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Reimagining networks as ecosystems:

**An exploration of international collaboration of art organisations
through the ecosystem lens using Arts Collaboratory as a case study**

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Abstract

Ecological language has been seeping into cultural sector in recent years to describe types of relations, connections and networks that are dynamic, mutually dependent and symbiotic. This thesis explores the concept of an ecosystem to understand international collaboration between arts organisations using Arts Collaboratory as a case study. Ecosystems are understood as an interconnected web of communities placing relationality at the core of this thesis. Relationality also enables the study of the connections between human and non-human actors. Space, knowledge and dependency materialise as interrelated concepts that act as axis to guide the discussion. A key feature of Arts Collaboratory is that the majority of the organisations are located in the global South, influencing the type of literature consulted as part of the analysis. Insights on the practices of Arts Collaboratory is placed in dialogue with theory related the three concepts, which demonstrated the relevance of these concepts within the overarching lens of the ecosystem. Space as a frame, is used to understand the space between organisations, how this relates to the binary position of the global South but also how space is created at a local level. Knowledge is deconstructed from a decolonial perspective. The ecosystem model facilitates the multiplicity of knowledges and situated knowledges. Dependency leads to understanding the ties to resources, especially funding, and the tensions that can be created in adopting characteristics of ecosystem model of being self-organised the potential reproduction of colonial relations that need to be considered in international collaboration of arts organisations. Combined with these additional concepts, ecosystem lens is productive to think with to understand international collaborations.

Contents:

Chapter One – Introduction.....	4
Environmental analogies.....	4
Methodology.....	7
Positionality.....	10
Limitations.....	11
Chapter Two Theory.....	13
Space.....	13
Knowledge.....	16
Dependency.....	18
Chapter Three – Case Study: Arts Collaboratory.....	21
Chapter Four – Analysis.....	23
Spatial Analysis.....	23
Knowledge Analysis.....	30
Dependency Analysis.....	37
Chapter Five – Conclusion.....	45
Bibliography.....	48
Appendix.....	53

Chapter One - Introduction

Ecological analogies

The language of ecology has been seeping into the global arts and cultural sector in recent times. Metaphors such as ecosystems, kaleidoscope and biotopes are increasingly being used to describe the types of relations, collaborations, networks with actors inside and outside of the sector. In 2019, the Taipei Biennale in Taiwan was adorned with the title 'Post Nature: a Museum as Ecosystem'. In the same year, the 15th edition of the Lyon Contemporary Art Biennale entitled, 'Where Water Comes Together with Other Water' was "devised as an ecosystem at the intersection of biological, economic and cosmogonic landscapes"¹. Furthermore, Triangle Network, a global network of artists and organisations "represents an 'ecosystem' where partners identify with the network's focus on establishing diverse spaces and conditions for emerging artists and other arts professionals, to learn from each other through dialogue and process-led activities."² These are but a few examples of contemporary art's adoption of this language and perhaps denotes a shift away from the individualism central to neoliberal ideology and the period of late capitalism, to an approach that neither privileges the position of the human nor the nonhuman, but acknowledges the intersecting ways humans and nonhumans relate to each other and the world.

There are various ways ecological language has been adapted and is interpreted in studies and reports in the cultural sector. For instance, Pascal Gielen articulates the biotope, which outlines a suitable environment for fostering the arts comprising of four different domains; the domestic, the communal, the market, and the civil.³ Cultural ecology as an academic term specifically within the field of anthropology dates back to the 1950s⁴, however, Ann Markusen as the lead author as the lead author, repurposed the term for a report in 2011 on 'California Arts and Cultural Ecology'. In which cultural ecology is described as "the

¹ "The Project," Biennale D'art Contemporain. Last modified April 3, 2019, <https://www.biennaledelyon.com/en/a-word-from-the-curators/>

² "About The Triangle Network," Triangle Network, accessed May 11, 2020. <https://www.trianglenetwork.org/triangle-network/about/>

³ Pascal Gielen, "Artistic Praxis and the Neoliberalization of the Educational Space," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 47, No. 1 (Spring 2013): 63

⁴ John Holden, *The Ecology of Culture: A Report Commissioned by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Cultural Value Project* (Wiltshire, UK: Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2015), 2

complex interdependencies that shape the demand for and production of arts and cultural offerings”⁵The language can denote a shift in the type of value placed on culture, as we see in Geoffrey Crossicks’ report on ‘The Ecology of Culture’, commissioned by the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the United Kingdom in 2015. Crossick adopts Markussen’s definition to advocate for an ecological approach to the cultural and creative sector rather than an economical one as it “provides a comprehensive overview that does not privilege one type of value – financial value – over others that attach to culture.”⁶ Whereas, Mauricio Delfin identifies a gap in studies of network formations in Latin America, arguing for a research framework of cultural network ecosystems.⁷

Although these studies vary in content, each of the authors favour an ecological metaphor as it enables a focus on the relationship, ties and patterns within a network, system, or sector and external sectors and actors. Ecologies provide an integrated and interconnected understanding of the organisms within a system whilst also comprehending it as a whole. At the same time the language can signal the state of vulnerability of a system. Networks, of course, have become commonplace in today’s globalised society and advances in technology and communication has meant that communities are evermore connected. However, defining a network as an ecosystem suggests that the characteristics of those relations can be dynamic, mutually dependent and symbiotic as Colin Mercer’s paper “Culturelinks: Cultural Networks and Cultural Policy in the Digital Age” begins to unpack in the statement below,

“We are dealing, finally, not with a ‘system’ or a ‘structure’ in any static sense but with a cultural ecology or ecosystem in which micro-organisms move around, multiply and migrate, and establish new relations of communication, exchange, symbiosis, from the hub to the nodes and beyond, and vice versa. In this we could do worse than follow the direction of ecology which, in one definition, is ‘the study of living relations’ and in another is ‘concerned with the web or network of relations among organisms at different scales of organization’. That seems to me to be as appropriate for cultural

⁵ Ann Markussen, et al., 2011. *California’s Arts and Cultural Ecology*. (San Francisco: James Irvine Foundation) Accessed April 2020 https://irvine-dot-org.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/14/attachments/CA_Arts_Ecology_2011Sept20.pdf?1412656156, 8

⁶ Holden, *The Ecology of Culture*, 2

⁷ Mauricio Delfin, “The promise of cultural networks in Latin America: towards a research framework for the study of region-specific cultural network ecosystems.” *Cultural Trends* 21, no. 3 (2012), 239 -248. Doi:10.1080/09548963.2012.698556

ecosystems as it is for natural ones and will demand as much scrutiny and new knowledge to protect and sustain cultural diversity.”⁸

Mercer’s description is useful as it goes further than the assumption that *things are all connected* and provides a variety of ways in which relationality manifests within an ecosystem. It also resonates with Arts Collaboratory, the case study that I will be studying in this thesis. Arts Collaboratory is defined as a decentralised, trans-local network of twenty-five diverse arts organisation in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and Europe. These organisations are bound together through their desire to bring about social change in their local contexts. The network operates as a self-organised ecosystem where “knowledge and strengths are brought together through collective and collaborate processes.”⁹ As the majority of the organisations are located in the global South, this study thus becomes spatialised. This has had significant implications in how I approached this topic and the type of theory I encountered within this analysis, making it a significant variable to link ideas related to the three concepts together. The global South itself is rather a contentious term, associated with geopolitics and pivots around binary logics and there is an inherent tension with binary positions that will be unpacked as part of this thesis.

Research Question

What particular insights can be drawn from studying a network as an ecosystem in terms of international collaboration between arts organisations?

In be able to answer this question, I have chosen the following three concepts: space, knowledge and dependency. These concepts will guide my discussion in the exploration of the relations between arts organisations through the ecosystem lens. They will allow me to look at the particularities of the relations as each can be used to understand how actors are connected and what types of interactions can place between those actors. The lines of inquiry I will follow that relate to these concepts include how are relations spatialised within an ecosystem? What knowledge is created and shared in an ecosystem? How does knowledge relate to spatial practice? How is dependency understood in these relations? What do

⁸ Colin Mercer, “Culturelinks: Cultural Networks and Cultural Policy in the Digital Age” (September 28, 2009) ed Biserka Cvjetičanin, *Networks: The Evolving Aspects of Culture in the 21st Century*, Culturelink Special Issue, Zagreb, 2010, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2153400>

⁹ “About,” Arts Collaboratory, accessed January 28, 2020. <http://www.artscollaboratory.org/about/>

constellations of relations depend on to endure? This thesis will contribute to growing literature on the relations in ecosystems in the arts and culture sector specifically, with regards to the relations in international collaboration drawing insights from a live case study that works predominately in the global south.

Methodology

As this thesis will focus in part on the practices of Arts Collaboratory I have employed an instrumental case study analysis¹⁰. This is suitable for a single case study as I am using the Arts Collaboratory as a tool to understand international collaboration of arts organisations through the lens of an ecosystem. This method has enabled a flexible, in-depth, exploratory investigation aimed at discovering the particularities within this ecosystem and how the individual parts collaborate. I will conduct initial semi-structured interviews with three of the 25 arts organisations in order provide a more detailed account from particular perspectives. I have chosen organisations from different regions to gain a wider perspective, these include members from Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, Utrecht, Netherlands; Casa Tres Patios, Medellin, Colombia; and 32° Degrees East, Kampala, Uganda. The second two interviews were conducted via videoconferencing. The interview questions will be based around how the organisations interpret the concept of an ecosystem and the individual organisation's experience of being a part of the ecosystem of Arts Collaboratory, including the trajectories of the individual organisations. I hope to obtain insights into what benefits the member organisations have gained from being a part of the network, their access to funding in general, and how they perceive the ecosystem to be sustainable. I anticipate that the interviews will be an open dialogue where I can further interrogate issues as they transpire during the discussion. The follow up conversations will elucidate on those areas and themes identified in the first round of interviews and in consultation with the theory.

These interviews combined with analysis of literature and reports related to Arts Collaboratory's work provide a rich, multi-faceted view of the case study. By also considering the surrounding context and influences, this case study analysis can be multi-perspectival. These interviews and initial research have helped in identifying relevant literature and in defining the concepts of space, knowledge and dependency. The role of theory within this

¹⁰ Kenneth Harling, "An Overview of Case Study." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, (2012):2 Doi10.2139/ssrn.2141476

thesis is not necessarily an academic framework that the case will be tested against, but rather these concepts and related literature will be placed in dialogue with insights drawn from interviews to understand international collaborations through the lens of the ecosystem, creating an interplay between theory and practice. This analysis will thus combine a variety of sources and literature that stem from the perspective of an ecosystem that help define the types of collaboration based on an interpretation of those relations as open, symbiotic, reciprocal, dynamic and in flux, as well as the type of dependency that expounds those relations.

The case study analysis will also take relationality as an orientation, which allows for analysis of the complexity of the relations and connections within the ecosystem. Relationality emphasises the multiple and dynamic intersections between concepts and practice. "A relational approach offers a deeper understanding of social phenomenon as it counteracts the reductionist tendencies in other methodologies."¹¹ In following the connections, I therefore will be able to layer the analysis rather than flatten the discourse. Ozbligin and Vassilopoulou argue that the relational perspective enables us to situate the phenomena, thereby exposing the social and historical nature of those relations. Even more relevantly, it perceives 'the space between', "through which insights are generated related to agency, action, and structures have causal interdependence and where they intertwine and cogenerate social interdependencies and intersubjectivities."¹²

Relationality can also allow the study of the connections between human and non-human actors. In this way Actor Network Theory (ANT) proves to be useful in examining those relations, particularly with regards to concept of dependency. However, to avoid studying the endless interactions within the ecosystem it is crucial to add parameters to this research, inserting boundaries is necessary for the construction of any case study analysis. These parameters are contained within the research question and sub questions. From initial research, space, knowledge and dependency materialised as relevant related concepts and

¹¹ Mustafa F. Ozbligin & Joana Vassilopoulou, "Relational Methods in Organisation Studies: A Critical Overview" in *Qualitative methodologies in organisation studies volume II: Methods and Possibilities* ed Malgorzata Ciesielska, Dariusz Jemielniak (Basingstoke: Springer, 2017), 156

¹² Ozbligin & Vassilopoulou, "Relational Methods in Organisation Studies: A Critical Overview," 153

themes to act as axis to guide the discussion. Throughout the analysis these notions are inextricably tied to each other thus relationality facilitates the comprehension of these links.

Relationality and space share a particular affiliation, as Doreen Massey affirms, space is *relational*. Henry Lefebvre's theoretical musing on space provides a foundation to the exploration of Arts Collaboratory. Taking spatiality as a frame means moving beyond studying the global South as a geographical location but instead attempting to understand how the global South is an imagined community and how is it tied to the global North, always in relation to something else. Arts Collaboratory consigns the spatial label of trans-local as a key descriptor which further points to the plurality of space in the ecosystem. In this research, knowledge is bound with space, it cannot be separated from the relational context in which it emerges. The decolonial project provides an entry point to study the relations within conceptualisations of knowledge, particularly those relations to the past. Walter Mignolo, Arturo Quijano and Ramon Grosfoguel whose work on decoloniality and modernity/coloniality provide theoretical underpinnings for the discussion on knowledge production and exchange between the members of Arts Collaboratory. Dependency in and of itself, is a type of relation. A combination of interpretation of dependency in geopolitics through dependency theory and ecological understanding of dependency leads into a discussion that evolves around resources, infrastructure and sustainability of this particular case study. The theory therefore is used as a starting point to untangle the relations that emerge through discussing the consequences of using an ecosystem to describe a network of arts organisations.

Relationality also allows a reflexive approach between the researcher and how the research is conducted and how they encounter what they research, acknowledging that no researcher or knowledge is neutral but is influenced by their positionality.

Positionality

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

Aboriginal activist Lilla Watson,

As part of this thesis addresses the production of knowledge from particular contexts I believe it is therefore crucial to acknowledge my own position. The authors and literature I have encountered throughout this research have prompted me to recognise my own lens and motivation for approaching a subject matter, such as relations to the global South. Donna Haraway argues that research practice is grounded in situated knowledges where the researcher identifies and articulates their positionality and how this influences production of knowledge.¹³ This paper is not neutral and the ideas presented are not universal. Choices have been made throughout the process on how to enter the debate this thesis is concerned with. As a white British woman I have certain privileges, bestowed with a British passport and a sense of curiosity I have been afforded opportunities to travel and study overseas which has led in part to a career in international development in my formative years. After working for some time in Sierra Leone I quickly became disillusioned about the development agencies in Sierra Leone, at times I would even say I felt uncomfortable. Under the pervasive paradigm of progress, the western model of development is exported to the global South whereby those countries considered *developing* are constantly ‘playing catch-up’. Development aid is often attached to strict monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and continued funding is dependent on demonstrating ‘evidence’ of progress. The discussion within this thesis will inevitably circle to back to these ideas, ideas around dependency and seeking alternative models, those models from arts and cultural sector. My most recent career appointment at the Arts and Humanities Research Council was focused on articulating the value of arts and humanities research within the field of international development. Many academics however are critical of the impact agenda within research and in particular the instrumentalisation of the arts within this context. Research collaboration within these funding programmes is being scrutinised and guidelines have been produced on how to develop ethical partnerships with partners in the global South. Relations therefore become prominent within these

¹³ Donna Haraway, “Situated knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no.3 (Autumn, 1988) 587

collaborations. I have become aware of the dynamics, perhaps uneven power relations that can be reproduced in research, between the researcher and the research subjects. As I enter the network that I am seeking to study, I must question how as researchers we construct ourselves, what experiences we bring and what language do we employ to convey ideas?

Limitations

In designing this study, I initially envisioned that I would embark on a semi-ethnographic study that would enable me to follow the connections within the network/ecosystem, in a way, to mobilise ANT theory. I was keen to develop an organic process that would enable the discussions with the members to help shape the development of the research, perhaps even find participatory ways, or collaborative mapping for them to engage with the research. This would have also helped in designing research that would be of benefit to the network. Marianna Takou, who works at Casco, had been my initial contact and after I shared the proposal with her, she kindly suggested that I shadow her. This discussion happened a few weeks before quarantine measures to control the spread of Covid-19 were put in place in Netherlands. The situation changed and there was a lot of uncertainty in general. It became somewhat a challenge to continue the regular contact with Marianna, due to her workload and the increase of meetings as work was moved online. Thus, the option of shadowing her in her meetings with other members of Arts Collaboratory no longer seemed feasible. It was during my second meeting with Binna, the director of Casco, that happened online during quarantine that she suggested I write a piece for the organisation. I realised that there was type of reciprocity expected in order to enter the ecosystem, as I would need to gain insight for a semi-ethnographic study and to produce a piece that would be beneficial to them. On reflection I deduced that the precarious conditions of member organisations had only heightened during the crisis and thus taking time out to reflect in an interview on relations became perhaps less of a priority than to source funding. This however, deepened my understanding of the network and led to the discussion on dependency section of this thesis.

Reading Guide

The remainder of this thesis will be split into different chapters. The second chapter introduces the three concepts; space, knowledge and dependency that ground the analysis within the thesis and delves into the theoretical discourse related to these concepts. The third chapter provides an in-depth account of the case study Arts Collaboratory, how it has evolved, highlighting key changes within their approaches and ways of working. The fourth chapter aims to activate the three concepts, drawing the theory into a dialogue with the practices of Arts Collaboratory and elucidating on insights from the interviews conducted with the members of organisations.

Chapter Two - Theory

This chapter outlines literature relevant to concepts of space, knowledge and dependency. The theory that derives from various fields lays the foundation for a critical discussion into these concepts, elucidating how they help make sense of international collaboration through the lens of an ecosystem.

Space

The concept of space is twofold within this study. Firstly, it acts as a frame to the other concepts of knowledge and dependency. Knowledge production and exchange between organisations in the global South becomes a spatialised discussion and dependency theory includes spatial terms centre-periphery. Secondly, I will delve into the particulars of the ecosystem at the organisational level to understand how space is constituted through international collaborations and space at the local level, leading into a discussion on the notion of the trans-local. Both networks and ecosystems conjure up an image of expansive space, a boundless space, linking sites across this space. Space as a concept has many meanings. It can be considered quite abstract and is often used in disciplines of geography and mathematics, but also within political sciences.

