

Constellations ° Assemblies: Conflict & Care

Transcript

0:08 Elisabeth Del Prete

Hello, everyone. Good afternoon and welcome to *Conflict & Care*. This event is part of the *Constellations ° Assemblies* programme that is curated by UP Projects in partnership with Flat Time House and in association with Liverpool Biennial. My name is Elisabeth Del Prete, I am Senior Curator at UP Projects, and I am a white woman with wavy long brown hair, wearing a pair of earrings with pink and purple stones. And I'm wearing a white shirt. I go by the pronouns she/her. The premise of today's events is to explore and reflect on how we manage conflicts when working with communities and on public art projects and visual art projects more generally. And how we navigate and negotiate conflicting agendas, and how we might implement practices of care in an honest and genuine way to address differences. Of course, global conflicts are very much at the forefront of our minds at present. But today's discussion will be focusing on the contexts of public art and social practice, and the contradictions that underlie the notion of care. *Conflict and Care* will be moderated by Morgan Quaintance, an artist and writer based in London. Hi, Morgan. I'm also very excited that Morgan will be joined by an artist Jack Ky Tan, and independent curator and Curator of the 12th edition of the Liverpool Biennial, Khanyisile Mbongwa. I'm just going to say a few words about Morgan and his background. Morgan Quaintance is a London based artist and writer. His Moving Image work has been shown and exhibited widely at festivals and institutions, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the *McEvoy Foundation for the Arts in San Francisco*, *Konsthall C in Sweden*, and *David Dale in Glasgow*, amongst many others. Over the past fourteen years, his critically incisive writings on contemporary art, aesthetics and their socio-political contexts, have featured in publications including *Art Monthly*, *the Wire*, and *the Guardian*, and helped shape the landscape of discourse and debate in the UK. From 2012 - 2023 he was the producer and presenter of *Studio Visit*, an interview-based radio programme for London's Resonance - Resonance FM. Morgan will introduce Jack and Khanyisile shortly, and for more information on the speakers today, you can find a link in the chat that we have just added. Before handing over to the speakers, I just want to mention some briefing, virtual housekeeping. So, if you experience any technical issues, please use the chat button at the bottom of your screen to chat privately with our dedicated tech support. If you want to ask the speakers any questions during the event, you can submit them via the Q&A button at the bottom of your screen to ensure they get answered. I know Morgan will be taking questions from the audience throughout the event. So please do use that Q&A button. And then we have closed captions available. And if you would like to read along or have any - or

have access to a live transcript, please select the CC button at the bottom of your screen. We are recording the event today which was mentioned at the beginning. And I'm now going to hand over to Morgan. I really do hope you enjoy the event. And please over to your Morgan. Thank you.

4:26 Morgan Quaintance

Hi, yeah, thanks, Elisabeth, for that intro, and hello to everybody. It's kind of strange, who can't see any of you. So I'm just imagining you all out there. But thanks for joining us for this. So we're quite pushed for time, yeah, so I'm going to be quite quick but not overly quick. So I'm going to hate to say things that are normal, even pace but be concise and not to be rambling. What I'll do is give you a quick sort of six-minute introduction, which maybe I suppose, would be my perspective on the theme or subject and then I'll hand over to Jack and then hand over to Khanyisile and then we're going to have a general conversation. But rather than waiting right to the end for you to jump in and ask questions, just maybe if we could treat this as a bit of a kind of free forum. So if you have anything that occurs to you, while we're talking, just chuck it in the Q&A section, and I'll keep an eye on it, and then field questions and put them to Jack or Khanyisile, as in when they come in. Yeah, and hopefully, we'll get quite a lot done in this period of time that we have. So yeah, just to say, I also have written this, I was going to freestyle it, but because we're doing it to time, I've got to be careful. But before I say this, rather than trying to provide a kind of constricting overview, or definitive reading of the theme, this is just kind of my perspective about it. And that will open its way to Jack's and then Khanyisile's perspectives on the subject. And then after that, hopefully, we'll be able to get some of your ideas about these - this notion of care and conflict or depending on which way that you're sliding. And that spectrum, in terms of what you feel is more important to discuss today. So let me just get this doc together so I can speak to you as prepared. Alright, so my own interest in care as a concept that seems to now be pervasive, stems from an ongoing effort to track shifting institutional and interpersonal behaviours. Following the political term that took place across the UK art sector in the middle of the 2010s. There's probably a number of different factors contributing to that paradigm shift in our field. And I'm just going to briefly talk through a few of them. So I probably argue that there are a series of events that led up to the shift in this country, beginning with the global financial crisis of 2008. So this event caused a fiscal crisis in Britain that resulted in massive cuts to the budgets of regularly funded institutions, anyone who was working for one around 2010 and 2011, will probably remember. So massive cuts and the necessity for those institutions to find cheaper ways of working to scrap large parts of their programmes, cut significant staff numbers, and in some cases reduce the hours and days they were open each week. The coalition government's age of austerity cut funds to public services, the welfare state and support provisions for

the country's poorest citizens. And in the midst of a gig economy, rife zero hours contracts and pervasive precarity, this country's poorest citizens became virtually all of us. Now as social provisions reduced, a kind of pressure for the arts to step in and take over emerged. Institutions still fielding outmoded programmes were facing irrelevance. And so they sought to employ artists and organisations who knew how to respond. And we're already well versed in community work activism, politics, participatory art, and any other socially engaged practices. These artists were already engaged in practices of care. And so these practices made their way and so the discourse made its way from the margins into the "centre". The question now, is whether or not the notion of a caring sector is real, or else is it a hollow practice performance? Or a clear-cut case of virtue signalling? Why must the burden of educating the sector sit with those individuals who were previously marginalised by it? How in a world rife with conflict can one attend to verify the aesthetic questions? And is one even allowed to attend to verify aesthetic questions if you are from a marginal subject position? One thing I just like to add quickly that I haven't gotten my pet thing is this thing that I've been talking about a lot recently, and I saw a statement I heard made by this Drag artist called Dynasty Handbag. And she was describing something that she called the self-care industrial complex. I'm just going to repeat that again because I think it's an amazing phrase, the self-care industrial complex. So as well as this notion of care, like emerging within our sector, it has sort of emerged in the popular consciousness as this thing that's marketized. So, you know, in the age of neoliberalism, everything is become monetized. And I think we can see now that this notion of care or self-care has been delegated to the individual again. So just to throw that in there as something for us to bear in mind. So yeah, some of these questions and more will be explored today, but we're going to start with to five-minute presentations from Jack Ky Tan and Khanyisile Mbongwa. So we're going to start with Jack Ky Tan first. So Jack Ky Tan is an interdisciplinary, so hard to say. Jack Ky Tan is an interdisciplinary artist based in the UK, working across performance, sculpture, law and policymaking. His practice is an ongoing exploration of social justice that blurs the boundaries between art, law, governance and consultancy. Looking toward alternative cosmologies and knowledge systems that predate Judeo Christian or colonial narratives. Tan interrogates the legacies of colonialism with a particular interest in Commonwealth and tropical epistemologies of resistance. By questioning how embedded societal structures form our laws and guide our behaviour, Tan's work attempts to rethink our entanglement with the human and more than human world and look towards alternative ways of living and working. So Jack, thanks for being here today. And I'm just going to hand over the floor to you now, and we'll see you in five - well talk to you in five.

