese *nyantrik* reveals an important connection and likeness in practice across cultures that has not been properly investigated. Wenger’s development of apprenticeship into fuller immersion can be seen as a validation of the Javanese practice of *nyantrik*, where the learning process not only happens through traditional top-down transfer but also in various directions through dynamic movements.

The A/r/tographical Method / Approach

The Academic Haibun

In order to describe the process in the author’s learning and becoming a creative writer, this article is written and arranged through a/r/tographical format, representing an autobiographical narration that combines ruminations of theory with creative works. At its very core, as Barrett (2005, p. 120) argues, thinking in both science and art share a point of emergence: through signs and symbols that stand in for the things that were materially and emotionally experienced. For science the output from thinking process is manifested through intellectual ideas, while for the arts the output is manifested and embodied in the object / composition. As a research practice that bridges creative practices and academic inquiry – and holds a belief that both processes affect each other – a/r/tography opens up a space for combining the two.

This combination resembles a Japanese prosimetric literary form: haibun. As demonstrated by Basho’s *Oku no Hosomichi* (Narrow Road to the Interior) – one of the most prominent haibun in history – the form can be used as travel accounts through the combination of essay and poems. Both parts are complementing each other, telling the whole story. An a/r/tographical essay is thus an academic haibun: a travel account for the journey of ‘becoming’. Unlike Basho’s travel account, an a/r/tographical essay is not limited to only one or two short paragraphs alternating with haiku or poems. Previous a/r/tographic inquiries have incorporated various art forms, such as self-

portrait as a self-evaluation tool in teaching practice (Smitka, 2015), photographs and cartography as public pedagogy (Irwin et al., 2009), paintings and performing arts as a way to re-imagine and re-discover identities (Leake, 2015), poems and body painting (Bickel, 2005), motion pictures (LeBlanc et al., 2015), and poetry in a language class (Leggo et al., 2011).

A Year (or more) of Living Creatively

The research setting of this article is *Project 366* (<http://project365plus.blogspot.com>): an online multicultural community of practice in arts and poetry. This is the community in which I did my *nyantrik* with established poets from various cultural backgrounds. As its name suggests (the number of days in a leap year, of which 2016 was one), Project 366 is a platform for daily practices of art creation with a major focus on poetry. The participants are expected to post signs/snapshots of their creative process daily. The emphasis on the creative process means that posts do not necessarily need to be finished products. In contrast, the posting of drafts or works-in-progress is highly encouraged. It is even possible to post a draft one day and the revision/reworking of that draft another day. Throughout the project, a continuous and sustained working rhythm is expected on a daily basis from the participants, with the aim of fuelling the creative process.

As Project 366 is hosted on a blogging platform, it also allows for further interaction through comments and responses to each post. In order to create the sense of a close-knit community, the comment setting for this platform has been set to ‘closed comment’, meaning only fellow participants can write responses in the comment section despite the post being available to the general public. The ability to comment is essential as it also encourages the writer to engage in the community as a reader. A literary community of practice, as Lam (2014, p. 21) argues, cannot exist without readers unless the writers also act as readers for each other. As a result of this interaction, some works evolved into further dialogue, which led to the creation of new artworks or reworkings of original posts.

As suggested by the project’s name, participants are expected to post for 366 days. Initially, this community of practice was conceived to run throughout 2016 only. However, the dynamic nature of the interaction, along with growing interest for the community, both internally and externally, led to it continuing its run into 2017. At the time of writing this essay, Project 366 is still continuing, albeit at a diminished level of activity. During the course of 2016, new participants entered the project each month, either as monthly guests (featured artists) or as newly invited participants. It was not unusual for the monthly guests to express interest in regular participation. The participants also encouraged the extension of Project 366 into 2017 to accommodate those who joined later to reach the expected 366 posts. Some of the original

participants also continued their posts beyond the expected 366 artworks/drafts.

