Lumbung, commons and community art

# a conversation between Simon Kentgens and Florian Cramer

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**SPEAKERS**

Florian Cramer, sim only

00:00

**Florian Cramer** 02:47

My name is Florian Cramer, and I'm here with a guest. Do you want to introduce yourself?

**sim only** 02:54

I'm Simon Kentgens. Thank you for having me, Florian. We've been working together for I don't know how many years - I think almost ten years... And we've worked on several research projects mostly on collective self-organization and autonomy.

**Florian Cramer** 03:15

Yes, but now we are already jumping right into our subject. But maybe we need to start with what we just heard? It was something that we both were a part of: a recording from documenta fifteen in Kassel, made in June 2022, when we were there with a small group of students. Can you maybe explain to listeners what was happening there?

**sim only** 03:40

We were listening to a rehearsal where we were actually playing roof tiles. So ceramic roof tiles, and this was part of a project that was initiated by a Jatiwangi art Factory, an Indonesian collective from a little town called Jatiwangi, in West Java. They were invited to be part of documenta fifteen. And they've done several projects, all their projects revolve around roof tiles, around ceramics, etc. And they wanted to arrange a large kind of mass performance with many people playing these roof tiles during the opening week of Documenta, which they did with several 100 people joined. And in preparation to this concert, let's say or performance. They organized like daily practice moments and we joined with our with our group, we joined one of those practice moments and this is what we were listening to. And as you can hear that the roof tile can only make two sounds like 'click' or 'clack' basically. And still with these Click and Clack you can make quite a... So they made a kind of musical score and we rehearsed it and..

**Florian Cramer** 05:00

You can also hear the voice of the conductor. He was a member of Jatiwangi art Factory who was in Kassel back then.

**sim only** 05:09

And so they were like... there was a group of the Jatiwangi art collective, which is a group of, I don't know, 40 - 45 people. And some of them were mostly involved in this kind of musical performance. But this was part of a larger project they were doing, which is called The New Rural Agenda in which they want to give new focus or new meaning or explore the kind of meaning of the of the countryside or the rural, let's say, in all parts of the world, not only in Indonesia, and this was part of...

**Florian Cramer** 05:45

But they are themselves based in a rural part of Indonesia, right? In Java, I think, about 200 kilometers east of Jakarta. The fact that they're working with roof tiles and clay also has immediate significance because the area where they live is the traditional area of the roof tile and clay industry in Indonesia. And that's, I think, how they came together: the idea was to create an art community for the entire village, working with materials that everyone in that village was already working with.

**sim only** 06:26

Yeah. And this roof tile industry was peaking in the 70s and 80s. And maybe still 90s. I don't know exactly, but then it kind of went into a decline because of newer techniques and whatever. And, and so they decided to, to... sorry, there's a slight distraction... And so they decided to start a kind of art community space to start working with the roof tile factory workers also. Yes.

**Florian Cramer** 07:01

But in the meantime, I understand that this region has been reindustrialized with new factories. So it's losing this rural village character.

**sim only** 07:12

There's a new highway that has been put there recently, there's an airport now. So lots of factories, as I heard from them, I haven't been in a while. But as I've heard from them, a lot of new factories are moving to there, because it's cheaper, because there's cheap labor, cheap land etc. Still, yes.

**Florian Cramer** 07:35

And you have been there, right? Because they also run an artist residency program, and you stayed there.

**sim only** 07:50

I've been there I think twice. I met them before here in Amsterdam, in the Netherlands, actually. I stayed there for a little while, and I just kind of was hanging out with them. How long? Not that long, actually. So I think first time was maybe a week or something. And then the second time was also several days.

**Florian Cramer** 08:17

But that's the way Jatiwangi art Factory runs, to have both the local activities and bring in international artists as residents.

**sim only** 08:25

Yeah. And at some point, they have also rearranged their whole their grounds and they made more space for more people to come. So yes, more residency spaces, there's a kind of museum for terracotta artworks, there's a kind of project space, a radio station.

**Florian Cramer** 08:45

I also understood that a lot of festivals and rituals that are being performed for the village community.

**sim only** 08:54

WITH the village community, I would say mostly, so it's it's something that they initiate, but I guess it's also something that is being done in the community already. I don't know. I mean, they do work a lot with the local workers and the local villagers.

**Florian Cramer** 09:19

That includes the Roof Tile Orchestra, which originally comes from the village community where there is a roof tile music festival once every year. Would it be fair to say that the idea is to have art that is very accessible and where the difference between artists and participants, or makers and audiences, is more or less dissolved?

**sim only** 09:50

I mean, these performances or community meetings that they do in Indonesia and Jatiwangi, they do these concerts with like a few 1000s of people, which is quite impressive. You can watch the videos online on YouTube, it's really quite cool. And in Documenta, there were a few 100 people I think, maybe people here are a bit shy to join.

**Florian Cramer** 10:21

When we listened to the piece of music, there were not 1000 people, but maybe 15 people in the group. But still, it means you need a certain hierarchy between an artist who makes the concept, somebody who writes the score and conducts, versus the participants who end up being performers executing a score that has been thought up by the artists. So isn't there still a hierarchy between artists and audience? While the artists may be working more in the style of curators or shapers of events, arent they still in charge of them,?

**sim only** 10:59

I guess they're in charge of directing the score, of directing the format. And directing also the framework in which it operates. But I'd say it's a different type of directing, not like a theater director would direct actors.

**Florian Cramer** 11:31

How is it different? How would you characterize that?

**sim only** 11:36

Well, I think first is it's much more open. So mistakes are not a problem. It's not about creating a perfect score or perfect musical composition. It's about being together and doing this as a group. And with many people joining you also feel the kind of communal vibe somehow.