French philosopher Henry Lefebvre with his seminal book *The Production of Space* has been hugely influential in shaping how space is understood in academia and no foray into the conception of space would be complete without consulting his writing. His work has diversified and made alive the concept of space as something in flux that is not static or complete. He explored how space is tied to the social and how social relations are essential in shaping space. It is therefore essential to consult Lefebvre before any academic foray into the concept of space. For Lefebvre space is active and not necessarily an empty container to be filled by humans. It is more than the frame in which something occurs, as space interacts with humans and is produced through these interactions. The spatial triad incorporates the physical, mental and social aspects of space into one unit of theory comprising of three areas; special practices (physical and perceived), representations of space (conceived/ discursive

and mental) and representational space (lived and social).¹⁴ His work enables me to view space as an active condition within this study.

The spatial turn highlights the importance of space as a productive frame within social theory. The authors responsible for driving this turn include post-structural geographers, such as Doreen Massey, also influenced by Lefebvre's writing, whose work has been used beyond the discipline of geography. Post-structural geography brings significant opportunities for the development of relational approaches due to its particular interest in heterogeneous relations and explains in part, why it might be useful for the study of a network as an ecosystem. Doreen Massey urged the social sciences to embrace the dimension of space through challenging assumptions about the concept of space. Space, she argues, should not be seen as secondary to time, but rather as entangled with and intimately linked to it.¹⁵ She adds that space is not a flat surface but rather a dimension to raise questions about power and relations, thereby making space political. Her work is based around three prepositions. Firstly, recognising that space is the "product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions"¹⁶ from global to the 'intimate'. Secondly, that space is to be understood as the "sphere of possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity."¹⁷ Finally, that space is seen as a process, "under construction...always in process of being made. It is never finished; never closed."¹⁸In this way her reading of space is very similar to Lefebvre, a productive reading that can be used to map relations and discern the possibilities of multiple spaces.

The multiplicity inherent in space is of particular interest to my study of an ecosystem of arts organisations mapped across the globe. As previously stated, she sees space and time as inextricably linked. She argues that modernity has denied multiplicity by offering a dominant trajectory, in a podcast she explains that

"The way in which we look at globalisation at the moment: it turns space into time. For instance, we are often using a terminology of we are 'developed' countries, the

¹⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The production of space*. (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) 38-39.

¹⁵ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: SAGE, 2005) 19.

¹⁶ Massey, *For Space*, 9.

¹⁷ Massey, *For Space*, 9.

¹⁸ Massey, *For Space*, 9.

countries behind us as it were, are ‘developing’ and then you’ve got ‘underdeveloped’ countries. Now what that does is to convert contemporaneous difference between those countries into a single linear history”.¹⁹

In other words, Massey is suggesting that this use of term “developing” rejects different versions, effectively “denying the simultaneity”²⁰. In many ways her work critiques modernity in a similar way to how decolonial thinkers as she argues that “one of the effects of modernity was the establishment of a particular power/knowledge relation which was mirrored in a geography that also a geography of power (the colonial powers/the colonised spaces) – a power geometry of intersection trajectories.”²¹ The relations of decolonial thinking to modernity/coloniality will be further unpacked in the knowledge section.

Another theorist who has examined the concept of space is design academic Yoko Akama who creatively entangles the Japanese philosophy of Ma, as the space of ‘between-ness’, with Bruno Latour’s Actor Network Theory (ANT), to explore *becoming* together in co-design. Ma, an ambiguous term, has interested international scholars in various fields and for Akama, Ma can aid in surpassing binary positions of subject/object, human/non-human in the plurality of its meaning. The inclusion of ANT is to understand what has yet to be assembled, the empty spaces as “connections are as valuable as the gaps in-between. Between-ness does not seek to define borders or delineate separate entities.”²² This concept of Ma may help one to understand the space, or emptiness, between the nodes of the network. Ma, a non-western concept, can perhaps challenges assumption of this non-space that may, from a western perspective be seen as something to be filled. This in-between space, also suggests the immaterial nature of relations.

To activate the spatial dimension of this study and to essentially spatialise the ecosystem, I believe that a combination of Lefebvre’s production of space and Massey’s spatial relations

¹⁹ “Doreen Massey on Space” – *A Space to Explore, Share and Shape the Issues Facing Social Sciences and Behavioural Scientists*. Last modified July 21, 2020.

<https://www.socialsciencespace.com/2013/02/podcastdoreen-massey-on-space/>

²⁰ “Doreen Massey on Space-.” *A Space to Explore*.

²¹ Massey, *For Space*, 16.

²² Yoko Akama, “Being awake to Ma: designing in between-ness as a way of becoming with” *CoDesign* 11, no3-4 (2025) 264.

will be productive to allow a discussion into the global South as a relational term and to look at the local context of each organisation and how space is constituted by the ecosystem.

Knowledge

Many networks operate as a platform for knowledge exchange, it is often one of the main reasons they exist. In the cultural sector, organisations in networks tend to draw on their experiences within their own context and share practical insights with their partners. In a similar fashion, Arts Collaboratory exchanges knowledge between organisations that are located in the global South, which has implications for the choices of theory around knowledge that I will engage with. I will engage with literature and concepts developed by scholars associated with the decolonial turn because these scholars are concerned with epistemology and that they are interested in challenging the dominance of western knowledge production. The academics, activists and writers who make up the modernity/coloniality group originate in the main from Latin America with their work gained prominence in the 1980s and continuing through to the present.

Firstly, how does coloniality differ from colonisation? Colonisation is associated with a period in time in which “European patriarchy and European notions of sexuality, epistemology and spirituality were exported to the rest of the world through colonial expansion,”²³ Coloniality however has continued after the period of the colonial expansion and in some ways the remnants of colonisation can be perceived in the structures of our society today.

Literature and concepts developed by those academics associated with modernity/coloniality network were responding to an epistemological ‘gap’. They sought to go further than postcolonial scholars, whose work according to Ramon Grosfoguel was incomplete as they adopted western thought “By privileging Western thinkers as their central theoretical apparatus, they betrayed their goal to produce subaltern studies.”²⁴ ultimately reproducing the subaltern as a subject of study. He further observes that “the success of the world-system consists in making subjects that are socially located in the oppressed side of the colonial difference to think like ones on the dominant positions.”²⁵

²³ Ramon Grosfoguel, “EPISTEMIC DECOLONIAL TURN.” *Cultural Studies* 21, no 2-3 (2007), 217.

²⁴ Grosfoguel, “EPISTEMIC DECOLONIAL TURN,” 211

²⁵ Grosfoguel, “EPISTEMIC DECOLONIAL TURN,” 213

The privileging of Eurocentric knowledge, inherited through coloniality, is also stressed by Zoe Todd. Todd is not necessarily a part of the decolonial network of scholars, but her work orientates around Indigenous Studies. Todd maintains that western scholars continue to be celebrated for “discovering... what many an Indigenous thinker around the world could have told you.”²⁶ The implications of knowledge produced by scholars in the global North *about* the global South continue to be heavily debated in academia.

Anibal Quijano expands on the subject/object in his conceptualisation of the *power of coloniality*. He describes the naturalisation of these relations that links the European colonial project and its legacies in race classifications and models of capital and labour that persist even today. The colonised, the object, the other is made inferior through this process. “The ‘subject is the bearer of reason, while the ‘object’ is not only external to it, but different nature. In fact, it is ‘nature’.”²⁷ This naturalises the inequalities between subject/object. The ‘other’ is fixed as an object of knowledge and any possibility of exchange of knowledge or between different cultures is negated, as, according to Quijano, “the paradigm implies that between ‘subject’ and ‘object’ there can but be a relation of externality.”²⁸

The challenging of binary positions subject/object, as well as nature/culture, reason/emotion and the systems of values that uphold these positions, are central to decolonial theories. Knowledge within this paradigm, is associated with the rational and Europe is thus seen as the site of rationality and reason. Grosfoguel contests that “[w]estern philosophy and sciences are able to produce a myth about a Truthful universal knowledge that covers up, that is, conceals who is speaking as well as the geopolitical and body-political epistemic location in the structures of colonial/knowledge from which the subject speaks.”²⁹ This assumed universality renders the subject invisible, perhaps even neutral. To further add to this point Grosfoguel utilises Santiago Castro Gomez’s concept of ‘zero point’ that depicts a perspective that, in itself, is without a point a view³⁰. This notion bears resemblance to feminist writer

²⁶ Todd, Zoe. “An Indigenous Feminist’s Take on the Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ Is Just Another Word for Colonialism.” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29, No1 (2016), 4-22. doi:10.1111/johs.12124

²⁷ Anibal Quijano, “COLONIALITY AND MODERNITY/RATIONALITY.” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007), 173.

²⁸ Quijano, “COLONIALITY,” 174.

²⁹ Grosfoguel, “EPISTEMIC DECOLONIAL TURN,” 213

³⁰ Grosfoguel, “EPISTEMIC DECOLONIAL TURN,” 213

Donna Haraway's notion of the 'god trick' in her seminal work on situated knowledges³¹. This universality contained within the western canon of knowledge production effectively eliminates other forms of knowledge production.

Perhaps the most productive aspect of the decolonial turn is that the scholars associated with it propose an alternative, urging academics to situate their 'geopolitics of knowledge' or the loci of enunciation to make the place of where the subject speaks explicit.³² However, that is not to say that all knowledge produced in the global South could be considered decolonial, as mentioned previously some tended towards western thought. Grosfoguel expands on Mignolo's geopolitics of knowledge to frame a new proposal, whereby we must allow a multitude of knowledges that draws on the multiple particularities within a specific context. Mignolo also offers 'delinking' as a means to detach from the Western canon of knowledge and the structures that uphold it. He argues that "[d]e-coloniality is a planetary critical consciousness that emerged and unfolded, precisely out of the limits of abstract universal of its current manifestations...Pluri-versality as a universal project is quite demanding. It demands, basically, that we cannot have it all our own way."³³ Delinking is essentially detaching from the core belief of modernity of 'abstract universals' that obscures no other alternative perspective.

The modernity/coloniality projects offers various concepts to think with, in terms of studying international collaboration through the lens of an ecosystem and how to under those relations through knowledge produced and exchange.

Dependency

Dependency denotes reliance and there are multiple ways it can be adopted in research. Within the structure of a network it can spark a discussion of the types of dependency that exists between the nodes, therefore relationality is explicit. In the context of this thesis which

³¹ Donna Haraway, "Situated knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no.3 (Autumn, 1988): 582.

³² Walter D. Mignolo, "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (2002) 57-96

³³ Walter D. Mignolo, "DELINKING." *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 500

looks at international collaboration through the lens of an ecosystem, focusing on dependency can add another layer to understanding the relations between the arts organisations. It also leads into discussion regarding resources, particularly resources the members of Arts Collaboratory are dependent on.

Research into networks and dependency inevitably leads to Actor Network Theory (ANT), which has been used to understand and interpret networks in social theory. Actor Network Theory was developed by French philosopher, anthropologist, and sociologist, Bruno Latour, but also figures heavily in the work of Michel Callon and John Law.³⁴ It is considered more a methodological and ontological orientation; a tool, perhaps, rather than a theory, that has been hugely influential in a variety of fields. ANT emerged from constructivist approaches and highlights the interweaving of the social and technological. At its core, ANT privileges neither of these positions, but instead offers an equitable analysis of human and nonhuman actors and how these exist in constantly shifting relationships. ANT has been widely discussed and employed as a method, however, it would be unrealistic to employ all components of ANT within this thesis. The “tracing of associations between heterogenous elements” will be useful in situating the nodes of the network or ecosystem, also with regards to space. How connections are made, unmade and remade, or reassembled will also be useful to zoom in and out on Arts Collaboratory as a case study. Using ANT can also reveal something about the stability of a network and how dependency is a feature, as we cannot isolate parts from the whole.

Survival and existence are inherent to the concept of dependency, it connotes a reliance on another being or thing to survive. If we now turn to the biological ecosystem, we discern that dependence often becomes interdependence, so the emphasis is on mutuality; if one organism is affected, this will inevitably affect the overall structure. Kriti Sharma articulates that interdependence is often misinterpreted as viewing entities as independent. She points to two shifts in our thinking. The first is to consider that things are not separate, isolated but rather an act of interaction, in this way similar to ANT. Secondly, things should be considered

³⁴ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: OUP Oxford 2007)

as “mutually constituted.”³⁵ These reconsiderations of interdependence require identifying the assumptions of discerning entities as independent.³⁶

Dependency theory can be useful in attempting to study collaborations and interactions between the global North and the global South. Dependency theory first emerged through Argentinian economist Raul Prebisch in the late 1950s but gained particular traction during the 1970s and 1980s. It has become associated with development studies and provides an economic analysis to address the economic gap between rich and poor countries, seeing this as the root of global inequalities. The centre-periphery lens is a key feature of this dependency theory approach, seeing the world as split into two parts where the richer, industrialised states are located at the centre and the ‘underdeveloped’ poorer countries (most often those within the Third World or global South) sit at the periphery. Prebisch’s research identified that economic problems in poorer countries were the result of economic activity within the richer countries, in that the resources were exported from the former and manufactured by the latter and then resold to the poorer countries.³⁷ Dependency theory has been much developed by several Latin American academics, within the limits of this thesis it would be near impossible to include all the discourse related to this topic. However, its applicability can help to understand international relations and see those as relations that are spatialised, this is similar to Massey’s reading of space and developed/developing countries.

³⁵ Kriti Sharma, *Interdependence: Biology and Beyond* (New York City, Fordham University Press, 2015) 2.

³⁶ Sharma, *Interdependence*, 2.

³⁷ Young Namkoong. “Dependency Theory: Concepts, Classifications, and Criticisms.” *International Area Review* 2, no. 1(1999), 130. Doi:10.1177/223386599900200106.

Chapter Three - Case Study: Arts Collaboratory

Arts Collaboratory, as a network, has evolved significantly since its inception in 2007, initially conceived through a joint venture between two foundations in the Netherlands, Stichting DOEN and Hivos, before Mondriaan Fund joined later. It was initially seen as a “funding platform and a knowledge sharing platform for artists’ initiatives in the Global South”³⁸ with conventional funding mechanisms. In 2013, Hivos and DOEN reshaped Arts Collaboratory to fit a revised mission that aimed to “promote sustainable, collaborative and open visual art practices that contribute to social innovation.”³⁹ Particular attention was given to strengthening the ‘trans-local’ community that had emerged through the programme, which, at that time was a community made up of 23 partners. In addition, Casco Art Institute in the Netherlands joined, whose role was defined as an associate partner to support the development of the programme and facilitate knowledge sharing by utilising their experience in lengthy research projects and cultivating relevant partnerships.⁴⁰

Sparked by the need to understand the different members of the network and to create opportunities for collaboration, the annual assembly was formed. Hosted rotationally by the different members of the network, the assembly is a way for the organisations across the globe to come together to learn from each other and devise collaborative projects. These assemblies are described as place of “[c]o-existing in an atmosphere of friendship and trust generates energy and enthusiasm”⁴¹ and a ‘village square’ where the members can talk openly about their ideas and struggles. It was at the Assembly in Senegal in 2015 that the core group co-created a common vision to become self-organised. A Future Plan was formulated that articulated this shared vision “towards increased collaboration to help strengthen each organisation and its local ecosystem” through the incorporation of core principles including solidarity, trust and building lifelines.

They continued to work and develop the tools and mechanisms required to fulfil this vision. Self-organisation and self-governance mechanisms were established at the Assembly in

³⁸ “About,” Arts Collaboratory. Accessed May 10 2020 <http://www.artscollaboratory.org/about/>

³⁹ “About,” Arts Collaboratory. Accessed May 10 2020 <http://www.artscollaboratory.org/about/>

⁴⁰ “Arts Collaboratory A Network for Visual Arts & Social Innovation: Overview 2013-2015,” DOEN Online Publications <https://view.publitas.com/doen/arts-collaboratory-overview-2013-2015/page/1>

⁴¹ “Arts Collaboratory A Network for Visual Arts & Social Innovation: Overview 2013-2015,” DOEN Online Publications <https://view.publitas.com/doen/arts-collaboratory-overview-2013-2015/page/1>

Kyrgyzstan and further meetings during 2016. This renewed chapter was defined by a distinct shift in the arts and organisational practices of Arts Collaboratory, resulting in increased impact in their different local communities.⁴² Arts Collaboratory was becoming the self-organised ecosystem as it is known today in which DOEN, one of the original funders, converted to being a 'horizontal member', participating in knowledge exchange. This exemplifies practices of addressing hierarchy between donor and grantees. DOEN continues to provide 5-year core-funding to all Arts Collaboratory organisations.

Their history contends to the critical nature of the way the members of this ecosystem operates, reflects, works and adapts together. Collaboration and collective action occur through various working groups and projects. These include, but are not confined to, post 2020, territories, climate justice, food and communications. To understand the complexities of such a network that operates as an ecosystem, the ecosystem lens provides a viable entry point to comprehend the web of relations connected to this type of collaboration. In the next section the concepts of space, knowledge and dependency will be brought into dialogue with the practices of Arts Collaboratory to draw out insights of adopting this ecosystem lens.

⁴² About," Arts Collaboratory. Accessed May 10 2020 <http://www.artscollaboratory.org/about/>

Chapter 3 – Analysis

Spatial analysis

‘Space like time also folds back on itself in oscillating center- periphery relations’⁴³

sMarilyn Strathern *Partial Connections*

The ecosystem of Arts Collaboratory network exists at a local level in the physical space and the space that surrounds the physical structure of the arts organisations and it also exists immaterially between the organisations through the in-between space of the nodes of the networks. In their literature, Arts Collaboratory is defined as working across territories to create a community in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and Europe⁴⁴. The territories are implied through the borders of those countries and regions. In one of the initial meetings with members of Arts Collaboratory at Casco, I was given a map depicting the scale and reach of the ecosystem that pinpointed the location of the various arts organisations that make up the network. We can discern from this map that most of the organisations are located in what has become known as the global South.