10:55 Jack Ky Tan

Thank you, thank you, Morgan. I'm just going to jump straight in because I've only got five minutes. So I am a - oh god, I'm stuck already - East Asian man with a shaved head. Think chubby Buddha in a gillet - a dark gillet and you've got it. Okay, um, many, many moons ago, I had a background in commercial litigation and what they call now conflict resolution in the sector. So contract disputes, property disputes, debt recovery. And I was also doing civil liberties casework, particularly actions against the police with regard to deaths in custody. So for me, conflict has been an interesting subject right from the start. And, in particular, I'm interested in this idea of conflict in Anglo Saxon legal systems, and how its conducted in an adversarial manner, and adversarial meaning during conflict where two or more parties are pitted against each other. And in an adversarial system, we deal with conflict by trying to determine a number of things, we try to determine what are the facts of the conflict, and by facts, I mean, the post-enlightenment meaning of facts, as opposed to any pre-colonial or non- understanding of truth or reality. We in a conflict, we tried to determine who's to blame. And what is the evidence to prove who's to blame? And then ultimately, we want to decide what is the remedy for the winner of conflict. And what is the punishment for the loser? So in an adversarial conflict resolution process, ultimately, we are trying to determine who or what is right or wrong, correct or incorrect, genuine or fake, truth teller or liar, sinner or saint. So this concept of word conflict arises to me from a binary worldview, or shall we say, put it another way, doing conflict in this adversarial way also reinforces the binary. So a large part of my art practice has been informed by these early legal experiences. And I've been exploring how we can at least why we do conflict like this in society, and also why it doesn't really work. I mean, over the years, I found that conflict, as fact finding in order to allocate blame, really doesn't help anybody. It doesn't do anything except to find blame. And it doesn't actually even do much to resolve the conflict, because people still come away from the process, angry, hurt, damaged, smug, if you win, or wanting to revenge - wanting to have revenge if you lose. So the conflict isn't actually resolved. Therefore, in my practice, I've been exploring non-western or non-Judeo-Christian cosmologies of conflict resolution, which often include care as part of the conflict resolution. Care for the participants in the conflict process, but also care for community and wider society because conflict, or even on an individual level, damages society. So it's about how do we repair the social fabric? And so, but when I say care here, I'm also very aware that like Morgan says, care is a not only a new Liberal term, possibly, but it's also a Western term like this, our understanding what care it's already a Western term. So and then just very briefly, because I've got one minute so I'm going to show you 30 seconds each of the two projects that I think typify this. So this is a project like, oh, ages ago, like 2015, I did this project, and it's called *Karaoke Court*. And it is a project where I invited people with real conflicts, to agree on the binding arbitration

agreement to resolve their conflicts, by karaoke singing before an audience. And the audience act as the jury, and they will actually have legal power to decide who wins the conflict. And many, many non-European societies, not many, but there is evidence throughout the world that different non-European indigenous societies use singing as a way of conflict resolution. Because what is presented is not just facts, but the whole being of a person in their vocality and in their voice, basically. And so people have to not only judge the facts of the case, they often have to judge who the person is as they're presented in their sociality and in their bodies. And I can tell you more about this on another time, but or you can, you could just Google it, and you can, you can watch a video. And then the other one that I wanted to show you is this, which is an *Anti-Racist Partnership Agreement* that I created for Sheffield University to use with its organisations. And basically, it's their partnership contract, but turned into a visual contract, but using their participants because the participants have come from different communities, different ethnic communities, using their cosmology to forefront the contractual term. And very, I'm over my time, but very quickly, for example, this term is the university's dispute resolution clause. But the dispute resolution clause you can see here at the bottom is like, it's like there as the full dispute resolution clause, but it's also incorporated into dispute resolution is this West African dispute resolution for the palava hut system, where you have to go into a hut and instead of just like having an out in conflict, you have to go into this hut to just meet each other and really kind of mediate with each other in within the kind of African cosmological world right? And so this what I've tried to do here is to incorporate this methodology of dispute resolution into the university contract.

17:57 Morgan Quaintance

Thank you very much Jack will be able to hopefully come back some of that stuff in a second but so I'm going to pass it over to Khanyisile now but before I do that, I'm just going to give you a quick biog. So Khanyisile Mbongwa is a Cape Town based independent curator, award winning artist and sociologist. With a curatorial practice centred around curing care and using creativity to instigate spaces for emancipatory practices, joy and play. Mbongwa is the curator of Puncture Points, founding member and curator of Twenty Journey and former Executive Director of Handspring Trust Puppets. She's one of the founding members of arts collective Gugulective, Vasiki Creative Citizens and a women of colour poetry collective called Rioters in Session. Mbongwa was the Chief Curator of the Stellenbosch Triennale in 2020, and I'm sure you all know that they were also the Curator of the Liverpool Biennial in 2023 which is one of the best in the past 13 years. So Khanyisile, the floor is yours.