**Florian Cramer** 11:58

Yes. And neither do you really have individual artist signatures. Jatingwangi art Factory themselves are a quite big collective, 45 people, you said. And the idea is that all their activities, in their different formats, are being collectively organized.

**sim only** 12:24

As far as I've understood. I've worked with them and I joined them for quite a while, but don't know everything. They do organize themselves in separate groups within the collective. So there's a group that works with music, with sound recordings, for example, but there's also a group that does ceramics. There's is another group that works with food, or sculptural pieces and so on..

**Florian Cramer** 12:48

But it's always done under the collective identity of the Jatiwangi art Factory. Jatiwangi art Factory doesn't seem to be just an umbrella where people would attach their individual signatures to. But it's all done under the collective identity of JaF, right?

**sim only** 13:05

The overlapping, overarching theme is Tanah, the Indonesian word for soil or ground or earth. So terracotta and everything they do is somehow connected to this. That's also how they explained it to me. So but within this, I guess there are a lot of possibilities.

**Florian Cramer** 13:37

We have previously talked about how this has been transported to Documenta and Kassel in Germany. Not all of our listeners may know that Documenta Kassel is a 100 days event, more than three months. If one also includes the preparations, this meant that these 45 people had to live in Kassel for a long time. How did this work?

**sim only** 14:01

I don't know how many people exactly came to Kassel, but from these 45 people, I think, at least around 30 or so. And then they invited a lot of people from around the globe, mostly from rural places, to join, for a summit they organized, the New Rural Summit, where many people discussed, talked, met and performed around notions of the rural. The members of Jatiwangi art Factory lived together in an abandoned house in Kassel, the former office space of a factory that had gone out of business. That factory was part of Documenta's exhibition in the East of a Kassel, in an industrial, a bit rundown neighborhood.

**Florian Cramer** 15:00

But then the question is, does this work at all? Because, we had just reconstructed how what Jatiwangi art Factory does in their community and their village is very locally and culturally specific. But if you then do the same activities, like the Roof Tile Orchestra, and you bring them to Kassel, does that actually make sense?

**sim only** 15:19

Yeah, that's the question. But I think what they did really well is that most of them stayed there for about three months. A lot of them stayed there for a long time. So to really make a connection, they were in Kassel for already one or two months before the opening of Documenta. In fact, most of them wanted to stay much longer, but they couldn't, because after 90 days their visa ran out.

**Florian Cramer** 15:45

Yes, that's perhaps the dirty secret of documenta fifteen which few people are familiar with, but only those who know the stories from behind the scenes: Although all these artists collectives from all over the world were invited, and although documenta fifteen lasts longer than three months, with its one hundred days, most invited artists only had 90 days tourist visa, a lot of them even less. I found that quite scandalous. We both were in the house where the people from Jatiwangi art Factory were residing. That was a tiny house for, at that time, more than 20 people, whole families with children, equipped with only one toilet and one tiny kitchen for all them. I mean, the Human Rights Commission probably wouldn't tolerate this as a refugee shelter.

**sim only** 16:43

It was interesting that they also advertised this a bit... So they were like, these artists from the 'Global South' coming to Europe. Right. So, first of all, they had a lot of these, like you mentioned, visa issues. This was really a big trouble for a lot of people. Then there was the housing issue. Since you are German you know that in Germany, the regulations are very strict. But suddenly, it was apparently possible to live in a factory. You know, that is definitely difficult in many countries and I would imagine in Germany probably even more difficult. Another collective, Gudskul, even lived in a museum. So you wonder, how is it possible that 40 or 50 people live in a museum? Or 60, I don't know, living in one big hall in bunk beds. Put into makeshift dormitories, basically. And this was the same for Jatiwangi art factory. And I mean, they had a really good time. And it was a nice place for them to live. But for me, I had some questions concerning the circumstances of how this was done. And I would wonder if this would have been, let's say, an artist collective from the West transported to anywhere in the Global South...

**Florian Cramer** 18:11

yeah, a shitty term..

**sim only** 18:14

....to Indonesia, for example, would those artists accept this? And if you also look at this very tiny kitchen and very tiny bathroom. And this transportation of a very local practice to a totally different context in Kassel. It's quite difficult, because I also understand that it's difficult if you want to bring in 40 people. How do you host this and where?

**Florian Cramer** 18:44

This was my experience, too, because - full disclosure -, I, too, was involved in the workshop program in the same area on two days. We were also hosted by Jatiwangi art Factory, but came with two other collectives, Hackers & Designers from Amsterdam and Display Distribute from Hong Kong. Those workshops took place in the factory building on the same site. In the building, there was some video documentation of Jatiwangi art Factory's activities in their hometown. In our workshop, we made a collective zine on Documenta with the visitors who came in, some of whom really took time to engage with this. And from our conversations with them, we learned that pretty much all of that information in the video was lost on them. It was not clear enough. We in the workshop basically had to explain this whole part of Documenta and what the collective practice of Jatiwangi art Factory was. So maybe that was also an issue of the whole Documenta 15 that all these collective community-oriented practices were very difficult to transport from their specific local environments, contexts and meanings to Kassel, because Documenta was founded in the post-war period of the 1950s on the idea of abstract modernist art as a universal language. You could say, it was based on an idea of radical nonlocality, and radical universality, or you might say: radical deterritorialization. And maybe documenta fifteen was the first Documenta that actually broke with this paradigm. Previous editions such as Documenta 11, curated by Okwui Enwezor, questioned universalist ideology by focusing - among others - on postcolonial issues, but all their artists were classically (and mostly Western-) trained fine artists who spoke and worked in the international language of white cube museum and gallery art. This was also true for the video art that dominated Documenta 11. But now at Documenta 15, I thought, this founding concept of Documenta completely broke down, because what you would actually have needed would have been some teleportation device to bring the audience to the original places of the participating collectives and their practices, whether in Indonesia, Thailand, Taiwan, etc. Would you agree?

