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From the living room to Gudskul

Colophon

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From the living room to Gudskul Ade Darmawan

He lives and works in Jakarta as an artist, and curator. He studied at Indonesia Art Institute (I.S.I), in Graphic Art Department. In 1998, he stay in Amsterdam, Netherlands for two years residency at the Rijksakademie Van Beeldende Kunsten. Back in Jakarta in 2000, with five other artists from Jakarta he founded ruangrupa. In 2015 his solo exhibition Magic Centre, Portikus, Frankfurt, Germany and in 2016 in Van AbbeMuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands. In 2016 He was participate in Gwangju Biennial and Singapore Biennale. With ruangrupa as an artists' collective platform have participated in Gwangju Biennale 2002 Korea, and Istanbul Biennale 2005, Asia Pacific Triennial Brisbane 2012, Sao Paulo Biennale 2014, and in 2016 curated Sonsbeek International in the Netherlands. In 2009 he became the artistic director of Jakarta Biennale, and since 2013 he is the executive director of Jakarta Biennale.

Within the Indonesian context, to gather and to assemble an organization or a collective is not a new activity. In the history of Indonesian art, gathering and joining an organization have also had a long and thrilling tale that began in the 1930's with PERSAGI (Persatuan Ahli-Ahli Gambar Indonesia – Indonesia - Union of Indonesian Painters, or Union of Indonesian Drawers) and followed by many others with diverse visions in conjunction with the political and social tensions in each period.

In the last two decades, the development of Indonesia's contemporary art's infrastructure has been quite dynamic. The vigorous growth is marked by the emergences of independent art groups or organizations in various cities, and large-scale art activities, such as museums, biennales, art fairs and art festivals that are held in major cities like Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Semarang, and Bali. At the same time, we have the phenomenon of artist initiatives, collectives, and art spaces which sporadically developed in different cities. With a small amount of financial support (self-funded) they are active in conducting art project, research, and artistic collaboration focusing on local social-political issues especially about cities and the urban environment. But unfortunately, these dynamics are facing significant problems in sustaining the long-term vision, strategy, and

financial support of the organization. These problems make it difficult for organizations to survive for more than three years. All these factors contribute to the lack of certain discourses or ideas to be developed regularly and continuously since the discourses or ideas will disappear before they can be developed. It also means we cannot hope that certain issue or ideas that can be developed in an intense and broad discussion.

One of the most fundamental failures of infrastructure was its failure to make and hold a relevant role in the accelerating field of art practices and the accelerating developments/changes in social cultural and political realities in the society. It should be able to continue to work, continue to build and manage its relevancy, which includes aspect of appreciation, criticism, education, and mediation, facility, which of course is supported by good management. However, insufficient support from the government made the situation go from bad to worse. In reality, the presence of government art institutions offered no systematic support to the movement of the discourse of art in the society, due to the lack of the human resources capacities, facilities, funding and further problems that were caused by bureaucracy.

We can keep complaining about the system that does not run well, or the structure that stays incomplete or imperfect. However, in all those circumstances, we can label anything as an alternative model. In the recent decade, efforts have been emerging people who were trying to complete or build and develop an art infrastructure or platform, which were derived from the needs caused by the acceleration of art, and social, political, and critical ideas. These were different from the government-built infrastructures and other infrastructures that held a different orientation. This lack of support can also be a failure of the prior support system which failed to respond to the acceleration of art ideas that had moved just as quickly as the cultural and social changes in society. As an example, we can see how backward the concepts of art that are applied in the current art education institutions as we compare them to the visual culture that is happening in the public by artists who have been profoundly influenced by the development of technology and the media.

Infrastructure development and their role, which was taken by the various collectives and artists who run spaces and initiatives to complement the deficiency or the infertility of the existing infrastructure, had become very sporadic and were done according to personal agendas. It certainly did not guarantee a synergic relationship between them. The path to a non-centric network, one based on collaboration and horizontal partnership, is a long and winding one. During this time, the various forms of cooperation between groups and organizations, which had involved informal infrastructures from the many disciplines, were executed frequently. Mostly, the emergence of these groups or organizations were not intended as a direct opposition, nor an antithesis, or a resistance, or even an immediate reaction from the mainstream, but instead can be more appropriately seen as an urgent need that grew as an implication of idea development. This infrastructure/practice, even when it was small, was mostly run by an independent agenda and not too concerned or did not give any attention to the existence of prior art infrastructure. It is conceivable that a group of creative workers who were very active with their ideas would not be too directly affected by the presence or absence of an art center in another city or region. This lack of influence happened because there was no prior relationship with mutual influence, which can also be a failure of the preceding art infrastructure who failed to understand the movements in their vicinity. A need triggered most initiative or activity, and then, through experimentations and according to reality, a collaboration structure or a model that was deemed the most appropriate was formed. Then it becomes a survival strategy of these groups to fill in the gaps in the absence of a system or structure, even if the gap was imagined or dreamed, sporadic, and even temporary.