19:03 Khanyisile Mbongwa

[*Speaking isiZulu*] My name is Khanyisile Mbongwa. Before I speak in any form of gathering, I acknowledge my ancestors and my opinion bininge where I come from. Because I am because they were, and I get to speak in whatever form because they have spoken before. And to also acknowledge those who are existing in plural walk with their ancestors and acknowledge their ancestral presence. I am a black African woman, currently short hair that is black and I think goldish/yellowish. I am golden brown. I have thick golden hoops and cat-eyed, golden frame glasses, I'm wearing the black T-shirt with a black on it. I'm sitting on the floor of my living room in the heat, the heat of Cape Town, it is so hot. On the screen, you see a GIF that has been, you know, sized down, that has a title saying, "there's no table for my seat". And this is how I frame all my conversations. I don't know until when. And it's sort of a philosophy, I'm looking at thinking about the table, the construction of the table within a very western form, and how in African culture and traditions we - we come with our seats, and there is no table; we gather in different ways. And that you're born ordained to your particular seat and what your seat means in society. And so thinking about *Conflict and Care*, I've been thinking a lot about, you know, the question of care in itself and I really liked what Jack said, you know, speaking about in terms of legalities and finding other ways of thinking about conflict outside as what we have inherited as Western forms of thinking about or you know, how inherited systems that essentially Western and wiping the world and functioning in particular ways to continue to not see us. So I've been thinking a lot about this word care and how the system normalises itself in a way of conflict, right? Like the institution doesn't see itself in conflict because it has never had to negotiate its identity, but instead it has had to determine the identities of everyone else, what they do, what we do, how we are positioned and what marks us in the world. And we can look at it in terms of colonised, coloniser, you know, enslaved and slaver and how are these already I know in the legacy of these things the institution is built. And I'm thinking a lot about institutions as within the place where things go to die. And by that, I mean that as an independent curator, for instance, the system does not protect me at all, when I'm invited in any project whatsoever, there isn't, I don't have healthcare through that system. The Labour Law doesn't protect me. The care package which the institution has is only reserved for permanent employed workers and anyone who like myself comes in as an independent curator or a freelance as we are called, does not have or is not afforded the same kind of protection by the system. And so, the system in itself then becomes a space of conflict, unresolvable conflict, as Jack mentioned, like that the system in a way is built through this ideological conflict, but it does not see itself through conflict. And you know, today I had, you know, so my talk is not as organised beautifully as Jack, but I had this conversation with an artist today doing studio visits. And this artist was talking his name is Ronald Muchatuta. And currently his work is about him letting go of his

refugee status in South Africa and Zimbabwean, and revisiting that, and how the system failed him and tried to recreate scenes of indignity as he was reclaiming and restoring his identity as a Zimbabwean man and letting go of his refugee status. Again, how the systems are always in a way, not acknowledging the ways in which we exist in precarity. Because it sees itself as how to identify, you know, and create a particular space for people to occupy. And as he was talking, he kept on going back to this word dignity. And I was trying to think of this word of dignity in relation to care, and relation to repair in relation to self-reconciliation, how do we ourselves reconcile our, our history, our presence, so we can imagine ourselves in spaces of care? How would we look at capacity as - as a formation, like what is our capacity to create a system for ourselves to care, but also in such a way that when we engage with institutions, we don't have to reproduce these scenes of violence to show the institution how much it doesn't care? Right? Like we have to find a way that like our capacities are not stretched or the institution doesn't force us into a space of stretching our capacity. So we can prove a point that how the institution doesn't care. And again, thinking about reform and reclaim, what does that mean, when one's dignity has been placed in question when one dignity has been placed and put in a space of precarity? And what this relationship is between precarity and conflict? And you know, in my head, I go back, there is no table for my seat. Because when institutions were formed, and the legacies of all these institutions, we're talking about museums, we're talking about galleries, we're talking about funding structures, generally, when they're initiated, they have not considered people who look like myself, who are black, queer, indigenous people of colour, and therefore can't see us or can't see me. And so how do you step into a space that does not have a perspective of who you are, but rather sees you, you know, from a place of precarity? You know, even the language in which we use to, you know, speak about previously disadvantaged communities, previously disadvantaged artists, even the language, for me, still maintains the state of conflict. And so this is where I will turn to my mother tongue and my culture, to look for places of repair and care and commune and congregation. And in my language, and one of my mother tongues is a word, you know, that means to care which is "ukukhathala", which is in the word in itself, it already acknowledges tiredness, "khathala", to be tired. So there's a way in which lead the way in which our mother tongues does something when you're thinking about these terminologies and ways of things in the world. So for me, I keep on returning back to language, my mother tongue, as a place where I can enact forms of care. Yeah, so I can enact forms of care and think about care from - from that indigenous African knowledge and sexual spiritual perspective and use language as, as a way to move through that. And another person that I actually another person, I think, but quite closely is Bell Hooks, the late Bell Hooks, who talks about a love ethic, and I think in a world in general, we don't have enough ethical politicians don't have a lab ethics, the systems which we

exist in don't have enough ethics. And I think in one of our conversation, Jack mentioned this thing of like, instead of thinking about, okay, how about the thing about love, you know, and what happens when you move from a place of love? And I really liked how Bell Hooks breaks this question of what is a love ethic? Or how can you build the love ethic? And Bell Hooks writes, "care, respect, responsibility, pleasantness, accountability, humility, spiritual growth", and really being invested in those, yeah, in those properties, you know, particular for me like spiritual growth, when someone is interested in your spiritual growth. For you to grow in a spiritual way they are, you know, connected to caring for you, and figuring out like what capabilities you need, rather than like, what they think you need, you know, they will respect you, they might not understand you, but they will respect because they're truly invested in your spiritual growth. They will hold themselves accountable when something has happened, you do not need to be the one who checks them. And I think this is where the disparity in the disconnection for me happens with institutions, is that institutions don't know how to be responsible, respectful and accountable. They are constantly asking people who have been already in sights of violence and have had to figure out how to navigate those identities that are steeped in violence and precarity to figure out how do we care for ourselves and then co-opt care principles and you know, into what I would call institutional performances of care and say, oh, now we have figured out how to care for you without even doing the work to ask the questions internally. How are we a state of conflict? You know, so I think I think that's my five minutes. Yeah, so yeah.