**sim only** 21:22

It's difficult to say because yes, of course, you cannot transport something like Jatiwangi art Factory, or other [hyper-local] collectives, into another location, that's not possible. At the same time, I think they made a huge effort in doing the best that they could, really engaging with local people, with local communities in Kassel. ruangrupa did this as well. Members of ruangrupa moved to Kassel already two years before documenta fifteen started. And I think, in relation to most of the exhibitions, or the large biennials, or Documentas that I've seen before, or that you see in general, this was really engaging with a lot of local communities. The question is how long will this last after these 100 days will be over? What is still happening? I don't have enough knowledge on this. I can't tell.

I think the question is really, is it even possible to do this within these one hundred days, with this huge budget? I wouldn't say it's a failure, for sure. But it's interesting. For ruangrupa and [their] lumbung [concept], it was very important to engage with a local community, with the local crowds, and to connect with them. For me, that was a kind of crucial, visual kind of intersection. Literally, like an intersection in front of the RuRu Haus. If you've been to Kassel, then you know, the RuRu Haus was the place on the corner of Friedrichsplatz where you buy the documenta tickets. There were two streams of people, one that would go from North to South from the train station, towards the Friedericianum, the museum. And there was another flow of people going from East to West or West to East. And those were the people going through Königsstraße, the main shopping street; the local Kasselers who just go to the local shops around there and buy their stuff. It was interesting to watch this, because you would see this intersection of people who didn't really connect. For me, this was a really nice kind of visual representation of how that really functioned or maybe didn't function. I thought that in terms of imagery, that was, maybe, the key of documenta...

**Florian Cramer** 24:21

...the takeaway? You used the word lumbung. And maybe it is a word that we need to explain. It is an Indonesian word used as the motto for documenta fifteen, by ruangrupa. It also seems to me as if that word was maybe not well communicated...

**sim only** 24:41

You think it wasn't?

**Florian Cramer** 24:45

It was always explained, but only as the Indonesian word for a collective rice barn. But what wasn't so well explained that it actually is the Indonesian equivalent of "commons". One way of translating it would have been to simply say that this documenta is about commons and commons practices.

**sim only** 25:08

Yeah, the lumbung is an actual thing. It's a physical thing. A storage space for rice.

**Florian Cramer** 25:15

Yes. But for example, in Dutch we have the old word "meent". And the meent also is a physical place. And it's actually a commons...

**sim only** 25:23

You could say, it's the Indonesian version of the commons? I also thought that ruangrupa chose this quite smartly, because "lumbung" resonates in German language. It sounds almost like a German word, like "Achtung" and "Bildung" and all these kinds of words. Right. So it's really sounds German. In a way, I think you could say that it was somehow the commons. And maybe, to look at this in a more political sense, you could say like that lumbung is more of a kind of exotization of this word, the commons, right? Or even a form of Orientalism. But it's also a way of almost branding something...

**Florian Cramer** 26:33

Yes! And that's the danger of it, that it becomes an art world branding like "relational aesthetics".

**sim only** 26:37

Yeah, that's a danger. But it's also easy to understand for many people, I think - because of the way how ruangrupa explain the lumbung, and how they visualize it with all their mappings and all their graphics. If you've been to Documenta, you could not have missed it, because it was everywhere. It's, I think, easier to understand than the "commons".

**Florian Cramer** 27:01

Yes, indeed. But on the other hand, you also saw in the way how documenta fifteen was perceived, especially by art critics and by news media, that exactly what you described as Orientalism and exotization, kicked in full force. It was a massive othering of the whole event. Of course, documenta fifteen had the aspect of post-colonial culture and site specificity for third world countries, like, among others, Indonesia. But on the other hand, ruangrupa who were the organizers - I wouldn't call them curators - of documenta fifteen, come from the Indonesian punk subculture.

And if you consider the organizing principles of documenta fifteen, then they're actually not so different from how, for example, squatter and punk self-organized culture works in the West. It's was just very alien to the art system, with its white cubes, with its curators, with its idea of top-down selection of artists and art works, and with its concept of what is quality art. In Kassel, ruangrupa worked together with a lot of local initiatives, many of whom were coming from subcultural and activist backgrounds. And in these communities, there was an immediate understanding and click with ruangrupa, because if you're - for example - a punk hanging out in an autonomous community center or a skater coming from hip hop culture, then you immediately understood what documenta fifteen and its ideas were all about: a community model of making art, and art as a life practice. That it's not about going to an exhibition and looking at artworks, but about a lived practice that includes everyday life.

**sim only** 28:52

Yeah. ruangrupa was initiated, I think, in 2000, during the political reforms after the Suharto dictatorship that ended in 1998. It was definitely a counter-reaction to what had happened under the dictatorship. And this was also a mode of survival, you know, to join forces. Like Taring Padi, the very controversial collective that maybe we shouldn't talk about too much, because it's a whole different story. But they also originated in the uprisings against the dictatorship...

**Florian Cramer** 29:39

Basically, Taring Padi were the subject of the anti-semitism controversy around documenta fifteen, to name it and to not silence it. There's a lot a lot to say about it, I think, also a lot of critique to be said about this work by Taring Padi. Also in generally, I had my difficulties with their works, because they were classical agit prop visual art. And that's also why they drew this attention. In the moment where, say, 90% of the Documenta consists of community workshops, and you have only a few classical visual art works, then they end up drawing all the attention. That is a problem....

**sim only** 30:24

...but that was the purpose of these works...