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These collaborations call for a need for research and mapping that should be done intensely and persistently, regarding the birth and development of collectives and or institutions in the fields of art and culture, so that a foundation for networking and cooperation can be established. This foundation can, in turn, help form networks consisting of small units engaged in each of the localities and strongly connected.

The art scene of Indonesian contemporary art has grown more dynamic with the increased activity of the alternative spaces or artist's initiative spaces that were initiated and managed independently by artists in cities other than Jakarta, Bandung, or Yogyakarta such as in Makassar, Semarang, Malang, Cirebon, Jatiwangi, Surabaya, Lombok, Medan and Padang. Also, many art activities were organized by artist and networker groups, which offered new and exciting ideas in the discourse of Indonesian contemporary art, such as art biennales, festivals, video and new media art, performance art, and project-based art activities. Events which took form as art projects, with their emphasis on the process, study, artistic collaboration, and social-political issues with the city and urban environment as the main subject, generated many creative new ideas. These are the signs of the concern of artists on the surrounding social situation, in the local and global context and in the effort to clarify the position of artists and their critical ideas in society.

The collectives have become a knowledge sharing and transformation platform for different people and practices that lasted intensively and continuously. Collaborators and members have woven organic artistic collaborations and exchanges of ideas. The relationships have grown at both the individual and communal (organizational) level through diverse activities and approaches. All these forms of collaborations could happen because of the intention and basic impulse to share, collaborate, and exchange ideas and friendship. This pattern has also been accompanied by the need to create cross-disciplinary artistic collaboration. A creative practice could not exist without involving other fields of knowledge that take part in constructing various discourses and social practices. These forms of collaboration are conducted by recognizing the functions and needs of each party without emphasizing other interests. These processes always use the opportunity to share knowledge among the communities so that they can fulfill the requirement of network development. A fact shows that differences in focus and interest have played a significant role in constructing the forms of relations amongst the initiatives. It's worth noting that every relation that happened shows specific dynamics and

characteristics. It is worth the effort to look back at various forms of collaborations that occur both locally and internationally.

Constant and intense artistic practices and negotiations with the state, privates, and surroundings have shaped the learning process. Finding a strategy to survive with all the limitations and benefits of local resources and uncertain things that always have to be faced is a challenge for these communities. One approach to surviving and facilitating the learning process is to find sources of knowledge and experiences from many sources that include either informal or institutionalized networks. The building of networks among art collectives and initiatives from several different cities with a similar vision can serve as a platform for exchanging knowledge and artistic strategy and can inspire each other. It becomes a forum or a platform that can strengthen the bargaining power of these organizations in the broader social, cultural, and political context. One consideration in building up networks is to think of them as an expansion of learning activities, as well as enriching the knowledge resource. However, developing a regional network project is almost impossible without seeing the local networks in other countries, that have been developed in another way, both formal and informally. These regional networks play an important role in supporting and mediating the local network in each country. Imagine the regional network is an extension of the local network. The regional network is developed and set with the consideration to support the local network. By this constellation, both networks will find their essential roles and positions and relate and be relevant to each other.

The path to a non-centric network, one that is based on collaboration and horizontal partnership is a long and winding one. During this time, the various forms of collaboration that were done between groups and organizations. Building a decentralized network, based on collaboration and horizontal partnerships, will have a lot of types of cooperation carried out between institutions that will also involve the formal infrastructure of various disciplines. In the end, it can form a network that consists of small units that are exciting and vibrant in every region and are intensively interconnected. It can also provide sufficient content or issues to share so that each network

member can relate and be relevant to each local context. It makes each member have a strong reason to share or discuss specific issues. The network becomes a platform that is conducting a map of what issues are relevant and important regionally and furthermore develop it into a more significant discourse by producing, sharing, and distributing the knowledge as an essential contribution in the region.