29:24 Morgan Quaintance

Okay, thanks Khanyisile. So basically, we've got quite a wide spectrum of responses from both of you really, Jack, we're sort of coming down on this notion of like binaries - binaries being like an overarching kind of structure that is orienting behaviours in ways that we that are restrictive, from language to, I guess, the way institutions are functioning and also this notion of like legal conflict, legal, legal conflict resolution, sort of producing binaries all the time. Khanyisile, I thought it was interesting to hear you talking about how institutions were really, I guess one of the things that I was mentioning just this notion of co-opting of care, and what does it mean to then be somebody who is in need of care, but needs to both also educate the system and how to take care that. But what we're going to do, what I'm going to do is to like there's some questions already. So I'm going to jump to them. But hopefully we can keep us rolling by keeping everything pretty brief. Not to say like, we have to cut it short. But one of the things, I think with these sorts of conversations is that they can go in one direction, like for quite a while, so I'm just going to be mindful of people who are switching that direction, so we can kind of cover enough ground. I hope that makes sense? But Jack, there's a quick question for you to start off with is, which is kind of practical one suppose like, how have the

cosmology conflict resolution cards been received? And that comes from Ashley from Scotland.

31:01 Jack Ky Tan

And yeah, very briefly received very well by the, the people that I made it for which were the participants and the partners, the six partners, civil society partners who work with the Centre for Race and Inclusion - Equity and Inclusion at Sheffield University. So it's a contract signed between the Centre for Equity and Inclusion and these partners. And they asked for a bespoke contract partnership agreement. And so they've received it all very well. And what's wonderful is that some of them even use the cards, which is that effectively their contract for like, internal training purposes, they use it in board and board meetings, they use sometimes they use it like a, like one person, one group, I know use it almost like a tarot, like at meetings, they just pick a card from the deck, and then read about whatever it is termination or conflict resolution as a way to remind themselves of the values that inform their partnership.

32:05 Morgan Quaintance

So do you feel like Jack, I mean, this is a question for me, because we haven't got one yet from the from the attendees. But that seems like a very sort of practical approach to changing behaviours in a given organisation? And what I like about it is that it's also it's applicable across the board. It's like not, not just speaking to a kind of establishment like you could take - that if me and Khanyisile were working together, we could probably use those cards. Was that - was that in your mind as we are to try and think of something that wasn't just addressing this system? That is like not really doing things for everybody?

32:37 Jack Ky Tan

Shall we say, it's a way of kind of, like, a lot of my work, I'm really interested in this idea of bureaucratic activism. So very good, yes, let's, let's call people out, let's protest. But then also, let's actually make boring practical changes, because actually, structural change requires structural tinkering. And so we have to do that work of changing contracts, changing policies, changing the way decisions are made in the boardroom, and just like, at a very practical level, because there's no point saying, we want this particular kind of inclusiveness, and these are all on our websites and everything. But we're still using, shall we say, colonial structures to - to make - so it's like, again, that's like, you know, can you really use the master's tool? To without, without, like, I can, you can, but I think you've got to actually hack the tools, you know, because if you use the tools without hacking them, you just end

up reproducing the colonialism, or the, the sexism or whatever. So for me, it's about always hacking the tools, and this is one example of how we hacked the tools of a contract.

33:56 Morgan Quaintance

Khanyisile, is that something that you I'm just trying to think of, like, how you have been manifesting some of the ideas that you've been talking about? I mean, on one level, I know that there's a there's a way that's a struggle, where you're just telling people, but like, what about, you know, there's more productive ways you found of working with your peer group?

34:21 Khanyisile Mbongwa

Yeah I mean, I think, for me, it also, like, I'm quite clear about contractual agreements, you know, and I think a lot of creatives need to really do that work of thing about like, because contract documents bind you they also bind to energetically and spiritually and so you need to figure out how to have a contractual agreement that does not, you know, hold you on your spine, you know, [*Speaking isiZulu*] Yeah, like so one of the things I do from the very beginning you know, whether I am negotiating and this is where for most people is scary, is negotiating with big institutions, I'm just some girl from the Township in South Africa, I grew up in the township, I'm ghetto, I'm hood, right? And these are part of my marcos. And then you are negotiating with an institution that is super big, like a Biennial, or like a Tate. And of course, then you might encounter complex of like, who am I in this, and you have to remind yourself that your geographical location that you're born into, is exactly the thing that founded you, and therefore you have every right to be in that room first of all. So for me, that's like the first thing to completely and actually see yourself as deserving of being in that room. And that everything you're going to say is as valid and everything that you demand is your deserving of. So for me that like, and this is why I start any, any conversation of this nature gathering with acknowledging my ancestors, because in that way, I'm inviting them to come with me. I'm also acknowledging the work they've done to prepare. So the next thing is to, to ask clarifications about their contract, walk me through your contract, what is - what does what you have written here, you have me in actuality, right? And then the third thing is to come with my counter contract. That is so important. You know, you can consult with a with a lawyer, but also you can write down the things that are non-negotiable for you, your counter contract, and one of those things should be no matter how big the institution is, and they invite me as a curator and artist, your intellectual property, you must make sure always belongs to you that should they want to do anything, after you've engaged with them, they have to come back to you. And whether you say like in coming

back, there will be a consultation fee, right? Because this is the way in which the system works, it knows how to protect itself. And in nature, it is like extracted, you know, and most of the institutions that we are working within and working through negotiating with our own legacies are colonial legacies. And in nature, they are extractive, curating is an extractive practice, I've had to figure out how to be a curator from my positionality as a Güney woman from South Africa and what that means, and how not to reproduce the scenes of violence. So how do I enact this practice without upholding the legacy of colonialism and whiteness? So that's one practical way, like the contract is an important part too. And always, don't be afraid to have a lawyer to get you to be like, give me if they say we need this back in two days, so that we will have it back in five days. Because I need to consult my people. Like you have that range - institutions make you feel like you don't, but you do. And you get jobs, even if they tell you that you you'll never get hired again, because it's so difficult. They like to look at jobs, people will come people because you're amazing. And you ancestors will be with you. And you're ordained by the divine intervention of God, Allah and Budha and whoever, so you'll get a vote.

37:55 Morgan Quaintance

So you do feel like, you know, the stuff we were talking about now sort of touching on that, like, sort of primal conflict, really, amongst creative people, which is like the conflict between the like administrator and the creative individual, like, how do you switch between those two things? And it almost seems Khanyisile like you're saying, insert the contract in in the first instance? And as soon as you know, insert the contract, at the beginning of the relationship will help you get towards that relationship where it just becomes creative and less administrative? So that was just an observation, because I just want to bring in other people's questions - mine are not that important, but like, so we've got a couple questions here. And I'm going to give you both of them. And then we'll see. So Linda Devo says, "how do we decolonize when steeped in it, it's hard to even know where one is playing our old conditioning as it runs so deep, any tips on interrogating one's own colonised systems and ways of thinking and approaching conflict?" So maybe Jack, do you want to do you want to go for that one? That's quite an intense maybe let's just maybe rather than doing a kind of global answer, maybe just think of a specific insight - instance?