**Florian Cramer** 30:26

Of course! But then you end up with a very traditional concept of art. But another aspect is that the reason why anti-semitic motifs ended up on their paintings was because they also used an open participatory process for making them, where you didn't fully control who was contributing, what was actually going on and ending up on these paintings. Which again, strongly reminded me of my own past in 1980s post-punk culture, and in 1990s collective-anonymous projects, where similar things happened [including for example, participation of salon fascists, racists and antisemites whose contributions were mistaken for campy transgression]. Or nowadays, in Internet meme culture. This is what happens if you have open participatory processes, if you experiment with collectivity. It means that you give up control and also that shit [- including: bad shit -] happens. But which then doesn't fit expectations of an audience that expects that everything in such a show has been filtered, has gone through curatorship, etc. Okay, maybe we should take a break now. But we can also be a little bit open ended because there's nobody after us. To use another word, we can have a nongkrong, the Indonesian word for chit chat or aimlessly hanging out, without goal orientation. We have a playlist of music here. And maybe we now need to make a decision, because we could either play something from the larger Rooftile Symphony and how it is really performed in Jatiwangi with these thousands of people, or we could alternatively listen to music experiments that came out of Western collectives. And one of them is the Banana School from Copenhagen, which we both have collaborated with in the past. They just issued album on a partly Rotterdam-based label called Futura Resistenza. It's called The Pruttipal Index. The other track is from a network of experimental schools in France called Freinet. An artist collective here from Rotterdam, Woodstone Kugelblitz, have re-issued some of these recordings that were made in the 1970s and 1980s.

**sim only** 33:09

Maybe if our listeners can in now. People who know us can can call us,. otherwise I vote Banana School.

**Florian Cramer** 33:29

Let's play something really experimental from Banana School, for six minutes. [...] What we just heard was DP & PLS, also known as Goodiepal & Pals, also known as the Banana School collective from Copenhagen. It's a band, it's a musical collective, it's an art artist collective that uses dancing as an activist tool, among others, against the deportation of refugees on airports, literally creating barricades through dancing that prevent the police from deporting refugees. They're also involved smuggling refugees over the EU border in Serbia.

**sim only** 40:20

Can you say this on public radio?

**Florian Cramer** 40:25

I think it's public knowledge. It's no secret. And, but part of their practice is to have these kinds of collective musical performances. I think that the male voice we heard in the last piece was by one of the refugees who's a member of the collective. We also had the child, Kat, daughter of Goodiepal and Nynne Pedersen, in between. If you're a little bit familiar with their work, then you know that this comes very much from their everyday practice. These are the melodies they use and songs they play in their activism, etc.

**sim only** 41:05

Right, because we've been talking for half an hour about Documenta, but Goodiepal & Pals and the Banana School was not, at least not officially, part of it. Why do you find it important? Does it connect to the lumbung, for example?

**Florian Cramer** 41:23

Yes, I think that there's a similar idea of the commons. So for example, the first time I saw Goodiepal perform in Rotterdam, at De Player about 15 years ago, you paid like five Euro entrance, but got 10 Euro back. I also met him at a festival in Berlin, where he gave away all his belongings. He was sitting in the middle of everything that he owned. And you could take anything you wanted on the precondition that you watched a video and had a conversation with him. Later, he transformed himself from a solo artist into a collective, and in the end gave up his name. So for example, on this album, you don't even find his name anymore, officially. That, for me, is is quite in line with the ideas of documenta fifteen and would have fit there. - Sorry, I should have said that in a way they actually were part of the Documenta because the female voice we heard, Nynne, who's one of the founding members of the collective, is now director of Trampoline House, and Trampoline House was one of the core collectives invited by ruangrupa to documenta fifteen.

**sim only** 43:07

So do you think that not accepting ownership or resigning ownership... ...like property ownership... Do you think is an essential part of the lumbung?

**Florian Cramer** 43:24

We would have to ask ruangrupa, but I think it's definitely part of the idea of the commons, to give up conventional notions of property and ownership. That's the whole idea. And I think this is also where we need to be very critical of contemporary art practices that use the commons as a kind of fashionable term. I think that if you claim to work for the commons but do not talk about ownership, if you are not addressing property, if you neither have an alternative vision nor an alternative practice for them, then you end up with a pseudo-commons. The worst example that I know was a project in Amsterdam, done by architects where they created a so-called commons as part of a real estate development project. Of course, you could say that's what's always happening, that concepts get appropriated, mainstreamed and watered down. But maybe the strength of the concept of the commons is that it actually *is* an alternative model of ownership and property, which conversely amounts to a hard criterion for whether something is a commons project or not. But there are also related question marks regarding documenta fifteen, among others because it included this so-called Lumbung Gallery. And that was quite controversial. ...

**sim only**

The Lumbung kiosk. Yes. This is where you would sell work.

**Florian Cramer**

[I actually mean a different project, the Lumbung Gallery, which was more controversial than the Kiosk.].The idea of selling work by itself is not necessarily the issue. But I think in the case of the Lumbung Gallery, it was actually two Swiss gallerists which had a model for artists to sell their work. It was a slightly different way of how artists would get a share of the earnings, in comparison to how art galleries normally operate. But it didn't really propose any alternative ownership or property model.

**sim only** 45:30

I don't know enough about about this. I do know that they tried to experiment with a lot of things and also with more commercial ways of dealing. Now you see that, in Documenta, all these collectives are taking part, but actually, they're presented as if they're solo individual artists, right? They are represented and presented on the website, for example, and in the public program almost exactly in the same way. So this reproduces this way of [...] In that sense, not only lumbung becomes brand, but also Jatiwangi art Factory becomes a brand, all these [collectives...]