The term global South is a departure point for a discussion into the spatial arrangements of the world and how the history of this ordering is inescapably linked to international collaborations across the borders of territories. A map is central to our understanding of geographical space, a visual representation of an ordering of space viewed as a flat surface from a position above but more importantly, from the outside⁴⁵. Geographer Barney Warf refers to Rene Descartes and the concept of ocularcentrism to explain how mapping and cartography has shaped our contemporary understanding of how the world is arranged and how this is tied up to power relations⁴⁶. Ocularcentrism is associated with early modernity and “subscribed to the notion of a detached objective observe capable of a “gods-like” view of the world.”⁴⁷ Mapping transformed space from something inconceivable into something

⁴³ Marilyn Strathern, *Partial Connections* (Lanham: Rowman, Alramira, 2004), 83

⁴⁴ “About,” Arts Collaboratory. Accessed May 10, 2020 <http://www.artscollaboratory.org/about/>

⁴⁵ Ben Anderson, “For Space (2005): Doreen Massey,” in *Key Texts in Human Geography*, ed. Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin, Gill Valentine. (London: Sage, 2008) 228

⁴⁶ Barney Warf, “From surfaces to networks” in *The Spatial Turn*, ed Barney Warf, Santa Arias (London: Routledge, 2008), 61

⁴⁷ Warf, “From Surfaces to Networks,” 62

more orderly through the placement of latitude and longitude lines by Europeans.⁴⁸ Early cartography is inextricably linked to colonial expansion from the west, “not simply a tool for administration, but equally importantly, a validation of Enlightenment science and central part of the colonial spatial order: mapping offered both symbolic and practical mastery over space.”⁴⁹ Modern cartography has helped shape our worldview emphasising the western perspective and “obscuring the heterogeneity of the global South.”⁵⁰ The global South as an imagined geography, to borrow Edwards Said’s term, cannot exist without the global North as they are entangled in the persistent conditions of historical relations created through Western imperial expansion and cemented through mapping.

Some of the members of Arts Collaboratory seemed reluctant to use the term global South as a term, hinting at the tension around using such binary language. The global South as a term has been much debated. Decolonial thinkers Walter D. Mignolo and Caroline Levander in their article “Introduction: The Global South and World Dis/Order” set out the conditions for considering the term and emphasise that perhaps what is most relevant is not what the global South is, but rather for whom it is important.⁵¹ The global South is for some a homogenous entity but for others an all too encompassing term, reducing every nation in the southern hemisphere to be the same conditions. It came into use to replace the term Third World after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, it is still used interchangeably with Third World and developing countries.

In the introduction of *Encountering Development: The Making and the Unmaking of the Third World*, Arturo Escobar argues that the development discourse is driven by similar principles to the colonial discourse, where spatial power is a key component. For Escobar the colonial discourse generated an “efficient apparatus for producing knowledge about and the exercise of power over the Third World.”⁵² He contends that the geopolitical and imaginative space, continually produced in terms such as Third World, global South, centre- periphery is “bound

⁴⁸ Warf, “From Surfaces to Networks,” 62

⁴⁹ Warf, “From Surfaces to Networks,” 62

⁵⁰ Matthew Sparke, “Everywhere but Always Somewhere: Critical Geographies of the Global South.” *The Global South* 1, no1 (2007), 118

⁵¹ Caroline Levander and Walter D. Mignolo, “Introduction: The Global South and World Dis/Order.” *The Global South* 5, no, 1 (2011)

⁵² Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Developing: The Making and the Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton University Press, 2011), 9

to the production of differences, subjectivities and social orders. Despite the correctives introduced to this geopolitics- the decentering of the world, the demise of the Second World, the emergence of a network of world cities, the globalisation of cultural production, and so on-they continue to function imaginatively in powerful ways."⁵³In other words, these spatial terms denote a social production of space and to use Lefebvre's language, forged on historical and political ties. Furthermore, anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff state that the global South "cannot be defined, a priori, in substantive terms. The label bespeaks a *relation* not a thing in or for itself."⁵⁴ This substantiates Massey's proposal of thinking relationally when it comes to space, anticipating the spatialisation of political and power relations.

On writing about the Havana Biennale, Miguel Rojas-Sotelo observes that the "global South emerges in the lexicon to denote a tendency of becoming aware of how the forces of the modern/colonial axis dominate the social and political landscape of the territories of the hemisphere south by the inhabitants of such territories."⁵⁵ This echoes what Mignolo and Levander raise about for whom the term is relevant, as well as embedding the modernity/coloniality paradigm within the debate on the global South from a spatial perspective. It also suggests that global South is productive for authors from the global South to unravel and to distinguish the historical entanglements.

Contemporary Art and the global South

At this point as the case study Arts Collaboratory is a network of arts organisations, it would be useful to ask how contemporary art has engaged with these terms. The emergence of the international biennale indicated a move towards the global South for the contemporary art world, in the latter part of the twenty first century with the first biennale held outside of the west in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1951. The biennale in general was instrumental in the development of the global contemporary art world as these first biennales, in particular, were

⁵³ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton; Oxford; Princeton University Press, 2011) 9.

⁵⁴ Jean Comaroff & John L. Comaroff, "Theory from the South: Or, how Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa", *Anthropology Form*, 22, no.2. (2012), 127.

predominately aimed exposing local audiences elsewhere to art produced in the West.⁵⁶ The Havana Biennale and its critics and curators, such as Gerada Mosquera, that have orbited it have played significant roles in challenging contemporary art and the dominance of western influence on cultural production, through a global South lens. “It is these seemingly peripheral sites where a focus on the biennale as a site for artists to engage with and to try and effect changes in the social and political realities outside of the institution of art is a contemporary reality.”⁵⁷ The shift away from the centre and into the peripheries was particularly evident in the 1990s with an increase in the number of these events, not only events that were presented the biennale format but also independent contemporary art organisations popping up in urban settings in the global South. These biennales and contemporary art spaces were also “activating urban spaces well beyond the museum. Arguably, it is these spaces, rather than in metropolitan destination museums, that audiences experience true diversity and depth of the art actually made across the world.”⁵⁸ In the case of Arts Collaboratory, some of the organisations can be found in within similar hubs re-imagining them as local ecosystems.

Zooming into the local

Networks are often defined as locally rooted and globally connected which can also be said for Arts Collaboratory, as the arts organisations within the ecosystem cannot be separated from their local context.⁵⁹ Their position is visibly marked on the map rooting their identity to the region and country they are located in. Their work reflects the environment they are situated in. Part of the original criteria to receive a grant from the Arts Collaboratory programme was that applying organisations had to be a part of an already existing network at the local level.

The physical premises that mark the intersections of the networks, where each of the organisations are geographically located, are described in a specific way by the members of the organisations. In my interview with Binna Choi, Director of Casco Art Institute: Working

⁵⁶ David Corbet, “Decolonising the Exhibitionary Complex: Australian and Latin American Art and Activism in the Era of the Global Contemporary.” In *Mapping South-South Connections – Australia Latin America*, ed. Fernanda Penalzoa & Sarah Walsh (Basingstoke: Springer, 2019) 29

⁵⁷ Robert E. D’Souza, “The Indian Biennale Effect,” In *India’s Biennale Effect: A Politics of Contemporary Art*, ed. Robert E. D’Souza & Sunil Manghani, (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis, 2016) 35

⁵⁸ Corbet, “Decolonising the Exhibitionary Complex,” 49

⁵⁹ Teesa Bahana, interview by Helen Duffy, via Zoom, 14 May 2020.

for the Commons, in Utrecht, the Netherlands, who stated that although the majority of organisations that constitute the network have contemporary art in their makeup, they are not defined as exhibition spaces, or museums, or spaces occupied by non-governmental organisation. Instead they function more as a place of gathering, an intermediary space that is 'cosy' and perhaps even home-like. How did these organisations come to function like this? Tony Evanko provided some insight into how Casa Tres Patios in Medellin, Colombia evolved:

“a local artist here who was participating in the activity, he told me that it was a really important gesture...because you're giving these artists who normally don't associate with each other - because they went to one university or the other so they become sort of cliquish, and they have a circle of friends that they're more accustomed to being with -you're giving them the opportunity on a regular basis to share their experiences, to share their opinions about work and other things. I thought that the importance of the space was to do experiments in their practice, but really the importance of the space became as a social space.”

Tony's insights suggest that space was created here by those that enter it. Although initially it seems that the idea was to create a space for experimental work, the space actually became socially constituted by the students who entered it. What is also alluded to in Tony's comments, is that these types of spaces perhaps did not previously exist. These organisations were often responding to a lack of adequate space within their local communities. In Uganda, Teesa from 32° East Ugandan Arts Trust commented on the general absence of visual art in the capital, Kampala, along with the lack of accessibility to art institutions which for her suggested that visual arts are perhaps not as valued as other places. To address this, 32° organised a public arts festive KLA ART that creates opportunities for artists to discover new audiences and engage with the general public.⁶⁰They are also currently moving to a new location and this move has sparked discussions on how space influences programming and how to increase foot traffic to generate income. Perhaps this move may require putting down roots in a different community, which triggers the question of how they maintain existing connections in their local ecosystem? In Indonesia, the space that Ruangrupa occupies is also shared with other local initiatives within their ecosystem. For Raw Material Company having

⁶⁰ Teesa Bahana, interview by Helen Duffy, via Zoom, 15 May 2020.

a space helped carve out an identity, be recognised and be able to distinguish themselves from other organisations instead of being “drowned” by institutions that they collaborate with.⁶¹ These organisations are dependent on these spaces, to gather, to host residencies and to engage with their local ecosystems. They make up part of the infrastructure that is dependent on funding to maintain, without which meaningful collaboration on an international scale seems a little out of reach. We will return to dependency and financial mechanisms in the final section of this chapter.

Social space is also created temporarily through the annual Assemblies and Bangas, the name given meetings that much smaller in scale and “based on “call for gathering” for friendship, self-care, reciprocal support, and collective study.”⁶² Both the temporary gatherings and the physical space within the premises of the organisations represent opportunities to share. It could be argued that the walls of the physical structure of the organisations in their local setting act as porous boundaries where knowledge, practice, and experience seep out through the connections made with the larger ecosystem of Arts Collaboratory. It is clear to me from conversations and interviews with the members of the organisations that the space produced, particularly the face to face contact, allows these members to share their experiences and their stories, helps to build a sense of togetherness and develops a sense of care between the members. Furthermore, these spaces allow the members to think through some of the issues each of these organisations have in their particular locations and to create a sense of solidarity. These spaces are given meaning by those that enter in a collective way.

The ecosystem acts as a network of ecosystems with each organisation member connected to other organisations through Assemblies, Bangas and collaborative projects. This assembling, disassembling and reassembling occurs sometimes at a local level at other times at a global level. Arts Collaboratory use the term spatial term trans-local to define the relations and connections within the ecosystem. Translocality is often associated with studies on migration. Geographer Colin McFarlane uses trans-local assemblage to approach spatial relations and practices of learning in development, particularly focusing on the work of a social movement group in Mumbai, India. Although the content of this study is not so relevant

⁶¹ “TEOR/eTica Interviews Raw Material Company,” Library, Arts Collaboratory, accessed May 22, 2020. <http://www.artscollaboratory.org/site/assets/files/3193/raw-m.pdf>

⁶² “Banga,” Arts Collaboratory Accessed May 16, 2020, <http://www.artscollaboratory.org/meetings/banga/>

here, how McFarlane unpacks the notion of trans-local assemblage is pertinent. He explains that there are three orientations, the first being that trans-local assemblage are “composites of place-based formations with exchange ideas, knowledge, practices, materials and resources across sites.⁶³” A site, in his second orientation, replaces node in a network which he also perceives as deeper and can transcend the connections between other sites⁶⁴. His third offering is concerned with the performative nature of these relations and not confined to a spatial category. Although the organisations within Arts Collaboratory are partly embedded in their local context, the trans-local prefix suggests movement across and through these relations. Their collaborative projects being a signifier of this where they find ways to connect to across boundaries, with those connections to the local still evident. In this way we perceive a plurality of spaces and returning to Massey, who describes space as constituted through interactions from the immensity of the global to the tiny. It could therefore be argued that a global ecosystem made of local ecosystems embodies this notion.

⁶³ Colin McFarlane, “Translocal assemblages: Space, power and social movements.” *Geoforum* 40, no. 4 (2009): 2.

⁶⁴ McFarlane, “Translocal assemblages,” 2

Knowledge Analysis

“Like all offspring of colonising and imperial histories, I – we – have to relearn how to conjugate worlds and partial connections and not universals and particulars.”⁶⁵

Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*

One of Arts Collaboratory’s primary functions, especially from the outset, is to be a south-south knowledge exchange platform. Knowledge is therefore seen as a vital resource to be shared amongst its members. Arts organisations, institutes and the artists themselves generate, distribute and circulate a plethora of knowledge. International collaboration suggests a reciprocal exchange of knowledge, seen in a positive light where each side’s position is given the same value.

Contemporary art and knowledge production

“Artistic research” and “knowledge production” have become synonymous in the arts and curatorship, which suggest that we have come far past the assumption that knowledge is only the domain of the academy. Contemporary art is particularly concerned with the notion of knowledge production as in the very term lies an inherent linguistic tension. Production associated with labour suggests complicity with forms of capitalism and neoliberalism, the very systems and structures that perhaps many artists and organisations are trying to critique.

It is implicit that art theories and discourse generate knowledge and maintain knowledge systems relating to art and cultural movements and practices. Artists and institutions are thus grappling with the relation between art and knowledge and the questions this relationship raises, for instance, “Does art produce knowledge?” and if so “What type of knowledge?”⁶⁶ Dr. Sarat Maharaj, Professor of Visual Art and Knowledge Systems at Malmo Art Academy, Lund University has been unpacking this relationship, attempting to move beyond debates on methods as knowledge. He asserts that “[a]rt is a form of inquiry, of being in the world, of knowing the world and coming up with new ways of knowing that world.”⁶⁷ If we apply this

⁶⁵ Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016)

⁶⁶ “Art as Knowledge as Difference: Sarat Maharaj Lecture,” Stedelijk Museum, accessed June 25, 2020. <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/digdeeper/art-knowledge-difference>

⁶⁷ “Art as Knowledge as Difference: Sarat Maharaj Lecture,” Stedelijk Museum, accessed June 25, 2020. <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/digdeeper/art-knowledge-difference>

to the case of Arts Collaboratory, what do their collective practices suggest about knowledge production, about being in the world and offering a new way of knowing the world?

Members of Arts Collaboratory generate knowledge through research, artistic residences, practice and collaborative projects. These projects at times engage local communities and or are developed collaboratively with other members of the organisations, examples include *Territories* and *Arts Schoolaboratory*. In all of their endeavours critical thinking is paramount, as is stated within their Ethical Principles that Arts Collaboratory is “dedicated to critical thinking and deep collaboration.”⁶⁸ Mas Arte Mas Accion in Colombia, elucidate on their approaches to knowledge production within their research:

“Our research is based on a post-foundational and social constructivist epistemological standpoint, positing that knowledge and our understanding of reality is construed in social interactions through interpretative practices. Thus, we understand research as an intentional, reflective, complex and documented process of creating meaning and knowledge that is part of daily life of all people.”⁶⁹

Thus, knowledge pertains to lived experience and is created through relations, it is a practice. The breadth of the topics addressed by the 25 organisations within the ecosystem are diverse and far-reaching, often relating to socio-political or ecological issues. With the focus on social change there is a political and activist element present and, in some cases, the role of art becomes questioned. For instance, in an online interview Koyo Kouoh from Raw Material Company located in Senegal explained that art is not “used to illustrate an issue, but we are thinking through art about issues”⁷⁰. This reiterates what Mahajar proposes that art can a line of inquiry. In Costa Rica, TEOR/eTica look at their local context to organise their programme and activities. They believe it is important to create a space to discuss topics that cannot be broached in other institutions as some of the topics are seen as a taboo within that society. TEOR/eTica see their role as encouraging a “space for discussion and liberty of

⁶⁸ About,” Arts Collaboratory. Accessed May 10 2020 <http://www.artscollaboratory.org/about/>

⁶⁹ “The Force of Art,” Mas Arte Mas Accion, accessed May 29, 2020. <https://www.masartemasaccion.org/territorios-pluriversos/?lang=en>

⁷⁰TEOR/eTica Interviews Raw Material Company,” Library, Arts Collaboratory, accessed May 22, 2020. <http://www.artscollaboratory.org/site/assets/files/3193/raw-m.pdf>

expression.”⁷¹The members of Arts Collaboratory conceive of knowledge production as spaces for thinking and questioning and in many cases use art as an entry point.

Arts Collaboratory share knowledge and experience through their encounters within the spaces that they produce, for instance the annual assembly and Bangas as I mentioned within the spatial discourse. It is within these encounters that the members collaboratively create common tools which embody the values of the ecosystem. These tools have adopted names from different cultures. Banga, for instance are defined in Arts Collaboratory as “nomadic, “know-madic” meetings, referencing the word banga in the Lithuanian language meaning “tide” and “time and space” in Luganda, a Ugandan language.⁷² Tony from Casa Tres Patios elaborated on the importance of these tools:

“we can use the *banga* mechanism as a way for us to move through a transition period within a given organization in a context. So, there's been several organizations, that have called because their context has changed or people have left their organization and the new people have a different vision. And so those kinds of moments and those kinds of mechanisms, in my opinion, are really what gives the network, what makes it unique.”⁷³

This suggests that fundamental care is given to how these tools that share knowledge and experience are developed and used. Arts Collaboratory see knowledge as an invaluable resource, it is created and shared amongst the members. Some of their documentation related to their practices are stored on their website. Within this online resource library there are interviews in which members of one organisation have interviewed another; documenting the sharing of their stories and practices. Marion Louisgrand Sylla from Ker Thiossane in Dakar, Senegal explained to KUNCI from Yogyakarta, Indonesia their activity ‘Breakfast in Common’, which:

“Through a series of open discussions during tea or a breakfast, aimed to create a space for collective thinking about the commons; underline the potential of

⁷¹ “Ashkal Alwan interviews TEOR/eTica,” Arts Collaboratory, accessed May 9, 2020. <http://www.artscollaboratory.org/site/assets/files/3196/teoretica-new.pdf>

⁷² “Banga”, Arts Collaboratory, accessed May 15 2020 <http://www.artscollaboratory.org/meetings/banga/>

⁷³ Tony Evanko, interview by Helen Duffy, via Skype, February 2020.

contemporary artistic creation for critical thinking on the debate of the commons; and imagine a network of experiences on the commons from different, intercultural contexts (Montréal, Dakar, Sevilla, etc.) that produce sources of analysis on the invisible commons. It was not about copy-pasting from one context to the other, but rather about sharing the same exercises in different contexts, bearing in mind our focus on Southern perspectives"⁷⁴

This insight brings together what has been discussed previously about social spaces for critical thinking and sharing of experience and ties it with the spatial dimension of the global South. The sharing of experience is done to replicate practice elsewhere, but instead the heterogeneity in the global South and the multiplicity of these contexts is acknowledged and practised.