The onset of the exchange of practices and knowledge have made a collective space as a forum for gathering a wide range of knowledge; it's a process of merging. In the process of realization and artistic practice, the merging and fusion of diverse knowledge are proceeding. This knowledge is simulated through events and experiences and flows through the network. A lot of speculation done in daily practice because the situations are often faced with uncertainty, in terms of funding, time, and human resources. The ability to consider all these uncertainties becomes a luxury. However, failure and success are equally important in the process. Accepting failure as part of the process becomes experience and knowledge that can be passed on to others.

The diverse academic backgrounds of the members of the collective and the intensity of the meeting create a new space and ideas, it propagates knowledge and becomes a place of learning for all involved. This new knowledge is discovered through intense, sporadic, spontaneous meetings, and even through manageable conflict. The collectives become an open educational platform based on the desire to share and are non-centralized. They have much knowledge that formed from the practice operating the collectives for many years that has to be formalized for better accessibility and replicable. The hybrid and experience-based learning that has spread and extends through artistic practices, events, and engagements liberates knowledge production and distribution from the power of the elite.

Living room

Ruangrupa is an art organization founded in early 2000. We have developed ourselves into a collective with various divisions, each focusing on exhibition, festival, research, and networking. All these

were achieved by mastering the art of organizing. Being true to our interdisciplinary vision, besides visual artists, we are now composed of individuals from various disciplines—such as architects, musicians, researchers, writers, designers, and journalists. For more than 17 years, Ruangrupa has been advancing visual art's creative works that are critical to urban surroundings, based on collaboration work. Ruangrupa has also become an organization that is consistent in bringing city discourse as its primary focus and continuously elaborates it further through research as a part of the creative process. Art projects and workshops that involve many artists and people from diverse fields of studies that always center on city issues discussions has created many visual artworks in the form of various objects in public spaces, installations, photographs, and audio visual. In this setting of urban society, Ruangrupa also emphasizes expanding studies and provides a place for video and new media works, which in the last developments are very relevant in seeing art and technology and its relation to society. Several activities that Ruangrupa has developed since the beginning of 2000 are Jakarta 32'c– Jakarta Students Art Festival, OK Video – Jakarta International Media Arts Festival, ArtLAB that focus on artistic research and social issues-based art projects, Karbon- arts, and a culture online journal. Ruangrupa sees that its function as a 'laboratory' is not supported with the sustainability and development of other elements such as visual art critics and research, education, publishing, and exhibition spaces as requirements to form discussions, appreciation, and information distribution, in both national as well as international forums.

As previously mentioned, many artist groups, organizations, and initiatives are appearing nowadays to realize visual art creative works, deal with their obstacles and find ways to survive. These organizations, although many are small, have shown their awareness in management and in extending the scope of discourse to the public. However, the sporadic movement surely will not be seen or heard if the artists or the creative projects do not have a space to grow and develop as well as discover their critical exploration. Not many of the artists that have participated and created original works continue to create works since it is difficult for them to find the next platform where they can

continue a deeper discussion. This state also prevents new discourses to be expanded.

At least two common tendencies could be observed among the organizations and groups involved in the exhibition. First, their artistic practices, whether collaborative or individual, constituted their artistic statement as a group. Secondly, these artists' groups and organizations played the role of a support system within the art ecosystem, through activities or programs that raised public awareness aimed at the broad public, such as exhibitions, workshops, festivals, discussions, publications, film and video screenings, websites, archiving, and research. The combination of these two practices, as artist collectives and as support systems in the art ecosystem, clearly distinguishes the role and type of these artists' groups and organizations emerging at this time from those of previous generations.

Meetings and sharing through conversations have become important, and a house provided a very comfortable space for allowing these things to happen. Such meetings most often took place in the living room, since it is the largest room in most typical Indonesian homes. All the groups and collectives above used the living room of a house as the starting point and the center of their activities, altering and adapting the domestic space into a more public space, converting the living room into a meeting space and exhibition space; and the bedrooms into working spaces or studios, a library, and a space for archives. Typically, it is a rented house in a middle-class residential area—a secular area, a melting pot of people from various backgrounds. There are practical reasons behind the choice of a rented house as a working place: these are easy to find and the rents are affordable. As such, an initiative's space has a better chance of surviving financially. The lease usually applies for a year, and the rent is paid with money collected from members of the group. The rented house is often also used to serve the various combined interests of the group, as a living and working space. Thus, the house can have two functions: as a space for living and a space for working and gathering.

The financial ability to rent in a certain area also shows that the artists come from more or less the same social and economic class as other residents in the area. Most artists usually also divide their time

as workers in the creative or media industries, part-time freelancers, or students. Most groups choose a working-class housing area or mixed areas with residences and small to medium businesses. A mixed area is particularly suitable because it is also a place for diverse kinds of independent enterprises.