The initial participants were about thirty poets and artists who were known to each other due to past collaborations. Most are established poets and artists who either are from Australia or who have had work published there. As the project unfolded, some of the original participants extended the invitation to other artists and poets. This practice of extending the invitation continued and helped the project to reach participants from a greater range of cultural backgrounds. The blogging platform started to see names from Sweden, France, Nepal, Indonesia and many other countries. Consequently, Project 366 started to publish poems in more languages: Indonesian, Chinese, French and Spanish, to name but a few. To ensure common understanding, English remains as the ‘common language’; and works in languages other than English needed to be accompanied with (at least draft-rough) translations. This also opened the door for translators to participate in this community of practice.

Another official rule within Project 366 is the frequency of posts. While participants are encouraged to post daily, consecutive posting on the same day is not allowed. This rule is imposed to create balance and a better group dynamic without any dominant participants. There are no predetermined topics or themes for the posts, thereby allowing the participants to create their texts/artworks freely. Unofficial themes, however, emerge naturally through responses towards shared social/natural phenomena that take place at a certain period of time.

The naturally emerging themes also reveal the existence of a collective imagination in Project 366. Anderson (1991, p. 22-31; Lam, 2014, p. 20) stresses the importance of this collective imagination in the creation of a community. Collective imagination, as Fler (2013, p. 77-78) argues, forms a cyclical relational matrix with the individual imagination. Within this matrix, individual imagination is inspired by the rules, products and processes of the collective imagination. New interpretations within the realm of individual imagination will, in turn, open up possibilities for new understandings of collective imagination to emerge. Within the context of Project 366, this cyclical nature was kept in motion by every new poem. Each new poem, therefore, triggered the activation of new cycles, which manifested in different poems focusing on events from different angles. Every posted poem in Project 366 serves as a building block for the community’s continuously expanding collective imagination – creating what Wenger (1998, p. 82-83) dubs as “shared repertoire”.

A Digital *Cantrik*

My participation as a digital *cantrik* within Project 366 began in its third month, March 2016. The term *cantrik* is preferred for this essay for several

different reasons, such as (1) my position as ‘the uninitiated’ compared to the other established artists involved in the project; (2) a cultural connotation suggesting a more holistic relation between the *cantrik* and the community than the stricter focus on skills and craft associated with the term apprentice; and (3) the close association of *cantrik* to arts compared to the wider meaning of the term apprentice.

Translation, as suggested by Kelen (2011, p. 287), is ‘one of the great apprenticeships for poets.’ Following this premise, I began my *nyantrik* process into the circle of established artists in Project 366 as a translator. While other participants posted their daily poems or artworks, I posted one translation of a previously posted poem on a daily basis. By doing so, I was able to get into the same working rhythm as the other participants – an important part of my process of habituation.

In the beginning, my choice of poems to translate relied more on their length. Shorter poems, at that time, were deemed easier to study more thoroughly in terms of structure and word play. After several weeks of working with shorter poems, I began to pick longer poems written around themes that interested me.

In the context of ‘apprenticeship’ (the skills and technical aspects associated with learning), translation allows the poet to (re)experience foreignness, that is, a rediscovery (Kelen, 2011, p. 287). Joris (2003, p. 4) describes translation for poets as a trigger for the *déjà vu* experience of the world and concepts s/he has known before. Working in a non-native language, Joris argues (p. 4), encourages the translator to work and operate beyond the oedipal grip of his/her mother tongue. This leads to a questioning of the process of automatization within a language and therefore finding a new way to use both the mother tongue and the other languages.

In the context of *nyantrik*, which carries a more holistic view of learning, translation serves as the key to enter and experience said community of practice. As a *cantrik* in poetry, entering the community as a translator provides an opportunity to observe the work process and rhythm of more established artists. This “semi-full” participation creates the scaffolding that leads to subsequent full participation and at the same time provides an opportunity to gain and cultivate the necessary social and cultural capital to become a writer.