Knowledge exchange in the ecosystem

To imagine a network as an ecosystem activates knowledges and experiences from different loci and in this particular case from the global South. Haraway's term situated knowledges is helpful here as it is inherently spatial, in that it "seeks those ruled by partial sight and limited voice - not partiality for its own sake but, rather, for the sake of connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible. Situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular."⁷⁵ The partial perspective of those sites dotted across the globe, at the periphery, but linked as a community through collaborative practice provide the form of combined larger vision that Haraway refers to.

Collaboration is synonymous with the social turn in contemporary art which is also referred to as socially engaged arts and Nicholas Bourriards's relational aesthetics. This type of practice often politically or socially charged emphasises art as process and as indicated by Bourriard has relation at the centre. The writer and curator Grant Kester has written extensively on this type of practice, he prefers the term 'dialogical aesthetics'. His book, *The One and the Many* brings collaboration and dialogical aesthetics in conversation with the global South,

⁷⁴ "KUNCI Cultural Studies Center interviews Ker Thioossane," "Library," Arts Collaboratory, accessed May 10, 2020.

⁷⁵ Donna Haraway, "Situated knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no.3 (Autumn, 1988): 590.

recognises the increasing collaboration between artists and other sectors including activists, non-governmental organisations, urban planners and marginalised communities. Kester brings together case studies that confront the assumption that “insight and emulation can flow in only one direction: from the enlightened core to the blighted periphery.”⁷⁶ The lens of the ecosystem similarly disrupts this flow in only one direction and appreciates that “maybe there are many forms of knowing and knowledge in the world around us”⁷⁷ as Maharaj proposes.

The type of knowledge that Maharaj refers to differs to is the hegemonic, western concept of knowledge as rational, associated with the head. The knowledge that the ecosystem generates also challenges this. Let us revisit Haraway’s concept of situated knowledges to further embed this point. She argues for

“politics and epistemologies of location, positioning and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These claims on people’s lives. [She is] arguing for the view from a body, always complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity. Only the god trick is forbidden.”⁷⁸

Situated knowledges help us to return to the modernity/coloniality group and the decolonial project that they propose, including epistemic disobedience and acknowledging that the “need for the geo-politics of knowledge is precisely to account for the spatial epistemic breaks from the perspective of coloniality.”⁷⁹ What we then arrive at is the ‘pluriverse’ where “heterogeneous worldings coming together as a political ecology of practices negotiating their difficult **being together** in heterogeneity.”⁸⁰ The language of the pluriverse can be even seen in some of projects of worked on by members of Arts Collaboratory organisations. Mas

⁷⁶ Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011): 15.

⁷⁷ “Art as Knowledge as Difference: Sarat Maharaj Lecture,” Stedelijk Museum, accessed June 25, 2020. <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/digdeeper/art-knowledge-difference>

⁷⁸ Haraway, “Situated knowledges,” 589.

⁷⁹ Walter D. Mignolo, “The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference.” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no1, 2002, 59

⁸⁰ Mario Blaser & Marisol de la Cadena, “Introduction. Pluriverse: Proposals for a World of Many Worlds,” in *A World of Manys* ed. Marisol de la Cadena, Mario Blaser (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018):4.

Arte Mas Accion for instance adopted the title *pluriversos*, for a project that was “carried out on the territorial diversity found in Chocó, based on problems that intersect biodiversity, narratives about the multicultural territory and the complexities that surround it.”⁸¹

The decolonial thinkers refer to the Zapatistas and their notion of a world of many worlds. Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena adopt the pluriverse analytical tool which is productive in assembling “ethnographic compositions capable of conceiving ecologies of practice across heterogeneous(ly) entangled worlds.”⁸² The pluriverse allows for analysis of the relations between these worlds, or as Blaser suggests the “material-semiotic grammar of *the relation* among worlds that dominates the fabrication of the current historical moment.”⁸³ It therefore acts as a useful concept for this study of relations within an ecosystem of arts organisations and knowledge exchanged through these relations.

Mignolo also includes the concept of the pluriverse in his writing, he suggests that “the pluriversality of each local history and its narrative decolonisation can *connect* through that common experience and use it as the basis for a new common logic of knowing: border thinking.”⁸⁴ There is acknowledgment that each local history has its own way of dealing with the remnants of colonisation allowing multiple ways of knowing and being. They do however share the same conditions of modernity/coloniality paradigm. The way that the decolonial scholars approach this have been to develop concepts and ideas, although entangled with modernity, are no longer “applying European- born categories to understand colonial legacies On the contrary, [they] have converted Europe into a domain of analysis rather than a provider of “cultural and epistemic resources.”⁸⁵

⁸¹ Mas Arte Mas Accion, accessed May 29, 2020. <https://www.masartemasaccion.org/territorios-pluriversos/?lang=en>

⁸² Mario Blaser & Marisol de la Cadena, “Introduction. Pluriverse: Proposals for a World of Many Worlds,” in *A World of Manys* ed. Marisol de la Cadena, Mario Blaser (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018):4

⁸³ Blaser & Cadena, “Pluriverse”, 4

⁸⁴ Mignolo, “DELINKING,” 497

⁸⁵ Walter D. Mignolo. “Decolonial Aesthetics/aesthesis Has Become a Connector Across the Continents,” interview by Aicha Diallo. *Contemporary And*. August 7, 2014. <https://www.contemporaryand.com/magazines/decolonial-aestheticsaesthesis-has-become-a-connector-across-the-continent/>

The amalgamation of differing perspectives, knowledges and experiences indicates that the future the ecosystem Art Collaboratory is radically imagining, complete with a set of ethical principles, could be considered a pluriverse. As Mignolo suggests,

“The future could no longer be owned by one way of life (la pensee unique of Ramonet), cannot be dictated by one project of liberation and de-colonisation, and not be a polycentric world within Western categories of thoughts. A world in which many worlds could co-exist can only be made by shared work and common goals of those who inhabit, dwell in one of the many worlds co-existing in one world.”⁸⁶

Does this suggest that pluriversal thinking can potentially evaporate binary spatial positioning of the global South to North? In a world, where many worlds exist, it would seem that the logics of binary positions would become redundant. The ecosystem, as an interconnected web of relations can bring these different worlds together, to share knowledge and experience from their loci. The ecosystem thus could facilitate the pluriverse, opening the possibility of multiplicity in knowledges and being in the world. Part of the decolonisation toolkit is delinking, detaching from western structures, how much can an ecosystem such as Art Collaboratory delink from western structures and funding mechanisms this then leads the discussion into dependency – where does dependency exist in the ecosystem?

⁸⁶ Mignolo. “DELINKING,” 499.

Dependency Analysis

Using dependency as a concept allows for a discussion into the relations with the non-human actors within the network or ecosystem. These non-human actors can refer to resources, not solely monetary resources but also time, space and knowledge: we encountered the latter two in the previous sections. Dependency also tells us something about how those relations are enacted and taking the ecosystem as the lens to view these relations we may discern ways of relating that are symbiotic, dynamic and reciprocal. This then brings back into the fore Colin Mercer's useful definition of cultural ecosystems. I will also expand on the concept of ecosystem and how it embodies self-organisation and the tensions that this brings to the specific case study of Arts Collaboratory. Dependency brings into focus the terms of the connections providing further insights into how to understand this type of international collaboration and the inequalities of power at play.

Attending to the elephant in the room:

Firstly, I would like to address the issue of funding and I aptly named this section 'Attending to the elephant in the room' to highlight it as a pressing issue and how it is often evaded in discussions. During the interviews I conducted the topic of funding materialised numerous times, for example Binna from Casco stated that the relationship to funding reveals many things about how Arts Collaboratory functions. Arts Collaboratory is currently funded by the DOEN Foundation. Funding from the Dutch Lottery Foundation DOEN supports initiatives that align with its three core themes: *green, socially inclusive and creative* in order to "establish a greener, more socially inclusive and more creative society in which:

- the capacity of the planet is the starting point (green);
- everybody can participate, where people work together and help each other with respect for individual needs and possibilities (socially inclusive)
- art and culture are at the heart in the belief that society can not do without (creative)"

Arts Collaboratory was initially set up as a programme that funded grants so it sits under the *creative* theme and within the International Culture and Media section that supports

“initiatives that reinforce the cultural infrastructure.”⁸⁷ On DOEN’s website, it is further explicated that they focus this funding on local projects and organisations. The evaluation of project approval is “based on urgency and added value of a project within the cultural sector in the country concerned or the contribution that it makes to cooperation and innovation in the sector in an entire region”⁸⁸

The requirements to receive funding indicate that a need must be identified and that the finances would of benefit to that particular issues with the cultural sector. Funding is often allocated in this way, tied to set of objectives outlined by the agency or donor who are often located in the global North. The language of the desired outcomes and objectives tend to suggest progress, development and building of capacity, to name but a few perhaps suggesting a comparison to a standard as set out by a western hegemonic concept of progress. Organisations applying for such funding need to demonstrate how they align with the criteria and usually how they will measure the progress towards these objectives. Monitoring, reporting and evaluating plans outlining indicators are then developed to demonstrate compliance with objectives.

At this juncture it would be useful to return to dependency theory as outlined in the theory chapter as dependency theory has been commonly used with international development studies. Dependency theorists were driven to understand inequalities on a global scale, by articulating the flow of resources from poorer states to richer states and the creation of a centre/periphery model. The theory is spatialised and the language of core-periphery remains with the periphery being the global South. It could be argued that the ecosystem model of Arts Collaboratory where resources are shared among members challenges the assumption of resources flowing in one direction, as we saw earlier with regards to knowledge exchange.

Some of the critiques of dependency theory derive from the decolonial thinkers including Arturo Escobar. Escobar is commonly associated post–development, considered an antecedent of dependency theory. Escobar contends that dependency theorists “still functioned within the same discursive space for development even if seeking to attach it to a

⁸⁷ “International Culture and Media,” DOEN. Accessed March 15, 2020. <https://www.doen.nl/what-we-do/creative/international-culture-and-media.htm>

⁸⁸ “International Culture and Media,” DOEN. Accessed March 15, 2020. <https://www.doen.nl/what-we-do/creative/international-culture-and-media.htm>

different international and class rationality.”⁸⁹ The issue is that the critique still stems from the modernist frame and as we have seen above, decolonial thinkers unpack the modernity/coloniality. Grosfoguel has also critiqued dependency theory with regards to the Latin American region and argues that the assumptions made by dependency theory

“are similar to the intellectual currents they attempted to criticize. By privileging national development and the control of the nation-state, they reproduced the illusion that development occurs through rational organization and planning at the level of the nation-state. This emphasis contributed to overlooking alternative and more strategic antisystemic political interventions below (local) and above (global) the nation-state. Moreover, *dependentistas* underestimated the coloniality of power in Latin America.”⁹⁰

Grosfoguel then goes on to elaborate on these concealed power relations that were made up of “racial/ethnic hierarchies” and advocates for the decolonising of these power relations.

On writing about the trend of international collaboration in the arts with NGOs and international agencies Grant Kester also includes dependistas in his book *The One and The Many*. His main concerns are related to the ethical implications of international collaborations. Part of his discussion on collaborations between artists, activists or NGOs articulates a position on the structural adjustment programmes (SDPs) of the World Bank and IMF that were prominent in the 1990s. He argues that through SDPs “countries were forced to surrender control over their internal affairs and conform to the dictates of neoliberal economic policies”⁹¹ and suggests that in part the humanitarian aid sector and associated funding mechanisms resemble these structures. This is a rather bold statement to make however, there is certainly reason to see that funding mechanisms with international agencies perhaps do need to be approached with caution, especially in regard to how funding apparatus can reproduce perpetuate uneven relations.

⁸⁹ Arturo Escobar, “Imaging a Post-Development Era? Critical Thought, Development and Social Movements.” *Social Text*, no. 31/31 (1992): 26.

⁹⁰ Ramon Grosfoguel, “Developmentalism, Modernity and Dependency Theory in Latin America” in *Nepantla: Views from South*, ed. Walter D. Mignolo (Durham, Duke University Press, 2000): 372.

⁹¹ Grant, “The One and the Many,” 118.

In a world where public funding is scarce, the pressure to fund effective, impactful work only increases in the cultural sector that is already awash with precarious workers. What other options do cultural organisations, workers or artists have in these conditions? With a lack of funds available for cultural activities within developing countries, how does this funding through the agencies and organisations located in the Netherlands create a sense of dependency? Kester also questions the complicity of artists working across these sectoral borders. How can individuals or cultural initiatives recognise their ties to complicity and challenge this notion that continues to reproduce inequalities? During my discussions with members of Arts Collaboratory it seems that this is one of the major areas they want to address. Binna from Casco acknowledges “this relation matters especially given that most of the member organisations work under colonial heritage and its persistence.”⁹² These inherent tensions led to discussions between the members to evolve towards a Funding Paradigm Shift and to persuade their funders (DOEN) to “allow it to self-govern guided by a set of commonly determined ethical principles.”⁹³ The mechanisms and tools developed as part of this shift seem to suggest the delinking that Mignolo is talking about, a detachment from the requirements of funding agencies including “lengthy applications, manipulation of story and development of lifelines instead” and essentially attempting to reconfigure the centrality of funding⁹⁴.

In their literature, Arts Collaboratory articulate that within “our post-colonial, neo-liberal reality ‘sustainability’ and financial practice in the cultural realm remain for a large part dependent on an ‘old’ donor/philanthropy/funding practices.”⁹⁵ They acknowledge that unequal power relations and hierarchies can be reproduced through their application and are working collaboratively towards a “fairer funding practice”, where one of the key questions they are addressing is “how can [they] redefine the role of money in our practice, and give more intention and emphasis to other values such as knowledge, collaboration and solidarity?”⁹⁶ It suggests that knowledge, space and funding are all key resources that are shared and discussed within the members of the organisation. They are all seen as part of *the*

⁹² Binna Choi, interview by Helen Duffy, Casco, Utrecht. March 6, 2020

⁹³ “Working for the Commons. An interview with Casco – Office for Art, Design and Theory, on new ways for art institutions to work.” Frieze. Accessed June 7, 2020. <https://www.frieze.com/article/working-commons>

⁹⁴ Binna Choi, interview by Helen Duffy, Casco, Utrecht. March 6, 2020.

⁹⁵ “About” Arts Collaboratory. Accessed May 20, 2020.

⁹⁶ “About” Arts Collaboratory. Accessed May 20, 2020.

commons. It is also clear that funding and the debates around it inextricably linked to dependence and in being self-organising, the tensions become even more apparent.

Self-organisation has become prevalent within the arts demonstrating a discontent with public institutions, as well as the art market with its links to capitalism. It has become a gesture for art collectives and organisations to disentangle their dependency on economic ties that show a type of complicity to western capitalism and neoliberalism. Stephan Dillemath, Anthony Davies and Jakob Jakobsen's seminal text 'There is no alternative: the future is self-organised' directly puts forward an argument for radical future of self-organisation, as perhaps the only way to proceed institutions lose themselves in new management semiotics and align themselves to a set of principles created by the private sector.⁹⁷ The use of ecological language, such as ecosystems, could be just that, a way to weave in new management language, thus abiding by the neoliberal logic. Delivering the same type of work but adopting a language that would make them more appealing to funders. We are confronted here by how loaded language can be and Grant Kester asserts that "it is telling that within the continuum of terms we use for working together each carries with it a counter-meaning: a warning, so to speak, of its ethical undecidability."⁹⁸ Perhaps adopting ecological language does suggest a type of green-washing, or is the ecosystem a counterproposal as Marianna from Casco suggested. It was also clear in other discussions with members of Arts Collaboratory, that there is a acknowledgment of the unnaturalness of how this particular ecosystem of global arts organisations was originally formed through funding. However, along with this, there seemed to be collective commitment to address this, being self-organised being one such area.

Through adopting self-organisation practice, Arts Collaboratory most aptly activates the concept of the ecosystem where the emphasis is on developing interdependent relations rather than dependent as they continually claim that the network "is run by shared management and shared-governance. [They] all can give mutual support to address

⁹⁷ Stephan, Dillemath. Anthony Davies and Jakob Jakobsen. "There is no alternative: The future is self-organised." In *Art and Social Change: a Critical Reader*, ed. Will Bradley and Charles Esche, London: Tate Publishing, 2007

⁹⁸ Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Collaborative Art in a Global Context*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011) 2

hierarchies in own organisations.”⁹⁹ In an interview with Frieze Magazine, Binna from Casco describes how the “process of self-organisation is geared towards going deeper into our struggles with art in local political and social contexts while developing their sustainability and take further care of each one’s own local ecosystem as well as seeing Arts Collaboratory as a larger eco-system.”¹⁰⁰ The local conditions and sense of precariousness linked to some of the organisations has heightened during the corona crisis. Those organisations who have perhaps been able to carve a sense of interdependence through support from the ecosystem, have in fact been the organisations most affected by the corona situation as they receive funding from external sources, bringing their survival into question. To further add to this point I would like to include a lengthy insert from my interview with Tony from Casa Tres Patios who also provided an in-depth interpretation of the Arts Collaboratory as an ecosystem:

“My interpretation of it is like in any ecosystem that's sort of an interdependent becomes interdependent relationships. And it doesn't mean that they're not organizations or in the case of ecosystems, organisms that are not more, let's say aggressive or don't grow more quickly or, or some are weaker than others. That's all part of that's all part of an ecosystem. And what we've been looking at during the past five years really is the idea of how those interdependencies work, given our different dynamics. And so I think it's essentially for us, it's just been an acceptance of the fact that that there are these differences and that that doesn't mean that each one doesn't have to be nurtured and that's part of the whole dynamic and that's again what makes it, I think, a beautiful kind of experience; an experiment. What's also interesting is that if you take the metaphor of the ecosystem in nature, and just think about the idea of rainfall or water availability, it's thinking about the nature of funding to a certain extent. I mean, there's certain basic nutrients that people need in order to move forward to grow or to just do what they do and exist.”¹⁰¹

What stands out for me in Tony’s extract is how the ecosystem model does cater to the changes and the different needs of the various organisations. However, it is also clear that

⁹⁹ *Arts Collaboratory Network*, 39

¹⁰⁰ “Working for the Commons.” Frieze. Accessed June 10, 2020. <https://frieze.com/article/working-commons>

¹⁰¹ Tony Evanko, interview by Helen Duffy, via Skype, February 2020.

funding is indispensable and the sustainability of these organisations depend on the 'nutrients' of that funding. How can ecosystems like Arts Collaboratory create that delicate balance required in receiving 'nutrients' to survive and collective working to create a counter proposal towards the dominant funding paradigm? Interestingly the understanding of ecosystems suggest that a balance needs to be maintained for the stability of the organisms within the ecosystem.