**Florian Cramer** 46:17

....and ruangrupa have been number one in ArtReview’s Power 100 art world ranking in 2022..

**sim only** 46:23

If you conceptualize it in a more radical way, then maybe you wouldn't need all these names. You would just bring all these people together for a large, joyful, festive summer. But I think that it's quite interesting to navigate all these difficult structures, because, of course, the Documenta has, as you mentioned, a very political agenda from which it originates. And there's a lot of money involved, of course, which makes it [even more] difficult. So there are a lot of agendas next to each other that are sometimes opposing and conflicting each other.

**Florian Cramer** 47:05

And with Documenta, one really needs to understand that it is not at all metaphorical to call it a state art event. It actually is a state art event with politicians directly involved in its governance.

**sim only** 47:21

And after the controversy with the Taring Padi, there was a lot of pressure and political attacks on local, regional and even national politicians. You mentioned something before about how art critics talked about documenta fifteen, right? Basically, and this is very rough, you could say that there were two sides. One side focused on the Taring Padi controversy and on all the stuff that was happening [around the anti-semitism accusations]. Then there were a lot of people - not really the German critics, to be honest -, but international art critics who were very enthusiastic about documenta fifteen. A lot of terms and phrases were used like: "something really new is happening," "this is a paradigm shift".

**Florian Cramer** 48:24

Particularly the American critics wrote that, yes.

**sim only** 48:27

When, a couple of months ago, there was a meeting in De Appel about this [/a lecture by ruangrupa about lumbung], the paradigm shift remained something that keeps on popping up. Apparently, people perceive this as a paradigm shift. Interestingly enough, if you would talk to the artists, or the people in the communities that were flown in, on the ground in Kassel, they would all say: we are doing nothing new. This is what we've been always doing. [This is not anything new.] We're cooking, were gathering and we're hanging out. We're doing some workshops, gardening, etc. This is nothing new. This has been going on for ages. And I thought that was quite interesting, how people, how the Western art world perceives this. Because they see this as something very radical, radically breaking with the Dutch, the kind of Western, German, etc. art...

**Florian Cramer** 49:19

...but only because of this institutional stage. If the cooking would just have taken place in Jatiwangi, nobody would have been [using those words]. It's all about the context.

**sim only** 49:34

I thought that was quite an interesting kind of juxtaposition - how do people talk about it. For me, what was a kind of paradigm shift, maybe even groundbreaking, was this huge gray area in which it was unclear if people were actually part of Documenta or not part of Documenta. So basically, you have to understand that ruangrupa invited a lot of collectives, these collectives invited more collectives. And these collective even if invited more collectives and probably even more and more and more. And so, you know, if you go into these deeper levels, it becomes completely unclear if people were officially part of Documenta or not part of Documenta. And this initiated a kind of gray area in which people were doing lots of things that were sometimes known, sometimes visible, sometimes unknown, sometimes invisible, sometimes announced, sometimes not announced. And it's interesting because this is pretty unheard of, right? If an exhibition, you're either part of an exhibition or not part of an exhibition, you're part of the Documenta, or not part of Documenta... I can spill the beans a little bit... There was a distinction of being officially a Lumbung artist. And it meant that you got a passport, first of all, for [being able to freely enter] Documenta, and you could freely use public transport in Kassel. I know this because I was a Lumbung artist myself [laughing], I was in this larger orbit... There were Lumbung artists who were official artists, and they did some performances. For example, there was this performance of a mountain monk. He dug a hole in the ground somewhere in the North in a small garden, and then stayed in this hole for, I think, five days without food as a kind of radical meditation thing. And then got out again, in this whole kind of meditative and performative, you know, procedure, or whatever. Only a very small group of people were invited, like twenty or so. It was very exclusive. It was not even announced. It was quite special. Actually, I was lucky enough to be there somehow. But I thought this was interesting, because these Lumbung [artist] passes that you talked about, they were shared. It was not like they were exclusive to one person, but people were sharing them all around. Hotel rooms that were booked for the artists were shared with [other] people. And at some point, the organization and no one actually had a clue who was using which passes and which rooms... I thought that was quite interesting, this kind of strange mixture of where the Documenta or the official organization, or festival, or whatever you call it, starts or ends...

**Florian Cramer** 52:36

Yes, and of course, that's also part of the idea of inclusivity and giving up control...

**sim only** 52:45

...yes, and letting this happen...

**Florian Cramer** 52:48

Yes. But what I still wonder is, and that's maybe also an elephant in the room, especially for a Western audience to wonder about, is, well, how is this different from what has been done in art pedagogy for a very long time? Almost as far as one can think back, or at least since since the 1960s? Where seemingly you have the same idea: you create events, you create platforms, social contexts, where essentially everyone can participate. And where you lower the participation threshold to the absolute minimum. I mean, that's what what you learn when you study art pedagogy [in a Western art school]. Right?

**sim only** 53:31

Yeah... This was also what I remember reading om one of the articles, with one of the critics saying that this is the perfect NGO art, basically, to do community work. Which is a simplification, I think, of what's been happening...

**Florian Cramer** 53:52

If I were to formulate an answer to that question, I would say that the issue may be that most art pedagogy is very mainstream, because it tries to reach people on a lowest common denominator. It is also very harmless. In most of the cases, it is not radical. It does not make radical proposals, but is concerned about inclusion and participation as an end to itself. And what I still see as a difference in the practices, not only at documenta fifteen, but this why also brought in Goodiepal & Pals. If you look at such commons-oriented, communal practices in the arts, then I also see something like utopian moments in them: the idea of, for example, experimenting with different forms of living, with different ideas of what society could be, even what politics could be, which all have aesthetic implications, too. If, for example, you listen to the last pieces of music we played, then yes, there are popular catchy singing tunes in them, and but they also have an experimental character that I think is tied to the experimental social character [of Goodiepal & Pals' work]. It is part of a larger, collective, open-ended experiment. And that's quite something else than, just doing, you know, creativity workshops for children in the neighborhood in order to improve social cohesion, wouldn't you agree?