As I translated the poems into Indonesian, a language that most of the participants were unfamiliar with, other authors responded to the first several translations with short words of thanks and appreciation in the comments section. As the language was unintelligible to them, it was impossible for the other participants to leave beneficial feedback. I was a part of the community, but I was not a part of the collective dialogue. It was, however, to be expected, as my intention at that stage was to be more of an observer. It was not until my tenth post that I started to participate in the wider dialogue. Mikaela, one

of the writers whose poems I translated, wrote a poem responding to my attempt to translate her poem, despite her inability to understand Indonesian without the help of translation software.

Through her response poem, Mikaela addresses the issues of translation that added another layer to her original poem. With the help of translation software (Google Translate), she checked the faithfulness of my translation. The lack of vocabulary to describe colour in Indonesian resulted in the ambiguous word *krem* for 'cream'. Mikaela's attempt to use translation software back-translated the word *krem* into 'beige'. The fact that 'beige' is not the colour she meant in the original poem made her read the poem in a different light.

Mikaela Castledine #59 Inflation

I still remember
the first clothes
I bought for myself
at sixteen
catching the bus to the city

a silken shirt
olive green with cap sleeves and a soft rolled collar
cream pants with pleats
poetry paid for them
I'd had a good run in the under eighteens

it still pays about the same
writing has never been indexed to inflation
and now those winnings would barely cover the bus fare
and a coffee

my last highly commended
made me fifty bucks
which
now that I think about it
they never even sent me

(posted on February 28, 2016)

*

Author's Translation #10 – from Mikaela Castledine's "Inflation"

Inflasi

masih kuingat
baju pertama
yang kubeli
di usiaku yang ke-enambelas
menuju kota dengan bus

kemeja sutra
hijau zaitun, lengan terbuka
kerah tergulung
celana krem berpelisir
terbayar puisi
kerja yang bagus
bagi anak muda
belum lagi delapan belas

gaji saat ini tidak berubah
penulisan tak menyesuaikan inflasi
dan honorarium hanya cukup untuk tiket bus
dan secangkir kopi

tulisan terbaikku
hanya dibayar lima puluh
dolar yang
ketika kuingat
tak pernah dikirimkan

(posted on March 18, 2016)

*

Mikaela Castledine #78
Behind my Back
(for author)

There is someone
translating our poems
into a language
that I don't understand
I wonder whether
they
the poems
are still speaking for me now
Ambassadors of my thoughts
I have to trust
that they still tell
what I taught them to say
and are not

badmouthing
behind my back

the Google translation back from Indonesian
makes me laugh and laugh
beige is definitely not my colour

(posted March 18, 2016)

Mikaela's poem brought my participation within the community into the collective dialogue. As she addressed me and my work in her poem, instead of through the comment section, it served as an acknowledgment and a way of bringing me into the main dialogue. She opened up a dialogue with me, and thus granted a stronger legitimation and recognition to my membership in this community of practice. As discussed in the previous section, legitimation, recognition and community membership are important social and cultural capital for the construction of artists' (writers') identity (Christianto, 2009, p. 114). Thus, being recognized and legitimised as a translator can be seen as being accepted as *cantrik*, a first step towards being an apprentice poet.

According to Lam's (2014, p. 21-25) model for the development of poets and their communities, secretive writing forms part of the apprenticeship (or in the context of this essay, *nyantrik*). She considers this to be an experimental phase, where the *cantrik* begins to write in such a manner that it mimics specific genres or writers. The writing being secretive, the resulting texts are mostly not shared. This phase echoes Bloom's concept of misprision, in which a new poet is trying to rewrite his/her predecessor's poem. This attempt, however, most likely ends up being a misreading, resulting in the creation of a new poem. Echoing Lam's identification of this phase, I started to write poems conforming to similar themes or structures of poets I translated. One of these mimicking attempts resulted in a response poem to Robert Verdon's #77 post that served as the draft for a later poem. The edited poem, however, was not published until much later, when I had acquired more cultural capital and recognition within the community.