39:16 Jack Ky Tan

Yeah, I suppose I can, I can only talk from my own practice, which is that I am like, a deeply colonised person, I was brought up in a British colony in Singapore, you know, brought up to, to just like, in my body and in my soul, to think British is best, right? So it's like, how do I even begin when my beginning is deeply colonised,

right? I was born into colonialism. So it's really to do with, for me it's, it's to do with a kind of what I kind of started thinking of as a practice of my nieces, where it's about a constant reproducing - have myself but with each reproduction of myself, it's not a copy, but it's a - it's a kind of progression where I undo myself as I keep repeating myself. So it's like to continue to make the mistakes of colonialism, but then to reflect on it and realise, okay, I just need to, I need to recreate myself again - rebirth myself again, but a little bit better next time. And so I kind of think of that. And, and I also think like maybe like, I think about often in terms of like queering myself, like, how do I queer everything that I think that like, even like when you were saying, you know, like Morgan just now but how do we, how do we switch between the administrative and the creative or the colonial and the non-colonial? I kind of think, all right, that's a moment where I, I can actually take that and then how do I queer it? How do I even like, go there? Maybe that's binary, you know that the idea of switching itself is a binary, maybe it's not about switching at all, maybe it's about synthesis, and then creating something new out of that synthesis through a kind of rebirthing of one's thinking. So it's a big question, but I think I would say that was that's my methodology.

41:18 Morgan Quaintance

Okay, Khanyisile, do you want to jump in on this one? Or do you want to take another question?

41:22 Khanyisile Mbongwa

I think Jack has it under control. *[Laughter]*

41:27 Morgan Quaintance

All right. So we got a question from an anonymous attendee, which is about do you think it's important to take people out of conventional methods of conflict resolution in order to break down barriers and facilitate conversations? I feel like we've answered that question. Specifically, Jack gave a concrete example with the cards. So I'm going to move on. One thing, I can I just add something to the decolonization question? So one thing I would say also, is that when we're in a phase now, where decolonization is very western centric, but like the rest of the world has its own colonial relationships with its majority, well, partners, that's going to be another phase that we're going have to enter into. And another bit, I think a part of decolonization is also recognising how we feel we feel safe in ideologies, what I want to move out of the west is the best, but maybe the rest is the best now. So it becomes the marginal subject as saying, you know, we need to just have a critical, sceptical mindset. I think there's one way to have like a colonial outlook in a

kind of global way. But I'm sorry, that was just a just a little offering there. Khanyisile?

42:36 Khanyisile Mbongwa

I just want to add just one line. My childhood decolonizing or decolonization which I am grateful for all the work people have done up to this point, right? But my challenge is that it's still centralises the coloniser. You constantly have to think of yourself in relation to a coloniser, you know, and for me this is the challenge is that it is almost like reinstituting colonial, colonialism from a different perspective of, you know, now you're the one you know, who's allowing the coloniser to occupy so much space in your imagination and manifestation of yourself and so, for me, it has been thinking more about what are the emancipatory practices that have been happening since the moment we were colonised, right? How have our people been in this process of emancipating themselves? And what does it look like now, right? Where the centre is not a coloniser, you know, that you are the centre, you know, and in a practical sense that begins with literally looking in the mirror. And, and either acknowledge all the things you don't like about yourself, because colonialism has taught you not to like them, and sit in that discomfort of not liking those things. And do that self-reconciliation work like "oh, I don't like to support myself not because I don't like it, but because I've learned how not to like it" - does that makes sense. You know, I think that's, you know, the, the moment like, reconciling with the as Jack was saying this, like, you know, we are born into these colonial systems, you know, while we are still in our mother's wombs already, we are functioning in this in these inherited systems. And we come to be in their and then one day when we're like "oh, no, this doesn't work. Oh, no, honey, this does not work. No."

44:28 Jack Ky Tan

I want to add to that, almost like, you really hit the nail on the head for me, where I was just thinking, oh, yeah, decolonization it's kind of almost as if I think of it as a kind of American cultural imperialism or concept, right? Where it's like, as if, as if America and Britain had invented this word decolonization in the last three or five years, when I kind of think well, my people have been decolonizing for 200 years, right? We've been, you know, doing this word. So it's like, well, we just need to like, think about non-western versions of de-post-colonisation, basically. And there are many academics and writers in Africa and Asia who've been doing this. Yeah.

45:18 Morgan Quaintance

Thanks Jack and Khanyisile. So we've got a few questions that come in. I'm going to - let me just see. Okay, so Sarah Dixon says that she struggles to visualise imagine a

non-conflict-based institution. Are there examples? I'm just going to read the few questions just to keep it rolling. Then Rowan is saying I'm curious if Jack and Khanyisile can speak about care and resentment? I'm specifically thinking about class in the UK, and the feeling of not belonging and not being welcomed in the arts. I asked myself how I can recognise but also address this belief within myself, and those that I work with and what it means to even address this conflict. And the last question, which I think relates to the first is from an anonymous attendee again, and it says, I sometimes struggle with the tension between the independent individual and the institution. Is an institution also just people and individuals, some of whom are actually working on the change and equity on the inside? Is it helpful to see the institution as inherently anti-care and pro-conflict? So I guess the first question about is, is there an institution that's non conflict based? Can we think of any examples? And the third question about what you know, there are good people within institutions? How do we navigate that? Do we not work with them? Or do we work with them? They're kind of related? Khanyisile like, do you - do you have anything to offer on them ones?