**sim only** 55:34

Yeah, I think you shouldn't also underestimate the joy. I mean, there was a lot of love and fun and joy, and let's say good vibes. That wasn't something that was brought top-down into a community or a neighborhood. It was basically done without these intentions of improving, even though...

**Florian Cramer** 56:18

Maybe that's the danger, right? It's the danger of such practices that, in the end, they become neighborhood repair programs or something similar. And here I am thinking not only of art pedagogy, but also of social design. I wonder what would have happened if, for example, we had thought of documenta fifteen, with all its collective practices, all its workshops and activities, not as art, but as social design. If it would have been called a social design festival, what would have been the implications of that?

**sim only** 56:57

So what do you think?

**Florian Cramer** 56:57

For social design, I know a beautiful example, here from Rotterdam. Maybe I can look it up quickly because I didn't prepare this, but have a web browser in front of me. [It was a group of artists, designers and architects...] You know, Rotterdam has this highly problematic history of social design projects. Especially for international listeners, one needs to explain that Rotterdam in the Netherlands always has had this image of an underprivileged and socially troubled city, with an underclass population that needs to be educated and socially lifted. And on the basis of this, social workers and designers are periodically commissioned to go into underprivileged neighborhoods in order to improve them. More than ten years ago, in August 2012, there was a group of architects who got hired for a project called "WIJkonomie", which is a Dutch wordplay on "we", "neighborhood" and "economy". This was taking place in Tarwewijk, a poor district of Rotterdam-South. One the architects in this projects - I know and I even worked with him here at Willem de Kooning Academy, Theo Deutinger, an Austrian who left Rotterdam after the financial crisis - , did something I consider very remarkable. They were hired for this social design project, but ended up refusing to do it. The statement is still on Theo's website. They wrote the following: *"Four architects spending two months of thinking about Tarwewijk and spending three weeks physically in Tarwewijk does not make any difference. The people of Tarwewijk have a lot of people like us seen come and go. Well educated groups with high flying plans, spreading hope for a prosperous future. When they are gone, live in Tarwewijk is more miserable than before. All expectations and trust by the people of Tarwewijk did disappear with the people foreign to the place. Tarwewijk does not need us to know what to do; Tarwewijk knows exactly what to do. Do it yourself Tarwewijk! We propose a project stop, a concept stop and a subsidy stop for initiatives from outside of Tarwewijk. The people of Tarwewijk know how to do things; they know how to start a business, they know how to work around regulations. We trust in the power of the people in Tarwewijk."* I think this is the best social design project I ever read about. You could draw the same conclusion, for example, as an artist collective like, for example, the Banana School or the We Are Here Collective and the Take-A-Way collective, to say, at some point: we need to stop, because whatever we do, it ends up becoming complicit to a problematic political agenda. And, knowing a little bit of the backstories of documenta fifteen, I also know that these were internal discussions [among the Lumbung artists] when all these controversies came up. There were discussions whether artists should basically call it off and stop.

**sim only** 1:00:51

What you just read out loud, I think you could say the exact same for Kassel. What is left after this joyful summer of Documenta? I don't know, for me - or as an outsider - it's difficult to really [tell]. So you would need to speak to maybe other people. But this is definitely a problem. And that the Documenta was used for problematic agendas was also clear. Because, you know, what I mentioned how Jatiwangi [art Factory] was in this run-down industrial area....

**Florian Cramer** 1:01:28

...that's now being gentrified...

**sim only** 1:01:29

...that's now being gentrified. Of course, this was part of a clear justification agenda by the city that they actually made [put in?] more money. As I heard, they were able to free some more money [for documenta fifteen] because of these purposes; because this was an area that was, in all previous Documentas, overseen, never used. And now suddenly, you know, tens of thousands of people are in this area.

**Florian Cramer** 1:02:00

Yeah. And, of course, it has the typical beauty of an abandoned industrial area...

**sim only** 1:02:08

Yes, classic ruin porn. You see this rundown, late-19th century, fantastic factory that is, you know...

**Florian Cramer** 1:02:16

...yes, indeed. But, I mean, we didn't solve the question, what was actually the difference to social design? I have a proposal. So was documenta fifteen, or are these other collective art projects, in the end, the same as social design projects? Maybe there's one difference, but I might be wrong. And that difference is also addressed in the Tarwewijk project statement. I think the crucial point here are the two months, and people being brought in from outside. The typical way a social design project works, [is the following:] there is a commissioning party, designers are brought into a place that they weren't part of. And then for a limited amount of time, based on a particular budget, they run a project. Commons-oriented collectives like Jatiwangi art Factory, like Gudskul, like ruangrupa, or the Banana School, however, are not projects in this sense. They did not start as assignments, or jobs to be done within a certain time. They are site-specific, yes, but not limited in time. They're not [just] interventions. The idea is not that you go somewhere for some time to fix things, and then you leave again...

**sim only** 1:03:56

It depends a bit if you have the pretension to fix things. Because in two months, or in one week, you can do quite a lot. I don't mean solving stuff. But at least there's a possibility to do something. And I would argue that what you just mentioned, the commissioning party is important, too. Who is the commissioning party, actually, and what is their intention? Because in the end, there's money, [and] there needs to be some money. Cash. So where does this money come from? And what is the agenda behind this money? And in the Tarwewijk [example], it's quite clear...