Robert Verdon, #77
Nada Brahma

all is sound uniting the brain
the simple tune

all is sound uniting the brain

the rhythm spreading like a fire
the raga, the rag and the birch tree

all is sound uniting the brain

the anthem of the revolution
the unsettling songs of wealthy youth

all is sound uniting the brain

the song of the child lost in the forest
the airless yawn of the sea and the desert

all is sound uniting the brain

the abyss looking back in terror
Nada Brahma

(posted March 12, 2016)

*

Author #14 – Om

Om

after Robert Verdon's Nada Brahma

a soft hum before time began
and a whisper of the first tune

the last echo to fade in time
of a requiem for all sounds

it stays in the ricochet
of falling brown leaves

and the moment between
each drop from a dripping tap

it sings the cadenza
in the heartbeat of beetles

and the loud breath
of flocking mosquitoes

in the noise of crashing snowflakes
and ice melting under the sun

in the sigh of wood burning

and the last scream of vanishing smoke

it's the buzz in your ears
from somewhere in time

a distant memory
but maybe you have never heard it?

(posted August 14, 2016)

The choice to work on Robert Verdon's poem was first and foremost based on its title ("Nada Brahma"). Despite the term being originally Sanskrit, these two words could be taken for an Indonesian expression without any need for translation. The concept of Brahma as the god of creation also resonates in my mind due to my close association with Javanese *wayang*. As a culture with heavy Indian influences, Javanese adopted the Hindu pantheon into most of their *wayang kulit* epochs. Concurrently, I was reading J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, where the in-book universe was created by its god of creation, Eru, through songs and melodies. The idea of sacred voices or songs behind every fibre of the universe served as my inspiration to respond to Verdon's poem.

While only an abstract idea in *The Silmarillion*, the literal concept of sacred sounds is shared by Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. The sound *om* or *aum* is venerated and regarded as the sound of the soul due to its production with a closed mouth. *Om* is produced more as a vibration inside the mouth and therefore can be uttered without opening one's mouth. This concept fuelled the writing of "Om" as unheard sounds or those that people tend to ignore.

A Deeper Involvement in Creative Dialogue

After participating as a translator for three and a half months, with around one hundred translations posted, my presence and position within Project 366 became more established. During this same period, my secretive writing phase had resulted in more original works. At this point, I considered them to be enough, in terms of capital, to begin shifting my participation within the community to that of a writer.

As a writer of original poems, the nature of my participation and contribution to the collective dialogue changed. I was no longer restricted to posting translations in a language not understood by the others, which in turn opened up a greater range of responses to my works. With my translation posts, responses were limited to short expressions of gratitude and appreciation. Through my own poems, however, other participants were able to react to the ideas, or even give constructive criticism of the writing style, as

they were written in a language understood by every participants. What was once a dialogue primarily between me and the texts I translated or used as models for secretive writing now involved meaningful exchanges with other poets through our creative works.

Susan Hawthorne #149
oracles

oracles in the ancient world
were full of useful knowledge
built on myth from the past
creating prophecy for the future

Pythia most famed of all
she could speak in rhyming
hexameter knew that the empire
Croesus would destroy

was his own. listen hard
to ambiguous words
they might carry meanings
unanticipated by you

(posted May 28, 2016)

*

Author #4
Oracles Now
(after Susan Hawthorne)

oracles now
are nothing
but random numbers
generated in script
of the unknown 'x'
and the mysterious 'y'

we pray not to gods
up above the sky
we pray to gods
of the machine
ambiguously
predictable

(posted August 4, 2016)

*

Susan Hawthorne #217
oracles again

on Malta Megalithic buildings
are theatres of memory
wind wraps itself around rock
blows in from the sea
and whistles through
the oracle holes

the Hypogeum is more
secret built under earth
sound resonates across
spiraled ceilings
the oracles here
are no longer alive

(posted August 4, 2016)

*

Kit Kelen #217.1
I'd almost forgotten Malta megaliths

after Susan Hawthorne's 'oracles again'

no one knows why these things were built
no one knows how
no one knows who built these things

who ordered?
and who toiled?