It was clear from my discussions with the members of the ecosystem that the initial funding received from DOEN was essential in establishing relationships between those members and the infrastructure needed to support such collaborations as well as fulfilling a gap of creating these types of spaces. In comparing the networks 32° has been involved in, Teesa stated that "because it was initially well-funded, it meant that we could meet more frequently in person. And when you meet more frequently in person, then you develop relationships. And so much of this work depends on relationships"¹⁰² Tony Evanko, the director of Casa Tres Patios in Medellin, Colombia, reiterated this point and spoke of how difficult it was to secure funding for administrative costs at the beginning as grants were often only available to cover the costs of projects.

"But we worked for like four years without any support, just trying to learn how to raise funds, and we would start to charge the artists residents money to stay here, so that helped just a little bit. But we were really not able to pay salaries for about four years. So, but we learned gradually how to apply for grants from the local government and the national government. And in 2010, we got a grant from the Arts Collaboratory, to do a one residency project. And then in 2011, we applied it and got that funding for the administrative support, which was a huge step forward for us."¹⁰³

Tony's comments suggest that some of the organisations within Arts Collaboratory may not exist in their current form without the funding from DOEN as they are dependent on this to survive. The delinking aspect of funding paradigm shift and drive to be a self-organised ecosystem also suggests that Arts Collaboratory are attempting to exist partially outside of

¹⁰² Teese Bahana, interview by Helen Duffy, via Zoom, May 14, 2020.

¹⁰³ Tony Evanko, interview by Helen Duffy, via Skype, February 28, 2020.

institutional models. In applying ANT logic, we would discern that there is no outside of the system as each part is made through its connections with others. What strikes me is that arts organisations, who value radical imagination, may be in best position to question and challenge this inside/outside phenomenon especially through the lens of ecosystem relations. In readjusting the hierarchy with DOEN as a horizontal member, whose own language has been altered through this experience in that they have adopted the use of radical imagination and *the commons* in their objectives, again reiterates ANT theory that entities/nodes are changed through their connections. This perhaps suggest that those ties to funding agencies cannot be severed but reimagined.

Conclusion

At the outset of this thesis, I outlined the emergence of ecological metaphors in the cultural sector and proposed studying this phenomenon to understand international collaboration between arts organisations through the lens of an ecosystem, to gain particular insights about those relations. Ecosystems are understood as an interconnected web or relations placing relationality at the core of this thesis. Throughout this study the ecosystem, a salient descriptor for dynamic, multivalent relations amongst things has proven to be a productive lens ~~to think with,~~ providing a plethora of related concepts and characteristics that define an ecological way of thinking. There are various trajectories that studying ecological language could take however, one of the key features of the Arts Collaboratory, the case study I was using to explore the use of this language, was that most of the organisations are located in the global South. This had major repercussions on the type of study I embarked on and it became a major variable in the research and helped in part to narrow down the area of study to three intersecting lines of inquiry; space, knowledge, dependency.

These three concepts are not exclusively related to the ecosystem or an ecological way of thinking however, I arrived at them using the ecosystem as a starting point to think about collaboration. The discussion part of the thesis revealed the relevance of the concepts within the overarching lens of the ecosystem, adding texture to the analysis with literature and insights from interviews. The dependency concept created the most critical discussion and where perhaps the characteristics of an ecosystem were most evident. The concept led into a discussion on resources, highlighting the dependency on funding and the tensions created in becoming self-organised, especially for those organisations located in the global South. The ecosystem lens suggests a dynamism in relations. Relations that are not static. They are in flux. They respond to their environment and to the conditions imposed by capitalism, patriarchy and colonisation. The residue of the latter is ever persistent particularly in how space is imagined and in how it creates binary positions of the global South and North. Again, a relationship emerges as one cannot exist without the other, my analysis demonstrated how they are bound together, impossible to unravel. The ecosystem lens revealed how space also matters at the local level, and that those relations that exist at global level are also rooted to the local. The ecosystem thus allows the multiplicity of space to use Massey and the relations

that emerge are trans-local in the case of Arts Collaboratory as assembled through the spaces they construct.

The spatial dimension appeared in the centre-periphery language in the dependency discussion and also the discussion on knowledge. The decolonial thinkers showed how western constructs of knowledge, tied to relation of subject/object, need to be dismantled. The ecosystem of Arts Collaboratory made up many local ecosystems, opens up the possibility of exchange of situated knowledges and experience, a pluriverse, where many worlds can exist. This analysis demonstrated how colonial ties can persist in relations through knowledge, space and dependency. Without grounding the discussion in these three concepts I may have arrived at different set of insights of how the ecosystem lens influences international collaboration.

My initial gravitation towards this topic was due to the work that Arts Collaboratory does because it works across national borders using arts to collaboratively engage in local, contemporary issues and therefore sits at the nexus of arts organisations, the global South and funding agencies. In this way, there was no question whether this was a suitable case study. However, finding an appropriate and feasible entry point to situate a discussion on the practices of such a complex organisation was at times challenging because of the plethora of options available. I was also aware that a lot of critical thinking and reflection was taking place as part of their collaborative practices which heightened the concern. During my discussions with the members of Arts Collaboratory it was clear that they were navigating the difficult terrain of becoming self-organised and addressing the funding paradigm with their eyes wide open. The language they used describe how they work together as well as the future that the radically imagine together suggests that this language is not about fitting in with an agenda of a funding agency, rather their practices embody this language.

Due to the nature of the study and research question it would not be realistic to arrive at a conclusive statement. The research question explored the three concepts though the lens of the ecosystem and provided insights into practices of Arts Collaboratory which in turn created a dialogue. The ecosystem lens, in and of itself, is always open and an ongoing, complex web of interactions and relations that do not necessarily allow the conversation to come to a neat conclusion.

What would happen if we were to continue to follow these threads and what are the possibilities of further research? These insights could be made richer from zooming in on specific locations and looking at the relations between the organisations in their local context, this would benefit from an ethnographic approach. Actor network theory could also be adopted to study how knowledge exchange in these ecosystems influence cultural policymaking at the national level.

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APPENDIX

Tony Evanko, Casa Tres Patios, Colombia, February 28, 2020

HD: I'm currently studying a Master's of Arts and Society programme in Utrecht and I'm also I'm currently taking a sabbatical from my role in the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the UK, and I look at the international government research portfolio and impact and evaluation of it. And I potentially may be going back in in September, but who knows, let's see what what will happen and Brexit might dampen any other opportunities. Previously, I worked in international

development and actually I worked on an independent project in Colombia. So spent some time there. So I understand a little bit about the context there, and especially sort of the arts and cultural scene. it's really nice to be able to sort of incorporate that. And so that's probably why I'm really interested in understanding more about Arts Collaboratively as a network and particularly around sort of the collaborative processes and the translocal interactions and relations. I want to kind of layer post colonial theory and look at the the concept of ecosystem and the certain language to think about what sort of a network like Arts Collaboratory offers and how it functions. Also I'm interested this work going on around the of role of funding and the funding paradigm shift that they're trying to establish. For from my perspective, I feel like Arts Collabatory, which is quite successful network, in the sense of how long it survived for, and, and I wonder sort of what might be the factors and like, kind of what might be the future for such a network? And so, yes, that's kind of maybe where I am coming at right now. And I'm very much at the very beginning of writing and developing my thesis. So I'm sure my ideas may develop. And as I go through, and but do you want to introduce yourself Tony and I've read about Casa Tres Patios. Yes, but it would be good to hear from you.

TE: So do you want to know about my history personally and/or then a little bit about how we how I got involved in the arts Collaboratory, itself?

HD: Yeah, that would be great. So I interviewed Mariana at the beginning of my course, and from Casco and it was interesting, because there is this aspect of personal relations between members of AC, so I think it's It is interesting to understand the individuals and their sort of the lens and the position that they have, but also within an organization and those different layers that can occur within a network.

TE: Yeah. Okay, well, I'm an architect and an artist, an architect by education and with a lot of experience working as an architect and and a practicing artist I worked for many years in the United States, both while I was practicing as an architect as well as my work here as an artist and as a artist and cultural, let's say agent and I came to Colombia as a result of a Fulbright grant that I got in 2006. I had been traveling to Colombia between 2001 and 2006. First to do an exhibition of my work and then to do workshops with local university students. It was in 2006 when I came as a result of the Fulbright Grants, basically, in order to fulfill a promise that I had made in exchange for an invitation letter to help me get the grant, I was asked to work with university students in a national university here to accompany them in a, what they call the (spanish word - tiger central?!) - it's like the final students in the final one or two semesters of their undergraduate degree, have to do presentations, do work on projects and do presentations every month. They basically have to do three or four presentations in the course of a semester, every week, a group of them

have to do presentations. But while I was doing the evaluations of presentations, it was a really a often a sad situation, especially for the students who wanted to do installation work or wanted to do videos, there was no place for them to do their experiments in a really adequate spaces or for them to do their presentation. So the grant was giving me a lot of money for the living expenses. And so I decided that I would rent a big house and just invite artists to come- art students at first and then also, artists in the community, would just come and sort of do local residencies. And so just to give them a place to experiment, and then use the space and because people here don't usually don't usually have workshops, unless they're more successful, most of the time they work in their houses. And so the spaces are sort of inadequate to do any kind of real experimental work. So that was just basically the idea initially, it wasn't any kind of a deep conceptual consideration. It was just basically to try to fulfill some sort of a need that I saw in the educational system that was not being met. And it was an interesting experience for me, because we were did a small first experiment with some students that we were working with myself and another artist professor. And it was just a basically a transfer of a project that we had done in the botanical garden here to an exhibition space to give the students that kind of experience, in the second round of invitations. after the residences were over, we were doing the public event kind of, we always opened up the space at the end of the residency for the public to come and see what happened. One of the artists, a local artist here who was participating in the activity, he told me that it was a really important gesture and I asked him why and he said, because you're giving these artists who normally don't associate with each other because they went to one university or the other so they become sort of cliquish, and they have a circle of friends, that they're more accustomed to being with- you're giving them the opportunity on a regular basis to share their experiences to share their opinions about work and other things. and so well, I thought that the importance was space to do experiments in their practice, but really the importance of the space became as a social space that can be used by the artists on a regular basis. So that was really for me gratifying and so that sort of lit my fire, so to speak, so that I could come back and I wanted to come back and continue it so the grant ran out, the space continued for a couple of months because we had signed the lease and so my now wife, Sonya and Santiago, maintained the space for a couple of months more and then then the space closed because of the grant there was no more money to rent the house but in meantime, during my past visits and during the period of time when we were open, I got to know lots of institutions in the city. And so the university of Antioquia contacted me because they were trying to think about how they would start this international arts event. And I imagine that you're familiar with Medellin's history of doing biennials up until the 1980s. And so the Museum of Antioquia wanted to try to revive that tradition, but they didn't want to commit to a two year funding schedule. So they decided, instead of calling it a biennial, or triennial or quadrennial, they would just call it an encounter of international artists. And so what they want me to do the first one in 2007, so they

thought that because they wanted to involve the community, art in the community, they wanted to invite international artist collectives and other individual artists to do work in the community and to stay in spaces in the community. So they were looking for some autonomous spaces or artists spaces in the community to house the artists. And there were only two at the time besides us.

HD: Which were the other two?

TE: Taller7, which is now closed. And also a space called La hickeda. In the in the neighborhood, Castilla. They've also closed since then, but they were the only two spaces really that were open doing art and working with artists. Yes, that time we're working only with local artists as well. Occasionally artists would come through that would stay with them but they hadn't developed any kind of a formal residency program, nor had we. So Carlos, our friend Carlos invited all of us to participate as hosts spaces. And the theme of the exhibition was hospitality. And so we were all invited to the host spaces and to receive national and international artist collectives. So Carlos made the invitation he tempted me by saying we can give you some support to house the artists and so that was really the push that I needed to come back and I had already also met my wife, and so there were lots of incentives to come back and continue to project. So I came back at the end of 2006 and we started working directly on that event, which started in March of 2007. So that's how we got started essentially, without very much forethought, just the enthusiasm to try to help the artist community. And then after the event was over, we had no funding at all. So we had bought this house where we are, where we ended with, with a loan from the bank, we bought the house in which the foundation is in now. But we worked for like four years without any support, just trying to learn how to raise funds, and we would start to charge the artists residents money to stay here, so that helped just a little bit. But we were really not able to pay salaries for about four years. So, but we learned gradually how to apply for grants from the local government and the national government. And in 2010, we got a grant from the Arts Collaboratory, to do a one residency project. And then in 2011, we applied it and got that funding for the administrative support, which was a huge step forward for us. So that was that was one of the big, big moments for us. So we've been involved in the Arts Collaboratory, really for the last 10 years.

HD: Can I ask a question, just in terms of funding. Was there much funding available from the national government at that time?

TE: Well, at the time they was funding from the National Government, we didn't really hear about it or know about it for a couple of years. We're just trying to sort of feel our way. But the funding that was available then was, I would say, relative to even funding in the States- it was good because as you know, in the States, the only funding that's available for individual artists are usually through the state governments and not through the federal government anymore. There

are foundations of course that help artists in the States, like private foundations but I was surprised to see the offering of the federal government had at that time. But since then, now it's declined a bit, but there was a time I guess it was about three, four years ago when it was really quite good, actually, relatively speaking, of course, but it was quite good because they think it was in 2007 or 2008. I may sit around. I don't know if you met Jaime, when you were here, Jaime Cerón is one of the most well known curators in Bogota. He worked in the Ministry of Culture for about three or four years and in Jaime's time, what he did is, he was very familiar with lots of the artists initiatives. And so and he realized that many of the artists initiatives were doing really interesting work and important work in the community. And he did a, he took it upon himself in the Ministry to do sort of a survey of what the needs were for the artists initiatives in different contexts. And so he went on the road, essentially with a couple of researchers. And they did sort of town hall meetings with artist spaces and, and they gathered lots of information and a couple of years later, I don't think it was the year after, but I think it was two years later, they came out with a whole range of new initiatives or incentives, stimuli, I guess they call them estimilos for both individual artists, but also for the artist spaces themselves, even spaces that weren't didn't have any kind of a legal status, a nonprofit status. So that was an amazing gesture, in my opinion with somebody from within the ministry would take it upon themselves to really research the needs of the independent arts organizations and then implement or manage to implement stimulus or economic stimuli for the spaces. So that was a really amazing thing. So I mean in comparison to lots of our companion spaces in the Arts Collaboratory, that was a huge difference. But, of course, you know, it's not a lot of money and most of the money was, most of the financing, if not all, was geared toward doing projects and not towards administrative support, so that's, that's the downside there. The Colombian laws are very strict and have gotten stricter with respect to how much, or how you how you can charge for administrative support, sometimes, sometimes you can justify hiring a curator or something like that. But paying, paying administrative costs themselves sort of as a separate line item is impossible with any kind of financing from the government. So that remains one of the biggest challenges for arts organizations or any social organization in Colombia - is how to pay their administrative costs. But nevertheless, the project funding and the breadth of the types of funding available from everything from international and national circulation of artists and artists groups to go and do projects and other countries if they have received an invitation that became available, local and national residencies became a line item also, which, in some ways can directly help the spaces that are receiving the artists. So there's also as I mentioned, the funding that was available for the non, unofficial let's say, artists places that became an item that had not been available before and was revolutionary actually in its format. So then, as I mentioned in 2010, we got the first funding from the Arts Collaboratory, and in 2011 we got the administrative support which- it started really helping us establish a sort of stability and we

started really being able to think about what we were doing a little bit more. So we started developing more of a consciousness of our interests, and our notabilities and we started doing a lots of workshops with international artists as they came through. Because we realized that the workshops are really the best way to make an impact on the community, because one of the phenomenons that we discovered was that on many occasions, the international artists that we would invite would not be the big name artists, it would be a young, exciting artist that has interesting ideas, but not any kind of a recognizable name. And so the public here tends to be very regionalistic, and so if there's not community involvement some way in some way, there's very little attendance. And so we had several very awkward situations where the artist was very good. They did a nice project, interesting project and we tried all kinds of communication techniques to get people to come in and it just didn't work unless the artists themselves involved the community in some way in their work. And so as a result, we, we realized that doing some sort of community participation, education project was the best way to create a good experience for everybody- be the artists, the community, the artist community and us to our make our work worthwhile. So we decided to start it from any sort of informal educational projects that led us to be invited to work with the Secretary of Culture in Medellin on a project that was called the redes the active as well as it's the network of visual arts, which was a project that started in 2007 to essentially teach our techniques to children, young people all over the city and from 2017 until 2012, the network was, as I mentioned, mostly focused on techniques. Occasionally the institution that was organizing and running the project would try to develop some sort of a concept about the citizens relationship with the city. But most of the time, the artist basically contracted to run the workshops for the children and young people would just focus on whatever their interests were. And so they were just that would be the topic or the way that they would engage the young people was through their particular interests, whether it was a formal interest or a socially oriented interest. So it was very sporadic. But in 2012, when the new administration, the.... administration came in. It was a time in Medellin in which there were a lot of violence in the peripheral neighbourhoods, the number of killings of the young socially oriented musicians and rappers was really growing. And so there was a huge problem with that in the neighborhoods in the new Secretary of Culture really was questioning- she and all of the other secretaries were questioning the cities programs with respect to how they're trying to deal with this kind of social situation. And so she looked at the work of visual arts and started trying to ask arts could be used as a way to create a social consciousness or to create alternatives to criminality. And she went to the universities who were running the project, who had been running the project at the time and asked them if they could change their methodologies to do try to address the issues and they were really pretty resistant. And because it would require them to rethink their whole administrative processes as well, or large segments of it. And so she, because of our, the workshops that we had been doing, she came to us and asked us if we would do the pilot project to

see how we could incorporate artistic practices and techniques into generating those kinds of reflections in the participants. So we thought it was a good opportunity. So we started working on a project in 2012, and made a lot of mistakes and gradually started developing some sort of a philosophy and methodology for working with the community. And then we worked on that project until 2018. 2018 was the last year that we worked on it because the project began to change again, and go back to more technique oriented methodologies that we weren't really interested in doing. And because we realized just how important we could be in the community with, with the practices and methodologies that we've developed. And also because frankly, since we started there have been this surges of artists initiatives that have come and gone within the community, but they've all, many of them have been very important. And so they've provided the kinds of social spaces that we provided initially, but it became obvious that they were just so many of the people doing the same kinds of things that it would be really kind of more important to start thinking about other aspects that are other ways to make an impact in the community. So we've been opting more toward doing socially oriented projects and participatory projects. So that's kind of the trajectory that we've taken in the last two years. Working with the Arts Collaboratory, parallel to that has given us the possibility of seeing, you know, projects, we're working in other countries, different Arts Collaboratory members, how they're working with the community as well - so it's been a way of sharing knowledge as well as giving us some basic economic stability.