**Florian Cramer** 1:04:29

But in Kassel it was also clear! Maybe you can say that it was the tragedy of the commons of documenta fifteen - that in the end, it was a social design project, after all. You could even say that Documenta as such is a social design project...

**sim only** 1:05:05

I don't know, because what you just said would imply that you would need to be in a specific location or space or whatever context for many, many, many years for a very long time.

**Florian Cramer** 1:05:17

Which is the case, for example, with ruangrupa, who have been in Jakarta for more than twenty years. Also Jatiwangi art Factory, but I am not sure...

**sim only** 1:05:29

I think they started in 2005 if I'm not mistaken...

**Florian Cramer** 1:05:31

But what I mean, is that there's no expiration date. Maybe it stops, but it's not a planned project that stops [just] because the project is at its [predetermined] end. There's a difference.

**sim only** 1:05:47

There's a difference. Yes. And again, there's no commissioning party, no one who says like: Okay, this needs to be redeveloped or approved, or whatever.

**Florian Cramer** 1:05:55

And it also comes from a kind of personal involvement, right?

**sim only** 1:06:03

Yeah.

**Florian Cramer** 1:06:04

For example, if you're operating as a professional design bureau, it also means that within your team, you have job functions, and people are replaceable, at least to some degree. So for example, if you are a social design bureau, and part of your team is a video maker, and that person would leave the team, you would replace that person with another video maker [you'd hire. This is quite different from an artist collective where people work on the basis of personal engagement and life practice, and where replacing a member would profoundly change the nature and work of the collective].

**sim only** 1:06:36

Yeah, that's true. Like I mentioned before, it was quite remarkable that two members of ruangrupa decided to live in Kassel for two years already, and they're still living in Kassel and they will stay for another year or a few years, I don't know exactly. Which, of course, also is a form of commitment...

**Florian Cramer** 1:06:56

Yeah, life investment...

**sim only** 1:06:58

Yeah, exactly. It's not only it's not only... It's not only saying but also doing, also being, and also taking the shit. It also means you take the shit, it also means that it becomes difficult. For example, these two members, they have small kids, for the last two years, they've been living in Germany...

**Florian Cramer** 1:07:00

...a job... ....and going to school...

**sim only** 1:07:26

....they speak German now. That's basically their life. That's quite a step. And, I mean, this type of commitment was quite remarkable I thought. This is very uncommon, I guess, in social design, but also in the art world, or in any kind of community art project. Not in any, but most of them, I would say.

**Florian Cramer** 1:07:51

But on the other hand, there's still the problem, for example, that we've seen in the past decades, that basically, the whole contemporary art system is a giant jetset, even where it's just an Easyjet-set. But it's quite unsustainable. That is also something that documenta fifteen did not solve, right? It was highly problematic on that level as well. These are all open questions. I mean, these are the actually interesting questions that should have been discussed. Maybe we could say in retrospect that documenta fifteen was this huge collective, practical, everyday experiment of how to actually run a commons? And also, how this can go wrong, and fail on all kinds of levels and in all kinds of details. But what you can learn from it, right? What you can take away from it? And also how far can you push [this experiment]?

**sim only** 1:08:23

Sure! Yeah. And what's a bit of a shame is that the focus on the anti-semitic imagery made it almost impossible to ask these kinds of questions. Yes. Yes, because that was there was almost no space.

**Florian Cramer** 1:09:05

But maybe, you know, that was also a blessing in disguise, in the end. Although it was horrible. It was also a horrible experience for all the artists who were under this collective suspicion for the many months they worked and lived there. But it was an important lesson in what happens when you try social experiments [of living differently/of life otherwise] in the system of art. While, on first sight, you might think that this system gives you that space, at least more so than other existing systems or infrastructures, documenta fifteen taught everyone about its ultimate downsides. If for example, Taring Padi's poster would have been on a political demonstration instead of a contemporary art show, there would have most probably been a dispute[, at least in Europe]. But that happens all the time: there’s a political demonstration, there's a banner, with perhaps the best example being a solidarity demonstration for Palestinian people, [and that banner would be controversial]. I'm a member of an activist group called Doorbraak, and we have a policy that if pro-caliphate, Grey Wolves or anti-semitic banners turn up at demonstrations, we first talk to the groups and then to the organizers. And if no consensus can be reached that these banners will be taken down, we leave the demonstration. That would be the classical way how you negotiate this among activists. And if Taring Padi would have marched with this banner on a demonstration, and somebody would have pointed out to them, look, you are carrying something that awfully looks like an anti-semitic caricature, then probably they would have been the first to take that banner down. And the case would have been over, maybe with some discussions afterwards in [activist] blogs, et cetera. The art system, however, is still a system that, especially from the side of the audience and the media, not only expects production of images, but which has also been educated to consider images end products of a discourse. And then suddenly, this [image] becomes central and singled out although it neither is a final statement, nor even representative for the art practices that characterized documenta fifteen.

**sim only** 1:11:35

So, maybe we should play a bit of music...

**Florian Cramer** 1:11:39

Yes! It's time maybe to switch to France and the experimental school music.... But we also have the annoying music...

**sim only** 1:11:41

I also suggest that we can play the annoying music...

**Florian Cramer** 1:12:01

We won't say what it is, we just tell that it's annoying.... [...]