know one knows where these people went
or where they had come from to begin

we suspect that they hungered and thirsted
and loved, that they hated and haunted

much as we imagine the future
is something we've already lived

but no one's really sure

(posted August 4, 2016)

*

Author #13

Ales Stenar

(after Kit Kelen & Susan Hawthorne)

a stone ship
on the cliff
never made to sail
the ocean next to it

its stone never rot
yet root down under
after a thousand full-moon
rising and set
only sea breeze
blowing in between
the only trace
of the bone's voyage
sleeping under
the boulders and the grass

only sheep and seagulls
keeping vigil
over their slumber

we are too busy
with our cameras

(posted August 13, 2016)

A growing dialogue can be observed in the above chain of poems. Differing from the dialogue about rain and floods presented in the previous section, this dialogue does not focus on one event. The trajectory of the dialogue is more progressive, with every poem moving to a slightly different topic by taking cues from the previous one.

In the first poem, "oracles", Susan Hawthorne wrote about Ancient Greek oracles and how they mostly spoke in riddles. Due to the distance between my Javanese cultural background and the Ancient Greeks, this understanding of 'oracle' did not resonate very strongly with me. It was just a distant word and concept, despite my knowledge of the concept of 'oracles' and Greco-Roman mythology. Instead, associations to an international technology company were closer to hand. The combination of my knowledge and my associations to the word affected my response poem, "Oracle Now", shifting the setting into a

present-day context. Consequently, the response poem also draws comparisons between the riddles of the ancient oracles and the binary programming language. Both riddles and programming languages are forms of communication that can only be understood by particular groups of people. Mediators are needed to make them understandable for the general public.

The posting of 'Oracle Now' was responded to by Susan's 'oracle again'. She revisited the poem that was posted several months prior and wrote her response based on the present day setting of my contribution. In her 'oracle again', she focuses on the remnants of old oracles in the form of the Malta Megalith. Reflecting on the argument of collective imagination (Fleer, 2013, p. 77-78), it could be said that 'oracle now' affected Susan's individual imagination, thus creating a new frame of interpretation for the topic.

The presentation of a new setting, the Malta Megalith, in Susan's later poem, was in turn responded to by Kit Kelen in his work "I'd almost forgotten Malta Megalith". Through this poem, he joined the dialogue between Susan and me but with a shift in topic into megalithic structures. This shift affected my individual imagination and resulted in a response poem about Ales Stenar, a megalithic structure in southern Sweden that I had visited before.

The above chain of poems also showed the change in my participation within Project 366. The communication became two-way as I could write responses to others' works and vice-versa. As a poetry writer (I had not been comfortable calling myself a poet until this point), I could showcase my own voice instead of just transferring someone else's into my native language. My participation became a new pin in this multicultural structure. At the same time, my writing practice itself gained a new (multi)cultural frame. "Ales Stenar", for example, is born from an Indonesian writer writing in English to a group of writers and readers from different corners of the world about his cross-cultural experience in Sweden while residing in China. It was an emerging voice still looking for its true shape, but nonetheless still a part of the multicultural dialogue that happened in Project 366.

Despite more substantial contributions to the community, my position within the community of Project 366 was still a digital *cantrik*. Through the metablog (<http://366metablog.blogspot.com>), a separate space to discuss problems and new ideas for Project 366, I was presented as a person who would benefit from more intensive mentoring in poetry writing. The dialogue in the main forum, however, remained natural and equal without any hint of hierarchical power structure between me and other more established poets.

The relative anonymity, courtesy of the blog arena, allows a non-hierarchical arrangement to manifest and persist. This structure also calls to mind Gunilla Lindqvist's concept of 'playworld' (1996, p. 16), defined as a space where children and adults are encouraged to play together. As Johan Huizinga claims that "all poetry is born of play" (1943, p. 129), Project 366 is in principle a digital playworld. The 'adults' within this community of practice

are the established poets by way of their vast experience and publication and the 'children' are the *cantrik* due to their objective of learning more from the more established parties. The participation of 'adults' is considered equal to the children in the playworld. They are not supposed to impose anything, as Lindqvist defines play as "an activity free from adult influence, an activity which expresses the child's natural development" (Lindqvist, 1996, p. 16).