HD: Okay, great, that's really interesting. Sometimes you can read quite a lot, but it's always good to kind of understand, the history and the sort of perspective and a founders position. And sort of understand how, you know, you developed a trajectory and how you developed a certain position. And it's interesting that you say that, you know, in such a place like Medellin, that there was a surplus of organized spaces that were trying to be places for arts residencies, and so therefore you kind of took, or were able to develop a specific role.

TE: Okay. Yeah, the signal goes in and out.

HD: Yes. And I'm going to just ask you, like, I've got a few questions about sort of specifically and they're quite open questions and you've kind of covered a few things already. And, but can outline why the sort of what might be the necessity of a network to exist like an ecosystem? I know that it's about sort of sharing knowledge and but Mariana was also saying that, and also it's quite clear within the material and like, developed by arts collaboratively that values are also really crucial to the way that arts Collaboratory works. So I just wondered what might be like what you might think might be the necessity for within like, specifically for and customers, patios why it might exist other than funding?

TE: Well, I think that the knowledge base is that really key aspect of it. And I think that some of the dynamics that we've developed over the

years with respect to mutual support, and that are centered on the values that you mentioned there, some of the values that you mentioned, are really key aspects. One of the things that we've identified over the years, is that collaborative projects are bigger- are always something that's very, that's very much emphasized in some of our meetings. And I think that I think that those are important, but I don't think that they're the real strength of the network and my opinion, I mean, they've resulted in really interesting projects and that kind of thing, but, but I really think, in my opinion, the strength is in the knowledge sharing and the mutual support and the idea that we can call, you know, a zoom meeting or something with somebody and just ask them to tell them where we are and, and maybe even convoke. It's, there's this a mechanism that Mariana might have mentioned, the bangas, and the bangas are these meetings that we convoke to support the network itself on specific issues, sort of these working group sessions where we can study a particular issue and then develop some sort of tools that can be used to address the issue and that we can propose to the overall group. Or we can use the banga mechanism as a way for us to move through a transition period within a given organization in a context, let's say. So there's been several organizations, that have called because their context has changed or people have left their organization and the new people have a different vision. And so those kinds of moments and those kinds of mechanisms, in my opinion, are really what gives the network, what makes it unique. Because as you said, most of the many networks because there's funding available and Arts Collaboratory in a certain sense is no different because we've had some discussions and we recognize that this is not an organically formed network. This is a network that was formed because of funding and then decided at one point that we would give it a try to see if we could make it into something more than just a funding based network and so that I think that these opportunities to share and to try to help one another even the food if we have very different practices is something that really, for me, has been one of the most important and impressive aspects of it because we were in a involved in another effort to create a network - it was called the network of artists initiatives in Latin America, something like that. RICO was the acronym.

HD: Would you be able to send me the name of that because that might be it's interesting to kind of, because obviously, at times, I imagine that lots of people within the organization might have tapped into other networks. And you might have seen how others then haven't sort of been able to succeed. Sorry, carry on.

TE: Yeah, I'll try to send you a link or information. Maybe I think we have a actually a PDF document that was produced, so I can send that to you as well. Yeah, because that there was an organization that was more or less the same size as ours, it might have been a little larger spaces and in what the ibero America, and so it was like spaces in Spain and Brazil and different, lots of different countries in Latin America. And the idea was essentially the same. To try to create this self

sustaining network, but we hired a young woman, we are as a group, we hired a young woman to try to organize us, I guess. And it was just a colossal job because we didn't have enough funding to do these kinds of assemblies which are super important and in order to get us together for a concentrated period of time to, to hash out our ideas and opinions and differences. Poor Katya was the only one that was kind of trying to mediate all of this and it was just too big of a task. She's a very capable woman, but very, very enthusiastic and intelligent and creative. But it was just such a, there's so many differences, philosophical differences and everything. It was just very difficult to mediate. So it didn't work. But so for me, one of the biggest successes has been just our ability to overcome the inorganic nature of our network and to try to develop these structures that are really mutually beneficial. And then the cooperative projects and the collaborative projects are sort of, in a way icing on the cake. I mean, when there's an affinity between organizations, and these projects develop organically, which is nice. And when there's not the ones that don't participate are not stigmatized in any way. They're just people just recognize the differences exist. And that's, that's it. So for me that I mean, that that's been one of the biggest benefits for being in AC and what is actually one of the things that's kept enthusiasm going in these working groups, because as you mentioned, we're looking at the 'Funding Paradigm Shift'. But one of the other or groups that we're working with is 'Post 2020'. So yeah, we're all trying to figure out what's going to happen to the network after 2020 with respect to our involvement as well as, as well as funding as well as how new groups can enter as well. So

HD: Yeah, I was gonna ask about that. How do you interpret the concept of an ecosystem as or network that functions as an ecosystem because an ecosystem itself probably suggests that it would be quite open but Mariana said that no new organizations have been added on. So I just how do you, I mean, not just in that, in that sense, but also like the concept of an ecosystem in general, how do you kind of interpret that?

TE: Well, my interpretation of it is like in any ecosystem that's sort of an interdependent becomes interdependent relationships. And it doesn't mean that they're not organizations or in the case of ecosystems, organisms that are not more, let's say aggressive or don't grow more quickly or, or some are weaker than others. And that's, that's all part of that's all part of an ecosystem. And what we've been looking at during the past five years really is the idea of how those interdependencies work, given our different dynamics. And so I think it's essentially for us, it's just been an acceptance of the fact that that there are these differences and that that doesn't mean that each one doesn't have to be nurtured or shouldn't receive some kind of nurturing and that's part of the that's part of the whole dynamic and that's again what makes it I think what makes it a beautiful kind of experience something an experiment. And what's also interesting is that when if you take the metaphor of the ecosystem in nature, and

just think about the idea of rainfall or water availability, it's sort of like thinking about the nature of funding to a certain extent. I mean, there's certain basic nutrients that people need in order to move forward to grow or to just do what they do and exist. And I think that that's been one of the unique aspects of the Arts Collaboratory is this relationship between the primary funder which of course is DOEN, because and fortunately DOEN's incentives or initiatives, I guess, or impulse to try to make this work think, Gertrude has been just an incredible force within DOEN and in an environment, which is tolerant, but not necessarily encouraging, in many cases of the initiative.

HD: Do you mean that within DOEN itself or with the Netherlands, or like funding, those sort of large funding organizations?

TE: No, I think with just within DOEN itself, I think because DOEN has been that they were they accepted this was Gertrude's proposal, actually from the beginning is that we tried to, to go in this direction recognizing that it would be necessary to maybe limit the funding for a few years but, and to give a administrative support but DOEN with the Arts Collaboratory, even from the very beginning before this change took place -always had funding for projects, but also administrative funding for three years- periods of three years with the possibility of going up to 10 years I think what the rule was before. The rule was before. So they always had this idea that the organizations need to have a basic economic stability. That I think that the funding levels varied at that time. Yeah, organization to organization, but but I think the DOEN's consciousness of that made really was remarkable. To a certain extent, I don't think there were many organizations that have that kind of philosophy. Or there are a few I know, but not that many. So that as a starting point was really crucial to maintaining an ecosystem otherwise, I think we would dried up and blown away you know, by now. To use that metaphor. So I think that that, that has been really fundamental as well, but also not just that, but the idea that we can talk and Gertrude is there with us and all the many of these meetings, if not all of these meetings, she tries to be present to see what's going on, to try to keep her finger on the pulse of the individual organizations, but also on the dynamics of the organizations. And I think that she needs to do that for her own internal reasons to justify what's going on and to be able to have a complete understanding of the dynamics but it's also because there's a sincere desire to support the activities as they continue to evolve. So I think that that's, that that's sort of part of the part of the dynamic of the ecosystem is the trust between all the members including the funder. And it was in Senegal, I believe that we discussed the fact that DOEN needed to become one more of the Arts Collaboratory organizations and to sort of come down off the pedestal of being the funder, and try to integrate into the dynamics. And it's been really a nice relationship. I think that maybe I wish, she's faced many, many difficulties internally and she's, I think then very stoic about those kinds of difficulties. But recently, she's been more open about sharing them, which I think has been a welcome change because it sort of

begins to show her vulnerability, and that's really necessary in order to have a truly horizontal or equal relationship. So that's been a really nice change. And it's it's much more in keeping with the whole philosophy between organizations as well. So I don't know if that answers your question

HD: Yes, really interesting. It's interesting to hear that it actually comes down to individuals in some ways as well. And their struggle within higher sometimes, like bureaucratic agencies. And that's quite interesting insight, and how does in terms of funding and other funding that you receive has it been complimentary or, and I like, you know, as somebody who's worked in funding agencies, and always found that those who received funding find it sort of so limiting to be able to always adhere to you know, the funding requirements, reporting, monitoring, etc. etc, is in terms of when you receive, like the money that from AC or within AC and then other sort of streams of funding is that, you know, is that manageable? Is that like tension between those things?

TE: No, actually well, that's an interesting question both from the standpoint of the administrative tasks that funding entails, because part of the discussion from the beginning when we were really, I think it was in Kyrgyzstan, the assembly in Kyrgyzstan, when we really started to identify the things that we want to change. With respect to our relationship with the funders, and the reporting, etc. We had to sort of reach an agreement with DOEN. In order to change the idea of reporting, but also to recognize it both from an internal standpoint as well as from DOEN standpoint, they administratively need certain things because it's not just them making decisions, they have to answer to other people, other organizations as well. The organizations that fund them so. So that was an interesting moment where we changed the idea of doing an annual report to what we've now called the Lifeline Plan. So it's more of a narrative document, it can be anything that the anything that basically that the organization wants, just has to still made some sort of requirements with respect to financial situation - the organization just showing where the AC funding was, how it was spent. And how it affected the bottom line of the organization in a given year, so it's not anything so specific that it becomes overly burdensome in my opinion. I think in comparison to other reports that we have to fill out for the Ministry of Culture and the Secretary of Culture here is it's actually sort of a pleasant exercise that can actually be converted into reflections that we could publish it, you know, if we wanted to, I mean, because they are sort of reflections about what we do, what we need and where we're going. So, I mean, I think that it's, I mean, I always took it in a, in a positive sense. It just gives me an excuse to reflect on what we're doing, so I think that for us has been positive in comparison to other funding reports that we've had to do in this kind of bureaucratic mechanisms.

HD: Yeah, that one you just put down like numbers of people, participants or numbers of people within specific communities that have been affected by something or other.

TE: Yeah, and the idea of having to have certain goals or meeting certain objectives, you know, doing the whole what is it? What do they call it the logical frames?

HD: logframes

TE: To justify that sort of things. You know, in a way, it's the same. It's the same thing in a way but it's all this bureaucratic speak, that's sometimes more restrictive than productive. Yep

HD: Okay, I think that's all I have for now, but I may want to get in contact with you again at some point, but this has been really helpful. Is there any questions that or anything that you specifically you want to mention about your experience or perspective that you think that I might have missed?

TE: Well, I think that the other aspect that we're really keen on developing, of course, is this, this idea of the relationships because part of our goal or need in the post 2020 situation is to try to find this - let me back up a little bit, because you probably know that we've changed from the process of changing from administrative funding and collective pot money to another system, or maybe the same system, but we're not sure. The Banga that we had in Cali a couple of weeks ago, Gertrude didn't say 100%. But what she was saying is that DOEN maybe still interested in funding the Arts Collaboratory, if it seems like it's, if it seems like it's truly necessary. But she's almost positive that it wouldn't be funded with administrative funding per se, because we've now set up the foundation, we have a mechanism for distributing funds from the main bank account in the Netherlands to to other organizations. And so this self organizing now has really has kicked in and we can be we can do it now. So what her take on it was that they were probably more be more interested in just funding some part of the collective pot. We would figure out ways to determine needs within our ecosystem and to fund those needs depending on solicitation of the organization. But within that structure also, the idea is that we began to enlist other funders who are interested in developing this kind of relationship, which is more organic and more horizontal, as much as possible. So that kind of - developing those kinds of tools, even doing workshops and funders meetings with them to sort of give them a sense of where we are and what can be done and how it can be different because I think is an interesting aspect of the Arts Collaboratory as well, so we're not just because of our financial needs to try to convince them that they should join our club. It's it's also because we recognize and I think what we've heard, is it many funders in the world are sort of questioning this project-based funding, but they that are not sure how to proceed.

HD: And I also for my conversation with Mariana a few months ago, I do recall that she was saying you know, within organization within AC, they have adapted and changed from participating in this way. And I wonder, you know, just by just by being involved in these things that you like organizations then have, like, are able to sort of change and adapt and find alternative ways of being, which might, you know it like that which shakes the system a little bit.

TE: Yeah. I think that that's an interesting point. I think it's curious because organizations start to look at their own their own practices have started to look at their own practices and have done interesting experiments. But in my judgment, the experiments haven't - I mean I can't think of one that has really worked I can say in terms of economics and the economic system ability here then really valiance experiments done very risky, big, big large scale experiments, relatively large scale experiments for for organizations, but often the costs, ironically the costs that are involved with respect to the identity of the organization is often is what suffers. So, you know, if you change from being an arts organization or even an arts organization involved in social projects, to some organization that uses mechanisms that are still rooted in capitalism, yeah, like co-working or something like that to fund your organization, then they complexion of the organization changes and so I think that many organizations have sort of jumped into fight and said, "let's do this radical change!", but then they realize that they're really not doing what they want to do and, you know, what their, where their roots are, what their DNA is. And so they, they, they've gone back and reconsidered and mutated to a certain extent and have lots more knowledge. But my view is that it really hasn't resulted in any kind of significant possibility of sustainability. So it just kind of these brave experiments but haven't resulted in anything other than possibly downsizing organizations. That's been a possibility of reconfiguring the organization's into something that's different than what it was before. But, but in the process, it's kind of saying, okay well, we're not going to have this economic stability, so how do we deal with it? You just make the same kinds of decisions that you would make if you're a small business, I mean, in a way you have to decide where to go, what to do and how to do it in a different way, that's not going to cost you as much money basically, as the bottom line. So while I think that their question that also sort of resolve to continue to work, but maybe in a different way, in a different context or in different physical conditions. But the bottom line comes down to whether or not people have enough funding to do what they really think is important to do. And so those are the things that I think well, that's my perspective on it. I'm not denying that there haven't been really interesting experiments and questions asked, but the actual ability for organizations to survive based on those experiments, I have my doubts about.

HD: So you're talking about the organizations within Arts Collaboratively now? Oh, yeah. I find that very interesting and that there's a lot there that I really would like to reflect on. Yeah, because I

think there is this huge question about sustainability within those within those organizations. I mean, but if I suppose, kind of what what what might be, what would be the suggestion?

TE: I think that's, that's why this paradigm shift question for funders is interesting, because in the case of doing for example, I think it's in a way it's a bit paradoxical because more than half of their organization has to do with microfinance. And then seeing how they invest like the element investing, let's say or in investing in social development and in social transformation, but on the economic side on the banking side or on the small business side. And so there's just, there's this incredible knowledge base of the capitalistic system that exists within DOEN an organization. And I think that that's knowledge that we could use. That could be shared in a way that's more much more creative than we're doing, for example. Yeah. So organizations, or x funders have this knowledge base that serves them, but could serve their constituents or the people that they support in ways that I think that they can't imagine just the knowledge and the experience of being funders and as understanding the global economic system that helps fund these large organizations is key to developing changes in that system itself, but also changes in the way that organizations operate within the system. And I think that's an area that's not being tapped into, not even in the Arts Collaboratory. I think we're just barely beginning to understand, and I think maybe even Gertrude is just barely beginning to understand how vital the information that DOEN has as an organization could be to this kind of paradigm shift. It's not just jumping in and wanting to develop a horizontal relationship with organizations and be able to talk to them as people and one on one I think that that's a huge step. But when my opinion is that the knowledge and experience and relationships with these large funding organizations have With the global economic system, is a huge resource that could be transformed into, into a completely different way of thinking about funding relationships and relationships with communities. We're starting to work on that a little bit within the Arts Collaboratory. There are several cases, and we're participating in those where we're starting to work with local organizations ourselves that don't receive funding from the Arts Collaboratory, but organizations that we try to support and with the knowledge and resources that we have, and then to help strengthen their activities, and they may not be related to our activities, but we recognize that they're doing good work in our community. So we work with them, to help them help them develop networks and to help them improve their techniques or whatever they're doing with the community. And other organizations are doing that as well. And then so when we were relating that to Gertrude, in the last Banga, we began to understand that how can we see ourselves funding the community based organizations as funders or as having resources to give to the community? And how can that relationship between that sort of what do you what would you call it? The terrorist relationship between the funder and the community can be made? It does create us. Yeah, it's like a very not then it becomes a much more organic kind of relationship and it becomes an a relationship, funding

system is based on trust and mutual support between and from all, in all levels. And so that kind of thing is really interesting because then if we think about this common pot idea, and how can the common pot be redistributed not just between our immediate organizations, but with the local community organizations and sort of expand upon this idea of how some organizations do this when they have a sort of agents in them in the context and the agents kind of scout other organizations that they might want to fund. It sort of making that a more organic process in a way. And I think that's a really interesting and powerful tool or process. It's resulted from this kind of challenge that we faced in order to try to understand these economic systems. But the common part, I think, is a really interesting concept. And we're doing it on a really relatively small scale. But it would be interesting to just have a group of funders together to say, Okay, you guys, you know, want this impact to reach the grassroots the people we're not we want organization working in the industry in this community, but we have contact with 10 other organizations who are really doing great work. So how can we amplify your funding to help them and then it's a win win situation for everybody. So, you know, those conversations with are really important to have and I think that that's what we're working on this funding paradigm shift. So I think that's, that's one of the things that's really just got me excited a lot.