46:45 Khanyisile Mbongwa

On non-conflict institutions, I think I would not call them - I don't think they would be institutions. First of all, I mean, because our concept, and I'm positing this as a thing that we either all agree through this gathering now that what we mean by institutions is like a Western-Eurocentric form of gathering that has very specifically created itself over the last 500 years as the world order, or the universal order, and having a say in people's lives and geographical locations, not only by removing, violently removing people into other locations, but then making them an unpaid labour for so you know, so institutions, right, so this is what, like, they're built on conflict and violence. What we have inherited as museums, you know, and I'm even talking about new museums that emerge, because they function within that same order of recreating themselves within an image that is familiar that seems accessible to a certain diaphragm. Alright, so institutions, and I'm positive that is that where we institutions are, that's what we're talking about? There are other forms of gatherings that are non-conflict based. And within the art world, the first one is a collective. A collective is a gathering of people that have either shared vision, but different perspectives of how to get to that vision and work together towards that, and in the in the process of constantly figuring out ways of caring for each other in order for this thing to happen. So, they coming together is not against something but towards each other, right? Non conflict. Cooperations co-ops that sometimes are made by and I'm talking into sort of what, oh [*speaking isiZulu*]...English has just escaped my mouth...metropolitan, like in the metropolitan setting, when you think of co-ops, and you know, in the sort of capitalist system, people coming together from particular geographical locations

trying to function in the economy and come together and open a co-opt, again, they are moving towards something because they've realised that the system does not know how to cater and hold them. So for me, those are like very basic two examples. You know, my mom, for instance, is in her 60's / 70's has been working for four years with a group, a huge group of black women, over 50 people trying to start a fishbowl up in Cape Town as black women from the Township, you know, and they're working towards this one thing. This what they conflict with is the system because the government system is like, well, we don't know how to receive you. Does that that makes sense? Like as practical examples of how non conflict examples but I think when we speak about all these other institutions, like we talk about prisons, we talk about policymakers, they all form part of the legacy because, you know, if we think from an African perspective, you know, when we speak about post-colonial or independent - Independence Day, we're talking about colonial legacies and all the structures. You know, even in South Africa being a British / Dutch colony, most of the stuff we use are all still like legacies of colonial conduct. Conflict, they do not see us, they don't know how to recognise us, they do not how to read us, they are not interested in that.

50:38 Morgan Quaintance

Okay, thanks, Khanyisile. Jack do you want to take those questions - or?

50:45 Jack Ky Tan

Yes, I'm just going to add to what Khanyisile said about that. For me, like institutions, I really let it like, I really agree with this idea, this definition of institutions are using it if we use these this definition, I would say that institutions are having architecture of power. And they are generally kind of hierarchical, because that's the best way to concentrate power in a few people at the top right. So this is the way institutions are built. Because logistically, colonially, it's very important to centralise power, you know, in the British Empire, let's centre it in, in England. So that this, this, this, this shape, we're able to then rule very, very wide landmasses and many people. So it's a logistical, practical solution, right? And it's just that if you create this architecture, that architecture creates a certain kind of stress through the system. So that architecture creates these stressors, which we call conflict, right? And then we need to resolve those stresses or conflicts through what I already explained, which is adversarial conflict resolution processes. Which then create, I think, really beautifully said, a way of not seeing that, as Khanyisile says, you know, that conflict resolution in order to maintain the hierarchical power system can only see certain facts and not others. You know, can see facts and not bodies can see evidence and not relationality. So that's why I think that's what happens. And this idea that institutions are individuals, I will say, yes, institution

made up of individuals, but on top of the individuals, there is a kind of, there's a kind of, it's got its own life, you know, like institutions have a kind of bureaucratic, systemic life that keeps repeating itself, in spite of all the good intentions of individuals. So yes, it's made up of individuals, but it's also separate. And I, I mean, care and resentment is an interesting question, because I would say a lot of a lot of what I've done in the last few years, particularly like with whistleblowing, I view it as a form of care and rage, you know, like, we take action against an institution as artists or as freelancers, not because we want to have revenge, because it's just not worth it. It really actually is not worth to go public. That is way too much energy. But you do it because you care. And you have anger because you care. So there's this kind of like, how do we shall we say, keep care within anger and not go to resentment or bitterness? There's my short answer for that.

53:42 Morgan Quaintance

So I'm just going to double back to Rowan's question again, just because you mentioned resentment there. But Rowan's clarified says, I'm specifically thinking about class in the UK, and the feeling of not belonging and not being welcomed in the arts. I asked myself, how can I recognise but also address this belief within myself and those I work with? And what it means to even address this conflict? So feeling uncomfortable, because of I suppose, their class position? And what can they do with that feeling of discomfort? Do with or do about? I mean, I have I have something to say, if you guys need a slight break. So I would argue that like, this is one of those areas within the history of Britain that needs to be addressed, but often gets lost sometimes. So essentially, the history of working class in Britain is one which has been buried, but is huge, active and arts literate. So I think one of the theorists that does a lot of work in relation to this that I think is really worth looking at is someone called Pierre Bourdieu. That's a little bit difficult to look at, but there's books like *Distinction*, where he discusses like the formation have taste and the notion that some people are born with it and some people aren't, which I think is this distinction between class - somehow working class, as opposed to be people who are without a culture, and that to access culture, you have to move into the bourgeoisie to access it. But by doing that you sacrifice where you're from. And you also feel like an imposter where you land. But that's the thing where you're sort of thinking about being working class as being in possession of no cultural capital. But if you really think about what's happening in this country, and what's happened before, the working classes possess quite a lot of cultural capital, but you tend to have to do a lot of archaeology to find those individuals who came from those backgrounds, and who made it in the cultural sector. But there's loads of them. Another book that I would really suggest is a book called *Them and Us* by a writer called John Newsinger. And he's someone who tracks the history of the working class and in the UK, specifically in the 20th century. But yeah, maybe that's from an

academic perspective. But this is like one of those things that comes up every generation. And I think it's because this country does a real job on the working class to erase its own history. It's almost like a subject position that's being marginalised from the inside. So that's, that's my two cents on that. But I'm, Khanyisile, do you want to yeah?