With this framework, Lindqvist perceives what is often understood as hierarchies and power discrepancies between children and adult as a horizontal relationship. When children are given potent roles as active creators, adults are stripped of their power. What they should do is join in the dialogic process with children. As Lindqvist (1996, p. 210) writes:

assuming roles has liberated the adults – it has enabled them to step out of their 'teacher roles' and leave behind the institutional language [...]. By virtue of the fictitious role [play], the teachers have dared to try new attitudes and ways of acting. The role-play has been playful, characterized by humour, improvisations and inversions.

This is the core concept of 'playworld': the space created to facilitate dialogues between adults and children, resulting in learned children and learned adults. In the context of this research, the playworld results in art creation from both the established artists and the *cantrik*.

In line with the concept of playworld, the established writers shaped the dialogic mentoring process by proposing topics, concepts or imagery for my poems through their own poems. These poems, regarded as instances of play, were signposted specifically for me to respond to. Their poems were often written from their own cultural or regional perspective, and my responses were based on my own background or experience. The dialogic process therefore involved exchanges of values and views across cultural boundaries.

Kit Kelen #258

St Michael's – the Catholic Cemetery, Tap Seac, Macao

for Author

is there among graves
breeze meaning?

summer is endless
winter is too

stone is the city's
still heart

clouds come back
it rains again

pinex and figs
and frangipani

the illusion of sleep
dispelled by fresh flowers

as if the truth of them were carved
for time to wash away

and little things are left to weather
toy cars, some rubber gloves

the mums and dads, the tragic young
the ones in uniform

pastors all smiles freed from their flocks
now certain of heaven

sometimes a cross is toppled
vases wilt and bloom

these names like a list the teacher calls
'pack up your things quickly and quietly

it's time
to go home now'

out there it's peak hour
horns and hum

buildings still rise
everyone is getting home

is there among graves
breeze meaning?

stone is the city's
still heart

let any death be sacred to me
no matter how long ago, how far

what's my sadness
to a hill of stone?

so many doubts
one could almost really believe

but no one is sleeping here
there are no ghosts

this is like the hitchhiker's record –
on these certain spins of the globe

were carved the initials 'I was here'
let there never be a stone for me

I won't be a part of this crowd

(posted on September 14, 2016)

*

Author #82
old graveyard

blooming purple plumeria
shadow of a setting sun

under each petal
a story lies

stones are cracked
names gone to time

behind the wild grass curtain
what memories?

candles are never lit
the only yellow flicker of light

is when earth bids
farewell to the sun

(posted on November 7, 2016)

Kit Kelen wrote and posted his graveyard poem after reading and discussing the author's draft poem about an old graveyard in Indonesia. In order to help the author, he composed a long poem full of things to associate with graveyard in Macao, China and the possible way to use and arrange them

in a poem. The author thus selected some of the imageries and wrote a new poem with similar imageries from his own cultural background.

One of such cases is the focus on plants and flowers in the graveyard. While Kit described the graveyard through mentioning ‘pines and figs and frangipani’, the author’s poem focuses only on ‘blooming purple plumeria’. Seen through the perspective of Indonesian culture, plumeria has a close association with graveyard. At least one plumeria tree can be found in any graveyard in Indonesia. Because of this, the flower itself is commonly referred to as the flower of the dead. The mere mention of this flower in Indonesia is enough to instill a picture of tombstone and people buried underneath it.