From a simple living room, the group positions itself as a vital part of the supporting infrastructure for both art and the community, becoming a stand-alone citizen's initiative. This kind of group, this type of initiative, which typically uses a residential house as its basecamp or meeting ground, imagines itself as living among the people. Its presence in a residential area is an opening, or a call for a skill, to negotiate and dialog with the values of the community surrounding it. Living together with the people, its activities are naturally carried out with an awareness of, and alongside these values, and may even tap from them. The direct or indirect involvement of the nearby residents can be a strategy of artistic exploration, influenced by those residents.

The position of "living together with the people" imagines an art institution's relationship within a society: it exists within the community and becomes a part of it—a strategy built on friendship and collective enjoyment.

Lumbung and Study process in GUDSKUL Ekosistem - As sustainability of ideas

Our biggest challenge is how to create a platform that can sustain this artistic practice and translate it within the increasingly rapid changes in society. The new model we propose is a form of an ecosystem. Conceptually, Ruangrupa and together with the web we have developed throughout our existence, have established a collective living-working culture that is collaborative, mutual and based on friendships. Organically, we have been sharing resources in the forms of human, time, energy, knowledge, besides financial and other tangible materials. The most valuable shared wealth we possess is our diverse approaches. We have been working together for the past 17 years, beyond just developing further our web of networks, but also

developing a replicable ecosystem to guarantee the sustainability of these webs.

Since the establishment of our ecosystem, we have introduced what in Indonesia is referred to as a *lumbung*—literally, a rice barn, a term commonly used by farmers in Indonesia’s village-based agricultural system. A *lumbung* is a collective pot, where all resources owned by each collective/group are deposited and stored. These resources include all tangible and non-tangible elements, including our specific programs and human resources.

Gudskul: contemporary art collective and ecosystem studies is a public learning space established by three Jakarta-based art collectives: Ruangrupa, Serrum, and Grafis Huru Hara (GHH). All three have actively immersed themselves into the contemporary art realm since the early 2000s, by practicing a collective and collaborative mode of working. In 2015, they further collectively formed a co-ecosystem, to practice an expanded understanding of collective values, such as equality, sharing, solidarity, friendship, and togetherness.

Believing that art and artists can no longer exist for their own sake, practicing collectivity and working collaboratively are methods to take a stand in society—practically and discursively. In the contemporary art realm, these methods of practice are consequential, through which understandings towards notions such as interdisciplinary practice, openness, pluralism, collaboration, exchange of ideas and experimentations of power are formed. We established Gudskul to encourage the initiative spirit in artistic and cultural initiatives in society. Using this approach, artists then simultaneously and organically act as producers, mediators, distributors, and networkers.

To achieve these goals, we designed Gudskul as a space for study, performed collective practice simulations, advocated the importance of the process through critical and experimental dialogues, and produced experience-based learning and sharing. This non-degree and unaccredited one-year study program has a dynamic curriculum. In Gudskul, participants will be involved directly in an artistic ecosystem while collaboratively determining the shared road ahead, while access to existing resources and networks maintained by the founding collectives serves as a support.

We established Gudskul to encourage the initiative spirit in artistic and cultural initiatives in society. We are looking for future agents who put their focus on local necessities while contributing actively in international spheres. We are opening Gudskul for those who are interested in learning together, to develop collective-based artistic practice and collaboration-focused artistic production methods, such as (but not limited to): artists, art managers, curators, researchers, and other cultural practitioners interested in networked praxis. Gudskul is our new platform established in 2018 as an educational platform. It is conceived to be a space for participants' experimentations and simulations to work collaboratively as a collective. Collaborative work is an operating pattern or method where togetherness and equality are practiced to produce something together.

On the other hand, a collective is an organizational system or management model based on the agreement of many individuals with various backgrounds to achieve and sustain specific objectives, values, and intentions (distribution). To achieve the aforementioned goals, Gudskul employs a series of experiential learning process using face-to-face meetings, studio works, field trips, internships, and residencies as our methods. Gudskul participants are operating within an Ekosistem environment, in which many actors are co-operating; artists, curators, art writers, managers, researchers, musicians, film directors, architects, cooks, filmmakers, designers, street artists, among many other individual skills. This diversity renders Gudskul as a rich and dynamic Ekosistem, a fertile ground in enriching participants' learning experience. Gudskul consists of collectives focusing on different artistic practice and media. This diversity also contributes to diversifying the issues and actors involved in every collaborative project happening within.