56:22 Khanyisile Mbongwa

Yeah. I mean, it's not from a British context. It's just maybe, as someone who moves around, you know. Class is a major thing in the art, I think a lot of people come into the art thinking is this liberal space where, and it's not, you know. Class, also in for some reason, determines, like, how, and when we're taken seriously, and we find ourselves having to work I mean, I come from, and this is why I actually I always mention where I come from, because it's important for me, for people to have the background of the kind of labour one has had to do to be wherever I'm at. So I come from, in South Africa it's called like poor to working class background. And so which means that I'm first generation to go to university, and there are all these stereotypes of like unculturedness of people who come from my positionality, which is untrue. Because if you actually look at how culture is defined, it's usually defined by the people who practice it and most of the time, it is working class people. And one of the things in which, you know, for me that are very practical is when you are for instance, negotiating a contract. People who have class will say to you can't mention money, the first moment you are in conversation with someone because that also reveals your class. But what that does is that it then puts you in a predicament that by the end, have you been doing this work and then you don't get paid for labour, because you are trying to negotiate some class distinction thing about you know, you are from an upper class bourgeoisie and therefore you understand capital in a certain way, but this is also how like, upper class bourgeoisie people maintain their wealth by ensuring that we, they keep out this particular frame restored and sturdy on the ground. So that one feels that if they act in particular ways, they shocked where you're from. But I think one way is to destabilise class is actually to start exactly where you're from, because where you're from informs how you exist and what you make of yourself in the world. You know, it's one way to, you know, I mean, I don't like this, I don't usually use this term disrupt, but I think it's one way to move the...[*speaking isiZulu*]...English guys, I English is gone. George has gone. George, it's gone. I can't, I can't find the English translation of the word I'm looking for. George sometimes leaves. [*Laughing*]

58:54 Morgan Quaintance

Okay. Do you want to do you want to? I'll let you take a break. And then Jack, if Jack, do you want to jump in on the class question?

59:02 Jack Ky Tan

Just briefly. I kind of feel like to think about class and the arts, you kind of have to go back to the beginnings of museums in the UK. I mean, it just within the UK context, like why were museums created? Why was the British Museum created? Why was the National Gallery created, right, during the Victorian era? Which was this kind of, I suppose, quite snobbish idea that the working classes are kind of morally or culturally inferior, and we needed to like, raise their level, shall we say, right? And so not only did they do this within the UK to create the V&A and all these places, but also museums as a way of raising the level of the natives in the empire as well to make them the better individuals that we think society should be, according to the worldview of a particular group of upper-class Victorians, shall we say? So I think, for me, like, there's always this like working against trying to - like, it's always a question of like, how do you access high culture? How does a working-class person access high culture? Which is kind of where the origins of it were. So I suppose for me, it's like, how do we even get rid of this, this originating question? How do we stop contemporary art feeling like the language of contemporary art and the products of contemporary art are this particular set of things, right? Why can't contemporary art simply be - can incorporate what was traditionally the cultural production of the working classes, you know? So for example, very starkly, we see for example, let's, let's take a clear example of say, male and female art. So for a long time, it was men in art. And so therefore, things like quilt making, textiles, were just not included in the history of art. But now we just need to challenge the various aesthetics and criteria of contemporary art in order I think, for some equality to come in, and be that class, gender or race.

1:01:31 Morgan Quaintance

Okay, thanks, Jack. So we've got another question at the bottom here, there's been some observations on quick answers and questions that have already been posed. So I'm just going to jump to the question. Below that, so Vicki Fears says, Could the panel please speak on the experience of resolving conflict created when trying to care for people with differing needs, personal needs, and in terms of the art they're working on? Khanyisile do you want to?

1:02:02 Khanyisile Mbongwa

Ask questions. You have to move from a place that you actually don't know. I think a lot of people who are a lot of us work within the space of like we care, sometimes forget to ask questions and say actually, to move from a place like, I actually don't know how someone else needs to be cared for. Because one that recognises your own limitation and also like shows the expansiveness of your capacity, right? So you

ask someone first, like, are you comfortable with me asking you what kind of care you need, and then move on from there. Because when you operate from a place of knowing that we know how exactly to care, then we sort of have a format. And I don't think there's an exact format when you're working with different people, there can be a standardised thing of like, this is where I moved from a caring place. But I'm very much aware that your needs might be different. And therefore can you have a greater space that becomes a safe space for both of us, for me to learn how to care for you, and for me to ask questions, when I might misunderstand what kind of caring you might need. Which is very different from an expectation of you Morgan telling me like, you know, you need, you know, me expecting you to just tell me what kind of care you need. The first point of caring is to ask a question like, you know, how is the space making you feel, you know, is this a space that you feel you can be held? You know, am I holding you in an appropriate way? You know, so those questions can start there to like to show the perk - to sort of exercise as the carer, you know, that you have a certain awareness and then the second part of it, which is the most difficult part is listening. We don't know how to listen. We all know how to talk and verbalise because that's what we're taught to like be expressive, you need to speak out for yourself, but and that has been at the expense of listening and I think, you know, listening to hear exactly what the person is saying, and not what you think the person is saying, listening not to respond to the person but to actually hear them which are, you know, different types of listening, so that you can have, see, check in with yourself to see if you have the capacity for the kind of care they need, or whether you need to source it somewhere else.

1:04:34 Morgan Quaintance

And Jack?

1:04:38 Jack Ky Tan

I think what jumps out at me is this kind of phrase differing needs, and I think all I would add to this is that I totally agree with what Khanyisile said. But what I would add to that is that for me, what I tried to hold at the forefront of my mind is that difference is the world. Like difference is actually, what makes the world perceivable and differences, what creates the world. So it's like, if you put your hand on the table like that you actually don't, you don't know, you just don't feel it, you don't feel it. It's only when you move it. And there is the kind of difference - moving as difference, then you actually begin to perceive the world. And it's the same for me. So it's like when I encounter someone with different needs, I don't kind of think I try not to think we should equalise our needs or make everything the same. I just kind of go, oh, this difference is just the norm. It's and so it really is like, how do I receive the difference? And my difference meets their difference. And we begin, we begin

there. So I know it's not a direct answer the question, but it's almost like, as a kind of a kind of approach.

1:06:10 Morgan Quaintance

Oops, I was muted there. So we're coming in sort of the last nine minutes, I think, of this session. We've got one speaker from an anon - oh, one question from an anonymous attendee, which is about do you have any comments in relation to conflict and care and artists, participant relationships? I sort of feel like we've addressed that. So I have a question I'd like to put to you, which is a question I've been asking myself actually. As an artist, we seem to have moved from a phase or an era of considering aesthetic questions to consider in questions to do with ethics. And it almost seems like there's a kind of imperative for us to step into this space. I wonder, how have you - do you both think about that tension? Is it important to you? But have you felt it as a tension between on the one hand being a kind of socially vigilant and responsible citizen? And then somebody who wants to think in maybe quite abstract and rarefied terms? How do you resolve that conflict within yourself? So do you even feel it? Khanyisile I'll start with you. Because Jack, actually, maybe, Jack, I'll start with you, because you, you have quite a quick answer.