Through his attempt to help the author by posting his poem in *Project 366*, he assumed the mantle of a mentor without conforming to the rigid power structure. Instead of giving directives, Kit took the discussion into the blog, a communal ground where everybody else could also participate and indirectly gave the author more inputs in a relatively horizontal power structure. This also further reflects the system of ‘playworld’ in *Project 366*, in which “the teachers have dared to try new attitudes and ways of acting” (Lindqvist, 1996, p. 210).

Concluding Reflections

This essay has shown that the Javanese concept of creative apprenticeship – *nyantrik* – can be used in an expanded sense to describe the degree of immersion into an online community of practice. As a previously unaccounted form of apprenticeship (Lave & Wenger, 1991), *nyantrik* poses a possibility yet to be explored for the future development of communities of practice.

Through the use of a digital communication platform like *Project 366*, a community of practice gains the ability to grow rhizomatically by participants involving other participants. The lack of a fixed physical setting allows the community to go beyond geographical and sociocultural boundaries, making it a multicultural community of practice. Like the rhizome, the community of practice has the potential to grow exponentially and infinitely, and is, therefore, dynamic and ever changing. Consequently, new things like ideas, dialogues and collaboration continue to emerge, meaning learning opportunities within this context never cease.

The community of practice also enhances the possibilities for creative dialogue between apprentices and established artists. In a more conventional learning process, the learner usually has only a one-way dialogue in which s/he reads a poem and writes a response or a new poem based on the previous one without publishing it. Through full immersion in the community of practice, the dialogue is transformed into two-way communication in which the original writers or other more established artists are able continue the exchange.

Lave and Wenger's expansion of traditional apprenticeship into communities of practice re-conceives the power structures involved in education. What was once seen as a top down power hierarchy between master and apprentice is transformed into a horizontal structure. Participating in the community means being both 'a master' and 'an apprentice' at the same time. Borrowing the term from the *nyantrik* process, *cantrik* can be used to refer to the participants as it suggests a more holistic immersion throughout the learning process in comparison to the traditional concept of apprenticeship.

As art creation is basically a play, this horizontal power scenario can be seen as Lindqvist's concept of playworld. In playworld, learning is done through equal participation between established writers and the *cantrik*. Both parties are 'playing' together on more equal terms without the overt instruction usually associated with being tutored by a more established party. As a result, art creation emerges from both the more experienced writers and the *cantrik*.

Learning through immersion also helps participants to grow, cultivate, and develop the necessary social and cultural capital for the formation of their identity artists. Through shared dialogues, a stronger and wider network is forged. As Project 366's coverage transcends geographic and cultural boundaries, each participant acquires wider legitimation and acknowledgement as an artist. As an online community of practice, however, the habitation with the master that is required in the traditional setting might not be reproduced completely. The author was lucky because his position as a PhD student to an already established poet enabled him to experience the habituation with the master to some extent. Other people with different backgrounds might not have the same privilege. For now, it might be concluded that the existence of a principal mentor / master prior to and in the early stage of one's involvement in the community of practice is beneficial. The master / mentor, however, also needs to conform into the power structure in the community of practice in order to allow development on both sides.

The description of *nyantrik* and how the multicultural community of practice works in Project 366 presented in this essay may potentially be a model for future projects with similar ambitions in learning the creative arts. By tapping even more heavily into the 'multicultural' aspect, such a project might further explore the possibilities of different poetic forms from various cultural backgrounds. Dialogues and interactions may take forms such as *tanka*, *haiku*, *macapat* (Javanese traditional poetic forms), sonnet, *pantun* (Malayan poetic form) or *qasida*. The poets could first use forms from their respective cultural backgrounds while observing other forms before crossing over to using them. Applying the daily rhythm of Project 366 would be helpful in building and maintaining artistic habits and modes of thinking. The expansion of future projects can also be done through the inclusion in the dialogue of more art forms, such as film, installation arts and performing arts.

The current advances in technology, such as virtual reality and augmented reality, may further link exchanges and communication among participants.

In sum, the rhizomatic growth, horizontal relations and playful dialogue present in Project 366 have shown the potential in learning to make arts and write creatively in a multicultural community of practice.

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