**sim only** 1:14:47

We need to be clear that the music itself was not annoying. It's the context, and we need to explain this a bit. As I mentioned earlier, Jatiwangi art Factory were staying in a former factory space. And this factory space was also a venue, an exhibition venue called the Huebner Areal. It was one of the largest venues of this Documenta, in this rundown industrial zone. The house where the people of Jatiwangi art Factory lived was literally right next to the exhibition space. Next to the entrance of the exhibition space, the Documenta organization decided to hang a huge video screen. And on this video screen, a film was shown by the FAFSWAG collective from New Zealand. I have seen it, and it's a really beautiful film. But it was outside, literally right in front of the house, a film of around 40-45 minutes. And it played constantly in a loop. There was about ten minutes of silence, and then it started again. And we just listened to a very short snippet of this film. But it had a very intense audio track. And there's much more, and it went on and on. And what we just listened to was what I literally recorded with my phone. I had put my phone on the windowsill of the Jatiwangi house to record the sound because it was so intrusive. And, in a way, so violent. But you get used to it, I mean, everyone who has been a museum guard knows that art videos loop, and you internalize that. But the people from Jatiwangi were living there. And every day at nine or ten, I forgot when exactly, it started, and it went on until nine o'clock in the evening. And this was constantly going on. If, for example, we would be speaking there at the table, we would literally need to stop our conversation because you could not...

**Florian Cramer** 1:17:22

...it's like at an airport, nearby the engines...

**sim only** 1:17:23

This also became a running gag, of course, because everyone knew that song by heart, and everyone was kind of playing with it. And we were just kind of making fun of it when I stayed at the house to helped them. But of course, I thought it was also a very casual kind of violence to it, somehow. Just putting a screen up there, without talking, without explaining... And I don't think this would [be tolerated] in any [other] kind of case [/environment] where people live, especially in the kind of complaint culture that we are in, such as in Germany or in the Netherlands where people will start complaining about this. It [/This installation] would be nearly impossible, because it just kind of enters your brain. I thought it was an interesting example. We talked about the toilets and about the kitchens, about how people were housed in these former factory places. But [then] also the art, how the actual exhibition, becomes part of this kind of violence. They [/The people from Jatiwangi art Factory] didn't speak up, which was quite remarkable. And I don't know exactly why they didn't...

**Florian Cramer** 1:19:06

Politeness perhaps.

**sim only** 1:19:07

Politeness, maybe - I would need to ask this. But someone said to me, you know, all this stuff with the collectives, it's very nice, but they want the art but they don't want the people. And I thought that was very [to the point/dead-on]. Because, yeah, they want the cool art and all that kind of cool communal projects. But how do you deal with all these people who come from countries far away and need visas, needed housing, might need food. Jatwangi art Factory, you need to understand, ran out of money. They were staying in Kassel, doing Documenta as one of the main exhibitors there. At some point, the money ran out, so they started a market selling food, to be able to make money, to be able to sustain their own living. Their Documenta allowance was gone. And still, they were organizing workshops, still they were organizing events, they were organizing music events, they were organizing ceramic workshops, etc. And of course, I understand, for them it's also an opportunity, to be there, and you're in the center, there's a lot of people. It's also fun. But yeah, there's something to this that is also quite discomforting.

**Florian Cramer** 1:20:53

Yes. And we should maybe also explain how events like Documenta work; biennials, too. They actually have rather low budgets for the artists. Because the standard assumption is, when you're an artist and invited to Documenta, this skyrockets your art market value. And therefore, in the typically assumed cases, your gallerist will pay your travel costs to Kassel, etc, etc. That is the kind of hidden deal, despite the fact that Documenta costs a lot of money, I think 30 million...

**sim only** 1:21:39

42!

**Florian Cramer** 1:21:40

And it's public money, tax money. But it still mostly goes into the facilities, and into maintaining the spectacle. But actually, for the artists, there's very little in it, because the idea is: you profit with your market value, which of course absolutely does not work, nor make any sense or even apply to the kinds of art practices that were shown there last summer, because they are not gallery art, and there were no gallerists footing part of the bills. And also: artists were staying there for the whole one hundred days, instead of just coming there, building up an installation for a week or two, and then going home, and having the exhibition run by itself. Normally, all the costs are actually supposed to be the operating costs for keeping the exhibition open [, not for hosting the artists].

**sim only** 1:22:30

That's the main difference. A lot of people who came there were quite surprised that the artists were actually hanging out [there].

**Florian Cramer** 1:22:38

Yeah. Joseph Beuys did the same in 1977 when he ran his Free International University for the whole one hundred days of Documenta 6, in its main building. But that was from an economically privileged position. Back then he already had art market success, so he could afford it. And the students were his followers (laughs), they followed their guru. - Maybe the question is: is the art system the right system to support commons practices.

**sim only** 1:23:19

Yeah, I think that's a really good question. And I would be inclined to say no!

**Florian Cramer** 1:23:23

Yeah, maybe that's the takeaway, right? It's a dire takeaway, but...

**sim only** 1:23:27

At least not in the way it's functioning at the moment.

**Florian Cramer** 1:23:33

It will have to radically change, and become hospitable to...

**sim only** 1:23:38

Yeah, but then it would need very radical changes, in terms of funding and organization,

**Florian Cramer** 1:23:48

...and also its expectations. Okay, shall we end on this dire note? (Laughs.) It was a long conversation. Thanks for everyone who was listening. We have recorded the conversation. If you missed parts of it, we will hopefully have a good recording that we can share with you.

**sim only** 1:24:12

And thank you for inviting me. We have these conversations more often, but in a more casual setting, or sometimes a professional setting,

**Florian Cramer** 1:24:27

This is casual, too, only with microphones...

**sim only** 1:24:32

Anyways, thanks for inviting me...

**Florian Cramer** 1:24:35

Then I propose that we hear some music from the French experimental Freinet schools which have existed since the 1970s. Here, I need to thank Teun de Graaf from Woodstone Kugelblitz who introduced me to them and showed me their original vinyl editions. They were pressed on seven inches in the 1970s and 1980s, with beautiful cover artwork. Some of them have been re-released by Woodstone Kugelblitz on a website. We'll play eight of these short tracks, each of them running just a few minutes.