1:07:40 Jack Ky Tan

Yes, when I was in art school, I used to have this conflict, because when I was in art school, there was this, or in my art school, there was this kind of, like, idea of like, pure art, you know, like, like, strict aesthetic art, that's just to do with the object or light or painting or whatever form, you know. And anybody who kind of, well, in my year, anybody who kind of did politics, in our, in addressed political issues was deemed to be a bit like, you know, that's not pure arts, you know, but actually, you know, when I think about it, everything's political. Like even a, an old masters painting a bowl of fruit, there are kind of you cannot separate the political from the aesthetic. And that's how I've, I've kind of got to this point where even a bowl of fruit a bowl of bananas, you, you have to kind of go, but where how is it that there's a bowl of bananas in a Dutch painting? I mean, like, what trade routes happen there? And how did that that, that, that that rich person got to eat a pineapple, you know, so it's, it's all there for me. So no problem.

1:08:52 Morgan Quaintance

Khanyisile?

1:08:53 Khanyisile Mbongwa

That's an interesting answer Jack, I was like, I really love that answer [*laughter*]. You know, I love that answer. Because I think for a long time, black people, people of colour, queer people, you know, only their art was read as political, if they make a rose if a black person paints a rose with thorns, it's, you know, versus a white person. So there's like a whitewash that happens with like, historically how white people painted stuff, as if they were a political, it was just like this aesthetic. It never was just aesthetic, you know? Just you know, so for me that's kind of interesting. Like, yeah, thank you Jack. Um, I think we have no choice but to be ethical - to have ethics in our practice right now because we are in conflict with the planet. There is no choice but to be ethical, because there is a deep conflict we have hurt, like, the planet cannot take more. You know, there's it cannot hold anymore, it cannot sustain anymore and if we continue not to be ethical in thinking about anything that we do and how we live our lives and how we produce. You know, you know, it is not a planet that will collapse, we will collapse into the planet, you know, and people keep on thinking the planet is not we, you know, we are the, the danger to the planet, we are in conflict and deep conflict. And I think because of that, you know, when we make work, whatever work there is, there's ethics, in aesthetics, in whatever we do, you know, and I think there's no for me, there hasn't been a separation, but rather a heightening of having to be super ultra-aware. That, for instance, I travelled so much during the, you know, the Biennial, trying to meet artists and like, how do I mitigate that, and the mitigation of that, as it's like, I have to find a producer, who has the sensibilities of figuring out what kind of material we can use it for producing new work, that is not going to further the damage to the earth right? And not decreasing the mitigating it, and just having that awareness and be like, Okay, so, in the next phase of whatever I do, how do I move beyond the mitigation? You know, and you know, and just building on that, but the ethics are still there, alive and thriving, you know, asking questions, do we need to do more museums? Do we need to collect more art? Do we need to make more art that is collectible? These are the ethical questions we need to ask ourselves while making beautiful things about horrible realities in the world. Right, like we are in conflict. We need ethics as a form of guide guidance and a guideline and a lifeline to remind us that we are busy swallowing ourselves, and we think that it is the planet that will collapse, but it is as so yeah.

1:11:57 Morgan Quaintance

Thank you Khanyisile and thank you, Jack - Jack Ky Tan. So we've come to the end really of our discussion here. I hope everybody's been enlivened by it. It's been quite high octane. We didn't know there was no dead air was it? We filled it with time and reflections on care and conflict. So I've been your host Morgan Quaintance. I didn't

describe myself in the beginning, so I'm going to do it now. Oh no, it's quite hard to do, isn't it? I can't just say like chilled guys into the arts can I get that's not descriptive. So I don't know. I suppose I'm male presenting, black man with brown skin. I need a shave; I've got a bit of a beard and my hair's a bit long. And I'm sitting in my living room in front of a lamp and the light. It's got it's getting darker. But that's about it, I think. Thank you so much, again for joining us today. And thanks to Jack Ky Tan and Khanyisile Mbongwa. And I'm going to hand over to Elisabeth Del Prete. Thank you.

1:13:02 Elisabeth Del Prete

Yeah, thank you. Huge thank you to everyone what a dynamic event with loads of questions and insights from both, you know, members of the audience, but also from like all the speakers. What alternative forms of gathering enable us to decentralise power? That was like one of the notes that I made to myself. And how do we move beyond an adversarial notion of conflict by creating something new through synthesis? Really, really exciting to hear this talk. Thank you also to Susan Merrick, our British Sign Language interpreter for this event, and also thank you to everyone for your questions and comments. A quick note to say that UP Projects will host a seminar session online on the 22 March to continue this conversation along with the many other conversations and key points that have emerged through the programme over the course of 2023, and now with this event early in 2024. There is so much knowledge in the room every time we host an event whether that is online or in person, and we want to create a format that enables more exchange. Because we recognise that the webinar format doesn't always create opportunities for a two-way dialogue, although I thought Morgan did a great job at taking loads of questions today. So thank you so much for doing that. So we invite you to take part in the seminar to reflect on some of these considerations. It will be online open to any artist, curator, producer, or creative practitioners active or interested in the expanded field of public arts. Places will be limited, so do look out for our next newsletter and book your free place. We really want to listen and build on your feedback for future events. So if you have a minute do fill out our survey. It will ask questions, general questions around this event and the programme more generally, and I think my colleagues are just about to add the link to the chat. Also, we will upload the recording of today's event on our YouTube channel that will include closed captions and the BSL interpretation. So, you'll be able to view that from our website. And as you saw on our slides, we do endeavour to keep the *Constellations* programme free for participants and event attendees. If you're able to make a donation, we really appreciate it as it helps keep the programme free. There is a link to donate in the Zoom chat and also via the QR code. And finally, a huge thank you to our amazing speakers Morgan, Jack and Khanyisile, to the Arts Council of England, Barrington Hibbert Associates, the

Constellations Patrons and UP Supporters for supporting the programme, to our partners Flat Time House and Liverpool Biennial, to Susan Merrick and also to everyone in the team at UP Projects. Thank you so much.