HD: That's really great. That's really really super helpful Tony and so much interesting stuff here that I want to reflect on and think about for my thesis. And thank you for your time. I'm gonna I'm gonna have to go now. And if there any questions you have I mean, I'm, I'm next week I have a meeting actually with Biinna and then I'm sort of scanning see which other organizations that I want to speak to, I think I'm gonna speak to Ferdi, and then, I'm gonna be happy to sort of share sort of my findings but I can kind of talk more about that later stage. And but yeah, it's been very helpful, super helpful.

TE: Great. Well, I'm glad if you have any other questions that I can help with, don't hesitate to call her. Right.

HD: Thank you. Thank you so much and and enjoy your day in springtime.

Binna Choi, Casco: Working for the Commons, March 7, 2020

BC: I was in Cali, there was a workshop that we call Banga, one of the language from Uganda that refers to place and time, we use it to refer to workshop or study sessions. The workshop was about paradigm shift in funding, in light of sustainability. Juli joined us, as the person who documents, we call this harvesting. I am in love with South America, but it took time, because I felt like because it's a continent, but I am still getting to know the one I come from which is more than enough and I don't want to build up this kind of

superficial relationship. Then my first visit to South America was Costa Rica and I didn't like it at all. The level class structure is so visible, like a kind of like a colonial legacy and things are so beautiful, so lavish and at the same time was a problematic so like, I didn't make it but then I visited Brazil. Last year, Sao Paulo. So that opened up my heart for Colombia through the Amazon

HD: I love Cali as well, it's amazing. It's a great city. There's like such a different vibe there to like Medellin and Bogota. Yeah, it's like the Afro Colombian culture, the music, the history - it's really interesting.

BC: Yeah, the breeze. You know, at night, it's extremely hot, but then it gets very cool.

HD: I actually heard about AC when I was in Colombia, when I was doing this independent research and then when I came here, I came to one of the openings last year and I saw that you guys were funded by or partly funded by AC. So then I got in touch with Mariana and we had an interview meeting for part of my course. And then I just thought actually, this for me builds on a lot of- because I feel like the model is a really interesting model- and how it's really trying to address some, like key issues like how like global relations work and, and also the role of arts, or the arts institution and how that's changing and shifting. And so, yeah, Arts Collabotary is something that I'm really interested in focusing on for my thesis. I've been thinking about exactly what to focus on, which was really difficult because you guys do so much and there's so much going on. My entry point at this point is thinking about like, how the network is defined as an ecosystem and what possibilities and perils that creates between, the interactions between the different organizations and the ways of working and sort of creating an alternative way of being but also specifically looking at - but I've had conversations with Mariana about the concept of the global south and thinking about how it's an entry point to think about things like the post-colonial theory and bringing that into the way of thinking about the ecosystem of AC. So that's where I'm at. I'm reading lots and I'm trying to think of concepts that I think might be interesting to bring in or, and about what aligns with AC. But it would be really interesting to get your perspective. And I think that actually from my conversations so far, there's definitely positions as organizations within the network, but also positions as individuals and how, like perspectives have changed because of those different varying positions. And also thinking about what the funding means, what the role of funding is, and working at this global and local level- and translocal collectivity- like assembling locally and then assembling globally. So we can start with thinking about the urgency- what do you think is the necessity for a network to exist such as such as AC, like what's the urgency?

BC: You are finishing your course by the end of the June? So then you also have to write a thesis?

HD : This is my thesis.

BC: It's about AC? You should join us, working on the evaluation etc if you have a time and then we can work mutually. Because I can't say about like kind of financial term but yeah, there is definitely like things we can share.

Yes, that's what I'm looking at how we can collapse. At the meeting I was reflecting on the notion of collapse, things are collapsing. But then we also need to collapse different things because like things such as growing and growing, and that's also like the nature of this network is growing amount of work to do. It doesn't work in terms of degrowth, in fact, I mean, it's not that simple. But however yeh there is so much communication. So what is the necessity of the network? It's kind of starting with the funding, but what kind of funding. The type of funding that we are familiar with, is working around the lengthy application, manipulative story in that application, selection by criteria by those who are sitting in power, or with certain privilege, and new things to them and that create like these, like fundraisers, funders, and sponsor and all these other, like so it's kind of centralized model and of course where are the funders and who are the funders? It's like the old colonial power continuing and that really felt experience through like daily working. So how to change this model of funding- it's very specific and local but I think it implies a much bigger kind of paradigm.

HD: Yes. I agree.

BC: You can approach or you can understand a lot about AC through the relation between the funding, the members, most of members and then DOEN - who is a member and how the relationship has been moving and changing. So that's one one way to look at it. So we kind of collectively narrated this kind of paradigm -colonial, capitalist. We didn't actually write the patriarchy, we didn't articulate through CPC. So, I think I mean, the feminist agenda was missing in our future plan for 2016 and 20. It builds a proposal for alternative structure of funding. I mean, funding that differentiates from the existing one, how alternative or not we have to see. So, no application but we write 'lifelines'. So, there are many different definition of what lifelines are, but trying to define institution from sustainability perspective; how you can continue life of organization, but what about life of individual around organization is also a question. But basically it shouldn't be long, like around five pages and it shouldn't be about a project, which was often the case of the application and no selection. So all the members who have been working together for two years, between two years and a half, between 2014 and 15 joined this venture together and they are not selected because we collectively make it happen that we all continue to receive the funding we used to get but with different methods so they studied together. So peer review sort of things became really important. And then third, the future plan also includes articulation of ethical principles. So like self limitation, openness, inclusivity - all these nice words. So, the certain **measures or boundaries** or whether they are kept practice - how well practiced or not, that's what we should continue to work on and then the collective pot. So, there are several kinds of devices in how AC has been operating. And but there are always huge **kind of compromises** or like, unresolved aspects. So, we kind of managed to convince DOEN to join this experiment over in a paradigm shift of making this like, funded artificial network into self organizing ecosystem. And the question then came, what is the economy? And I think one of the departure point of this economy is to realize the colonial structure. So in a sense, I think that's how we, I think managed to convince DOEN without having to have like great invention. So, in fact, the global south offers so much. I mean, we talk about how Cali is great. I mean, that greatness is not measured. It's not monetized. I mean, there's a tourism but it's an appropriately monetized and there is also dimension of resource. So, that has to be paid. But we are exchanging. So, that kind of change in perspective is what we I think articulated in that plan and that was also very like addressed during our assembly. So the first assembly was in Indonesia and the second assembly was in Senegal and in Senegal for example we visited an island which was site of a memory, a site of slavery. So, yeah and so money wise, or how to distribute now if we self organizing and there was a question whether we differentiate the amount of money among the organizations or it just same amount to be distributed. And the easy choice was the latter one.

HD: And that's the collective pot?

BC: Some of money that DOEN provides, so, within that we set the rule like 50,000 euro for each institution per year, regardless of where you are. So 50,000 can mean a lot in Indonesia and here it's good, but not the same. And then every year - its an annual institutional funding, but you can use ??? at the same time, but the time actually when we began only seniors were secure, and then two years for kind of memorandums, like, DOEN agreed on that it's inclined to pay and secure. So on the third year, we were really busy to get that inclination to be confirmed, and then extend the payment.

HD: In terms of the funding that you received as a whole, or as individuals organization?

BC: It's a whole, but then how to distribute it. We decided to distribute annual funding for each institution 50,000 or equal, but you can spend three years funding which was then secure, so like 150,000 Euro all in one year, because there are a few managers who wanted to buy land or a house. Then allocating certain amount in collective pot and how to manage the collective part how to use also like require some mechanism. So there are like several, I don't know 10 different working groups working on all of this kind of mechanisms and then we develop the rule. So like to use the collective pot, or to create collaborative project - you don't get permission from anyone, as long as there are three organization come together to develop it. So collectivity is the, like, measure that are almost applies to most of activities

HD: Yeh because usually, this is a quite interesting idea because this is one of the thing that I always noticed the tensions within organizations that are working on social change, and they've received money from a funder and there are requirements from that funder to develop in a certain way, and this way of developing / progress is built on concepts that were developed - I believe that you can't separate this idea of what we live like modernity and coloniality from this concept of development and the structures of funding. It's like, even if you're giving it to an organization that's doing all this work, often just there a tension with it being complicit in the ways of working?

BC: Yeah, I think it's always there.

HD: Yeah. I mean, how do you get away from that? It's really difficult like. And I think that sometimes evaluation and monitoring is another sort of way of being complicit. In this way, and with the model that exists in the West and like the western idea of what a model of development means. But I think that's where AC is interesting that is trying to think about that in different way.

BC: Can you put that as a question?

HD: How complicit is the current model of development with colonial practices, or post colonial practices?

BC: Yeah, because the idea of development is also rooted in that. To continue, another thing that I'm working on that I got reminded again during the workshop in Cali, was the concept of life. I mean life is complex process. It's you know, it is kind of though, life is not separated from institution and life is bigger than institution you could say. But still when we say life it's including institution, but it also includes failure and it includes process how you going through failure, like a singularities. You can qualify life, you know, like, when we feel alive, like kind of vitality and when we feel death or zombie. So concept of life in that regard and AC kind of funding was maybe something to allow, like, kind of life process. There was also like, yeah, AfroColombian community member who joined part of the workshop and she was talking about that she's in kind of retreat period because she was betrayed by a collaborator. I mean, how hard already it is to work in Colombia, and she doesn't wanna ask for funding. But there's only one kind of education institution that she collaborating with. But she's into this kind of movement, like dance body movement environment from a decolonial feminist perspective. And she is now retreat. She didn't meet many people for last few months. But she still keeps going, because this is my like, I'm dedicating my life to this process so it's life dedication project. So I come to question life, actually, however passionate or we give meaning to or how I give meaning to my work but still here is a very strong dimension of job that's why I got pissed off certain times that I I don't get enough reward I mean it could have been so much easier to do usual curating- there are so many artists who could be discovered and you know uncovered and whose work could be shown and that would bring so much capital. It really brings a crisis to your work, we are coming from different kinds of profession but where we are is not really like defined. But then from the perspective of life education, it's a completely different story and then maybe AC could just facilitate that given that it already provokes, by knowing it and not knowing, it should be responsible, I mean, so he took kind of collective responsibility. So, like we have been moving through the organization's, 25 organizations, but there are nameable individuals - it's also growing, it's not a closed committee of those who actively - it cannot be like that, but I thought also these individuals have to be named. And we need, we could bring more awareness to how to take care in the long term these individuals so that these individuals also can take care of others in that way.

HD: And then maybe that's going back to this concept of ecosystem, understanding how it functions, the relations of care. When one needs more. Yeah. How does that impact other parts.

BC: So yeah, Ecosystem network, ecosystem means that there should be kind of looseness, so that it's working by need. And there should be fall- out as well. Something incomprehensible, something you don't like, but something holding them together. Yeah. And then allow them movement. I mean if this falling out or becoming too toxic and then contaminates others and that should be eliminated or something has to be done but if it's possible that that fallout or - the toxic actually could help the ecosystem to continue yeah, but practically I think our work through Arts Collabatory in like work is sort of becoming as a kind of net of people and places beyond any distinct frame, it's not through tourism, or economy like financial trade and it's not through development, it's not through the curatorial work.

HD: You're saying it's like a net of people in places but it's not necessarily defined by tourism etc.

BC: Then coming back to these organizations, very weird organizations. So most of them have most of them have their space like house

HD: So that locally embedded in their communities?

BC: Locally embedded but also not fully embedded in a way because they are not, they are out of box space.

HD: Is that necessary for them to work in this way, that they aren't be fully embedded?

BC: It is necessary, most of organizations have contemporary art in its food. And none of them stem from a community, or a rural community. I mean, they are all urban. So it's naturally like, also quite middle class. I mean, so among many AC organizations, for instance Tony, he's American and has a background in architecture. MAMA was founded by two guys, one is Scottish. There are many, you can you can see that.

HD: Is it the same in other places, like because I thought that in Colombia that they're not actually or they're not they themselves individually from these, like poor communities?

BC: Yeah the community that we are helping or we want to change the way that kind of structure that perpetuates the conditions. Where they live, so none of us come from there. So we are kind of funders by ourselves, I think. So it's kind of really trickled down in that way. So, it is, but it is not museums. And it is not a exhibition space. It is like most of them are kind of a space of gathering with undefined forms of studying, looking and being together

HD: Like places to assemble?

BC: Yeah, I mean yes, primarily, I mean then there are like specific activities that each one is doing with regard to the certain communities and Riwaq for example, they are working on restoration of the like abandoned or damaged building in Palestine. I think gathering is a core or this I mean, the quality of the space I thought has to be defined. Like it could be better articulated. What it means to have such a space I mean, what it means to still have like a convent of Catholic order. It's not so like populated, but we don't destroy them. It's good to have them.

HD: I also found this. I was going to actually do my thesis originally, like when I was in Colombia where I noticed that there are these casa de culturas - cultural houses that pop in areas. And it's usually like someone not from the area that goes and, like, sets up some sort of space then becomes a space to engage with the community, but it's not originally from that community. And then they create a network around them. Then they're kind of embedded and it's kind of responding to something. And I thought, this is like, I never saw this in the UK. This is an interesting way to think about maybe an AC and how it has these spaces with, like, across the globe there are working in this way differently.

BC: So that has benefit. It's different from an NGO. So this kind of house as a intermediary. But what what kind of color and form this intermediary has and what does he do? Think that's kind of question...

HD: how long will it function like this and when will it finish or will it need to finish?
BC: AC? That's the question that we have. So there is also one of the working groups Post 2020. Like that's exactly what we are asking. And then, for example, Lugar de Dudas in Cali they are considering to, like, make the death of their institution. But then to be something else, for instance, okay. It was ambiguous I was in.
HD: They want to change?
BC: They think it's not sustainable, because they don't want to diminish salary, for example. They want to keep paying relatively well to their workers. But they don't want to keep their organizations by kind of squeezing. Yeah, there's any, there are no viable economic solution yet. I don't think it will need to have more funding. Probably other ways of doing- I'd like to think that way. Based on also our experience at the like, around the farmhouse in Leidsche Rijn, it was a project with 20,000 euros. But it's like one of the most fulfilling and beautiful projects - 20,000 is like really nothing is our project.
HD: And that project will be shared with the wider AC network.
BC: Yeah. also how to communicate better with our each respective ecosystems.
HD: How does that work at the moment, and what are those challenges?
BC: I think there's no clear model of multiplication, or transfer, but then there are several projects - maybe they are the future of AC. One is Territories, each working on particular territory in struggle, so in our case it's Leidsche Rijn and the farmhouse, there is the climate justice and food, radio, translocal school. Those projects are illuminating some of the activities and the actually practice of Arts Collaboratory. You think it's a promising? How does it sound?
HD: It sounds good. It's I mean, it's really, it's so interesting how it's kind of the way it develops. I think the way it is developing and where it will go I think it's quite rare to have achieved. I mean, have you seen other things exist networks that exist like this?
BC: There's no time to look around. Another Roadmap to Art Education, you know this network? Because they have a similar time, Time Period or development as I see. It started by the prohibitive. a swiss space?
HD: Who are they funded by?
BC: I don't think they have a global, like, they don't have like structural funding. So it goes by different cluster regionally, like Africa or South America cluster where they focus on education
HD: I think that's easier to communicate it. So like, education...
BC: Much more productive
HD: Yeh it's somethin you know, when you say like, What's AC doing? Yeah, it's difficult to say, it's difficult to kind of be able to, you know, in that world where it's like, what education and yes. But I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing. I just think that that's the world that we live in. At the moment. Yeah.
BC: Together with Alexandra, we were reflecting on ethical principles. And when we were reflecting on we were having conversation about failure and openness. We were reflecting on serious playfulness and

failure - two concepts together - coming together, joining and then there are we talking about like, what are we like, kind of friends so that we are not friends because they're like a circle. Network is much wider to be in like, affection every single person. Yeah, but it's more like actually, we were coming more to the idea that it's more like a family, an extended family, because family could of course have conflict over money and there's the ones who are behaving well, or successful, those taking care

HD: and those that are quiet that you never hear from.

BC: And distant relative all of a suddenly appearing and then doing something

HD: and dominant voices.

BC: Father, Mother. Yeah and cool aunt. that's more feeling we were thinking

HD: than an ecosystem?

BC: or friends, friendship, we didn't go into the ecosystem yet.

HD: There's so much, isn't there. Do you have any questions? I mean, I would like to continue the conversation

BC: Yeah, actually, it would be helpful for me too. Are you going to transcribe this?

HD: Yeah. I will share everything that I'm that I'm doing and reading and what you know and I want to continue. Yeah. And also, Mariana said that I could shadow her a little bit with when, when she's working on AC stuff. So yeah, I can do all of those. And it's just, it's interesting because I also want to within my work, think about my position as someone who's from like a funder, and then how does that alter my perspective? And someone who's worked a lot on evaluation

BC: Oh its a funding institute you work in?

HD: But I also this is I also find it quite problematic. Like, in my, I think I'm trying to understand this quite a lot. I think about positionality. Like, often when I was, you know, speaking with academics, and I've worked in organizations that funded through international development and this is more like research funding, which is way more actually bureaucratic than I thought it would be. I thought it would be much more open and, and the sort of conversations that you have with academics and colleagues in a very closed system. Also, this is the hat that I am wearing in these conversations is not necessarily that it's just that, that will inevitably influence how I come look at things, sometimes it's through that, but also, I've been overseas. You know, I'm really interested in quite small organizations and how they function.

BC: Why?

HD: I think they can be less neutral.

So yeah, this is like the radical imagination, those things within DOEN and Casco, AC language, it allows for a lot more. In another big organizations, you have to be much more neutral.

BC: Yeah, I think that but that's really the question how we would grow?

HD : Do you need to grow?

BC: I think yes. But you need to determine how to grow or how to age. So there are, I think there have been many moments of radical imagination and maybe a certain kind of attempt. On the other side of

smaller organization is there's always a limitation in labor and division of labor, and making use of certain expertise and applying that and keeping proper time and space for using your skills. So, it may not be sustainable.

HD: And also what like again, is sustainability just linked to development like what do we mean by sustainability?

BC: Yeah, so these organizations can be killed indeed, to be something else that is much more sustainable and viable and, like, have much more room for vitality in life.

HD
Okay, yeah, I'm going to stop recording now.

Teesa Bahana, 32 Ugandan Arts Trust, interview by Helen Duffy, May 14, 2020

Helen Duffy 0:31

How are you? How's how's everything in Uganda?

Teesa 0:36

Um, yeah, you know, all right. I mean, we've been in lockdown for, I don't know, who knows, like, maybe almost two months maybe. I think something like that. So I think next week they'll say whether or not it's gonna be extended. But yeah, a lot of people I think are really quite frustrated. because there hasn't really been that much or not enough support from the government for people who are reliant on like, you know, day to day income earning so. Yeah, it's tough. So yeah, I mean, you know, pretty fortunate I have a job and, you know, like my home situations good. So, yeah, for me, I'm honestly not even like mentally it's really been okay. Okay. That's good during the slower pace, and all of that. But it's just it's unsettling knowing what's going on out in the world. So it's a bit strange. How about you?

Helen Duffy 1:55

I feel I mean, I don't have anything to complain about in terms of like, I'm studying, so I and so it was like, it's fine in terms of, you know, like, I'm not reliant on any sort of income at the moment. But yeah, just trying to focus. It's I feel like at the beginning or, you know, during April, people were saying, like, you know, this is really good time to be doing your thesis and I was like, pressure. And so my, my thesis is slightly delayed. So it is what it is.

I am, was working at the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the UK.

Teesa 3:31

okay. We've received funding from them. And

Helen Duffy 3:34

I realized this- The politics of return research project. Is that is that Yeah. Yes. So basically, my role there is to look at like impact and evaluation of the portfolio. So the stuff that's like global challenges Research Fund for sort of big funds. And, and it was it was interesting and and I've been I've done lots of interesting things and there's lots of bureaucracy with British academia

Teesa 4:26

Yeah, I can imagine.

Helen Duffy 4:28

Yeah, exactly. And, and I came from working in NGOs. And then I had a sort of break. I worked in Sierra Leone for a while. And then I worked in Colombia trying to do my own sort of research on how arts initiatives and measured the impact of their work and the peace building process. So like, and I kind of just had lots of conversations with interesting people about the challenges. Like these very linear models of measuring things. And so yeah, so that was really interesting. And, and so I don't know, I've just been weaving my way through my life. And actually I came across Arts Collaboratory, when I was in Colombia, because I think some of the projects that I was sort of interested in had been received money from them or Yes, so and then when I came to, so now I'm doing my Masters at arts and society and sort of looking at this link between or sort of the link between arts and social change. And, yeah, I went to one of the openings at Costco. And so that arts Collaboratory funds them. So I kind of had a conversation with Mariana at the start of the year, which was part of a project and then yeah, and then I kind of was Thinking about what is it that I want to my thesis on and I just kept on coming back to this and like concepts of collaborative working and like the like networks and kind of trying to think about like, yeah, there was just I did my elective on post colonial studies. So that was then interesting for me to kind of put another frame on the type of work that I want to do. So yeah, that's where I'm at.

Teesa 6:32

I didn't actually get where where is where are you doing your masters? Oh, sorry, in Utrecht.

Like, which? Which institution?

In Utrecht. And now I'm doing my internship next week, starting that which is around, which is a publication and arts publication, a new one that lives looking at like situated knowledges and trying to get to that's interesting. It will be interesting because I think part of the stuff that I'm interested in arts Collaboratory is thinking about sort of decolonial like concepts around knowledge and seeing knowledge from different situations. And how do we Yeah, how do we sort of collate all of that?

Okay, so tell me about what you, about your role, background and the organisation

Unknown Speaker 8:59

Yeah, I've been in this position with 32 since January 2016. And my background, I studied Sociology and Anthropology at university, bachelor's, and yeah, I was just always sort of interested in society more broadly. And had thought that I wanted to get into community development. So I ended up working also with a number of different NGOs. Also in education, but yeah, and well, I guess NGOs, nonprofits, in lots of different places. First off, started in the States and then was in Kenya and then South Africa, then Rwanda and Burundi, then back to Rwanda and then Uganda. And, yeah, it was interesting sort of using that experience or those experiences to figure out what I was really interested in, in our things actually worked like sort of, maybe gaps between how something is presented and what it actually looks like when you're in it. And then also thinking about what my own strengths were and interests were and how I could apply them. So when I moved, I always wanted to move back to Uganada, but it was just a case of like, trying to find the right job because I like structure. So I didn't really enjoy - there were there were points in the wondering that I maybe didn't have a job for some time and was like trying to pick out stuff and I really didn't like that uncertainty. So I knew that, you know, I don't want to just move back to Uganda and like be floating. So when I did move back, I ended up working for this woman who was doing sort of communications. She had a nonprofit that would support women microentrepreneurs and then also had a for profit consulting company that worked with trade in East Africa. So I was doing communications for both of those things. But it was sort of this job that you can find yourself having a lot of free time or if not actual time, just more it's like the substance of it is not that interesting, or at least for me, wasn't that interesting. And so I found myself sort of thinking more about, you know, again, like when is it that I actually went to do. I don't know why it was, but I just sort of realized that I wanted to work more with culture. And yeah, I really can't remember what the impetus for that. But I remember then starting to look into doing a master's. I was looking at a program at Goldsmiths for, like creative CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP. And then because I had this free time with this other job, I ended up meeting some friends and they were like, oh, we're gonna put on this music festival in six weeks. Do you want to help out? And I was like, yeah, it'll be great. And so I started working on that, and just really loved it. And just yeah, it was such a good time. And, I mean, there were lots of complicated things with that too. But it was just really great to put on something like that and, like immediately see the impact and I'd like him this, you know, monitoring and evaluation kind of way. But just like literally like transformative experience for a lot of musicians who are coming from a completely different backgrounds, coming to Uganda for the first time. A lot of Ugandans also who were like hearing particular styles of music for the first time, in this, like really

amazing location. And now that Festivals is like the biggest Music Festival in the region, and like, has made all these international lists for like, best category Africa Music Festival in the world, you know, like it's really become this huge thing, but it was tiny in the beginning and like really just a labor of love. And so yeah, like I had that experience. And that sort of brought me on the radar of the previous director of 32. So we were sort of in similar circles, we weren't like close friends or anything but you know, knew of each other and I think she was looking for her replacement at the time and so would always keep asking, you know, do you like your job? Like, you know, what, what is it that you want to do? And so she invited me to apply and interview for the role. And at the time, I didn't actually even know that it was a director's role. Either it was like operation director role or something like that. I was like, okay, maybe I could do that. And then all of a sudden, I was like, no, no, it's like, director. And I was like, oh, okay. Yeah, then I like I had literally started my application the masters that like, you know, email people to get references and then just sort of add it in as like, you know, this is basically everything that I'd want to learn but I get to learn it on the job and you know, yes, it feels incredibly intimidating. And I know nothing about visual arts or Contemporary Art but, you know, like, couldn't say no to the opportunity. So that's sort of how I ended up in the role.

Teesa 15:04

It's really some of what you say really resonates with me like this kind of like. Yeah, how I felt with the working with NGOs. So you've been with you've been with 32 for since 2016, so at that point when you joined, 32 was already a part of AC.

Yeah, I don't fully know the history. I know that the previous director went to, there was this meeting in Colombia that she went to, and I think from that got invited to be an associate partner at first because they had this distinction in the beginning. I think from like, 2013 to 2016 32 was an associate partner, and then from 2015 onwards it became one of the network members. As far as I know.

So I might just talk to you a little bit about what is that I'm interested in looking at, because the network AC is so huge, and so expansive, and there's a lot of work I understand going on about reflecting on on your practices and approaches and ways of working. And and then for me, it just it was a really interesting model where it was really trying to address like the elephant in the room like the element of funding and like, how do you work and sense of hierarchy between the global north and the global south, and how and those things, and so I'm kind of at the moment looking at it from this idea of knowledge exchange and transfer and the relations created and I also want to look at like this concept of space, the physical space, but also the space in between each of the organizations like, sort of as a kind of imaginary space. And, and then and then also dependency and an agency. And because I think that from other my other conversations, especially with Mariana at the beginning, it seemed to me that like some organizations are slightly more dependent on the funding and I see from 32, you are or were part of the Triangle network and also Prince Claus Fund. You have

quite a lot of support from different areas. And first of all, it might be good to get an understanding of what is the added value of being part of Arts Collaboratory.

Sure. Yeah, I mean, I think on a basic level, a huge part of it from the beginning was the core funding like it was five years of core funding -I think when I compared to other networks, it's it's almost like the funding enables a lot of the really critical aspects of the network. So because it was well funded, initially, it meant that we could meet more frequently in person. And when you meet more frequently in person, then you develop relationships. And I think, yeah, like, so much of this work is based on relationships. So even when you look at how the network works now and like, who is very involved and committed, and I don't think there's anyone who puts a lot of time into the workings of the network that doesn't have a close relationship, or like feel quite close to other individuals in the network. Like I don't think there's anyone who's just like, oh, this is just a random thing, that's kind of fun, and I'm gonna devote some hours of life to it. So I think Yeah, like those, those personal connections are really key to what makes the network really quite powerful. And I mean, some of those connections also come from, you know, you meet, we have annual assemblies where at least one representative from every organization attends. So that's a really big way that you meet everyone and like it's 10 days together for the most part, maybe their arrival and departure date, but like really intensive working and we are talking about these really big ideas and learning about contexts that are maybe kind of similar to yours but also their differences are really enlightening as well. It's also I think, a lot of people who are very open to learning about each other and like being excited about that as well. So it's like a very intense moment where you do get to connect. And so when you're outside of that, and like emailing and doing things like that you're connecting based off of that time you had together, but then I think also, it depends on the work you're doing together in the interim periods. But it's that work that you're doing together, you're having regular meetings and things like that. And so I think you also connect well, through that, too. So when I think about the differences in the networks, I think it's the ability to meet more frequently and build relationships. And that we have work that we're doing together in between. So it's not just, oh, yeah, no, that ization and you're part of this network and you meet, like, have a network meeting and then you go off and you do your own team. It's that in between the meetings, there's work that we're doing for the network, as well. And it varies between partners, but some of the work that you're doing as an organization is also very connected to the network that you know, like your programming might be involving other networks. Whereas other other networks, it might not quite be like that. Not all the time.

Okay, great.

And so the ecos

Unknown Speaker 23:50

network at some point described started to think of itself as an ecosystem. How do you like how do you kind of Do you understand what sort of cultural ecosystem in terms of arts Collaboratory and how it works?

Unknown Speaker 24:11

Yeah, I mean, I think it's sort of this notion that every member or every partner is, it's context is important to how base, like its context is very important to how it operates. And even how it operates can be separated from its context basically, that, you know, it is very embedded in what's going on around it like it has, you know, particular partners or, you know. I mean, there's probably a difference between the ideal scenario and what actually happens in what things actually look like. But I think the idea behind this ecosystem is that, yes, their member partners, but that the work should extend beyond that, the network itself should extend beyond just 32. So, you know, if someone if someone in AC who is based in Mexico wanted to look at publishing, and independent publishers, then even it doesn't do that work, they might be someone else that we work with or have worked with, that we would then connect our partners in Mexico with, so it's not just oh, you have to work with me too. It's where like, we can also connect and spread the work through our own connections here.

Helen Duffy 25:56

Okay, great. So I was saying that I'm interested in sort of this concept of knowledge exchange. And I imagine, like how, how do you understand knowledge? It is just the written word? How else kind of, and I know that they happen at these assemblies, the one that used 30 to organize last year, but also Bangas and other meetings, but also imagine like, online, there is a lot of exchanging of information. How would you sort of constitute it? How would you define the type of knowledge that is being exchanged?

Teesa 26:38

I'm not sure how to answer that question, I am wary of definitions in general

Helen Duffy 26:55

I think most of AC are. I feel like Mariana with too. So for me, it's just kind of thinking about ways we define things, ways we make sense of the world.

Teesa 27:16

Yeah, but I think even so. That means there's just so many ways of sort of what you make of it, right? Like, I don't think there's any defined thing like as the network for how knowledge is shared, I think that very much depends on the individuals that are part of the network, on the organizations that are part of the network and they own sort of approaches and what their interests are and, like it's all it's what, it's what everyone makes of it. So if you know there are organizations that are collectives and organizations that are a lot more founder- centre and and more hierarchical. There organizations that are really interested in the process of learning and knowledge exchange and have programs that are very much around education. because they some organization like the quite a few that have educational programs and we developed one recently. So we sort of did research and looked at what organizations existed and what they were all doing. So that was a way that in terms of knowledge sharing, like we spent a lot of time just looking online and like, you know, going to their websites going to previous iterations of the programmes and seeing how things work. And then also, depending on our relationships with people we will call people also like schedule a meeting and say, hey, we're really interested in this program and how it works. Could you talk about this, this is or we even talk about people who participated in the program, so not organizers. So, you know, let's say, look, Lugar a Dudas has this program called Escuela en cierta? And we knew some people who facilitated that program. So we didn't talk to people at lugar a Dudas, we talked to the facilitators, and we're like, what was your experience in that program? And so for us, it was like, there's so many opportunities to gain knowledge. It's like this is this is sort of the network constitutes of these like a million different things and it's really just what do you want to know? And you decide your approach to how you want to know it, knowing that people are really open to sharing their experiences and their learnings, their failures, that kind of thing. And if they know that you can still find out information otherwise. Yeah, so that's it. It's a very broad answer. But that I think, have been our experience.

Helen Duffy 30:29

And you were saying earlier that and, you know, assemblies was a way of kind of bringing people together and finding people like sort of organizations or ways of working contexts that are similar, but also differences and the differences were also enlightening. Can you like, expand on that a little bit?

Teesa 30:51

Yeah, I'm trying to think of examples. Yeah, because I guess there's sort of two approaches to that. So, like, there's a collective in Mexico and a collective in Kyrgyzstan, that have had quite a few exchanges together, that you would, I mean, like, you know, when you think about different countries, I think we ever did, and you put those two countries together. So they were really joined together because they really well, so the collective in Mexico does a lot of self publishing and the one in Kyrgyzstan does more like performance. Right. But they ended up doing quite a lot of self publishing together. And I think it was more just because of their like, because they were both collectives and had that shared way of working. And yeah, we're just like interested in each other's practices. So I think that it's been interesting to see how, yeah, just sort of learning more about

those approaches. And also, I think, you know, this critique of neoliberalism and late stage capitalism, all of those things that maybe otherwise in other networks would then really be apparent. Because again, like being in, you know, global majority, like we're all influenced by these things, or influenced by colonialism and but in very different ways. And I think that's when I when I talk about Yeah, the, the differences being really informative that's part of it as well. I'm just learning how different places have responded to their colonial history, the colonial present and how they respond to that through art as well. What their art markets look like and how they're their some organization. But I, you know much engaged with the art market as it stands, like, you know, really about being in art fairs and things like that, and then the others that are in a more antagonistic position to that. So that's also, interesting to learn about, as well.

Helen Duffy 36:28

Interesting. I think it's good also to kind of think about then sort of the role of art in these contexts and may also be in particular with Uganda, like I read that the sort of work of 32 is mostly with arts residency.

Teesa 37:09

A few things I mean, we have our residences, and then we also have workshops, we have a public Arts Festival, and then we have a lesbian Resource Center as well. So that's open to or art? Well really anyone who wants to use it, but it's predominantly for artists.

Helen

what do you think the role of art could be? I feel like this is too big of a question. And so the role of art in social change what in in, in certain sense of how does how did those things encounter like arts encounter social change? I saw a video and where you talked about, and is it a festival or one of the you were talking about I started before we talked, I was watching a video of yours maybe. And about taking over the art festival, bringing art into the streets and sort of harnessing arts way to kind of Create dialogue. Could you expand a little bit on that and sort of the way that he to maybe uses arts to engage with its context? Its community, etc?

Tess:

I think part of it is that in Uganda I mean, it's a verylike if you're just here for a while, you'll notice it's very vibrant in terms of like, music and dance and like, people like entertainments really big and important. But when it comes to Visual Arts, you just don't really see it like the, like images moving around the city. Like you don't really see graffiti, you don't really see statue, sculptures, like it's just not very present. And they know like, there's no real there's The National Gallery but like, no, it's really quite inaccessible. And in terms of the curriculum, it's just not it's really present and it's, it doesn't really feel very valued on a societal level. And so it's just sort of thinking, like, if we view it as important Then why? Like, who sort of? How does it how do you democratize it basically like how do you make it more accessible for everyone to get to engage with it? Like why shouldn't people get

engaged with art and why are there no opportunities for people to be able to do that? And so that's sort of, I think, the underpinning philosophy for the festival that artists should like even just you know, in terms of iPhone, I'd say like literally just having something to look at that is stimulating in some way, like whatever, like just on a bare minimum, like that should be like every society should have that right. And then on another level, they're thinking about what I can do in terms of, you know, art for society of society, societal change, when it can do to bring about critical dialogue about things that, you know, maybe other forums can't do as well. And you know what it means, when you put it into a space that brings different people together that wouldn't maybe ordinarily engage with a particular topic, but I was able to bring that up. What it also means to Yeah, like have have spaces for critical thinking and to sort of also reflect on certain things or questions and things and How also in general, they really aren't spaces to do that. And often the powers that be are also in very invested in not having spaces to do that as well.