

An Ethnography of Collective Worldmaking: The Cinematic Practices of Komunitas Film

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When they participate
and when they are also participants
and film as a medium
it runs through them
like the river runs through them
and as a result everybody in it
is both swimming
and at the same time wet.

What does it mean?

That means they soak in
whether it is true or not
I don't care
it is there as remnant
as they are immersed in it
in their world
and when they are immersed in it
they open up this other horizon
and it is not individually created.¹

¹ Richard Oh on *komunitas film* during one of our meta co-theorizing conversations on August 26, 2019

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Preliminary remarks

This is a cumulative doctoral thesis consisting of a framework text as well as four individual publications, all published in peer-reviewed journals. The PhD candidate Rosalia Namsai Engchuan is the author of all of these publications. The framework text is aimed to illustrate the contextual links between the various papers and situates the questions discussed within larger debates. In order to do so, this framework text covers the context and evolution of the project (Chapter 2), its theoretical foundations (Chapter 3), overarching research questions (Chapter 4), state of the art and positioning in the fields of research (Chapter 5), an overarching discussion of methodology (Chapter 6), the contributions of the individual articles to the overarching research questions (Chapter 7), the central findings (Chapter 8) and the contributions to the fields of research (Chapter 9). It concludes with a conclusion and outlook (Chapter 10).

The peer-reviewed and published articles making up this cumulative thesis are:

Engchuan, Rosalia Namsai. 2020. "A Political Dance in the Rain: Queer Short Film in Indonesia and the Cinematic Creation of Social and Material Spaces for Argument." *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 176 (1): 7–36. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-bja10002>.

Henceforth referred to as 'A Political Dance in the Rain' 2020.

Engchuan, Rosalia Namsai. 2021a. "Situated Assemblages of Un-Situated Things." *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 51 (March): 34–47. <https://doi.org/10.1086/717399>.

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Engchuan, Rosalia Namsai. 2021b. "Landscape of Possibility: Community Filmmaking in Indonesia as a Relational Process." *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde/ Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 177 (2–3): 221–33. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-bja10028>.

Henceforth referred to as 'Landscape of Possibility' 2021b.

Engchuan, Rosalia Namsai. 2021c. "Attuning to the Whisperings: Cinematic Epistemologies from within Environmental Crises." *Darshika: Journal of Integrative and Innovative Humanities* 1 (1): 21–48. <https://so07.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/DJIH/article/view/1063>.

Henceforth referred to as 'Attuning to the Whisperings' 2021c.

Overview of abstracts

A Political Dance in the Rain: Queer Short Film in Indonesia and the Cinematic Creation of Social and Material Spaces for Argument

Queer films are largely absent from Indonesian cinema and television screens due to the country's current climate of LGBT 'moral panic'. This article examines how, two decades after the reformation, Indonesian film practitioners are forced to navigate complex configurations of power and knowledge—negotiating social, political, and religious entanglements through their cinematic practices. My analysis is focused on *komunitas film* (film community/ies) and, more specifically, events and activities surrounding Luhki Herwanayogi's short film *On Friday Noon* (2016), which chronicles the emotionally and physically fraught journey of a transgender Muslim woman as she seeks to perform Friday prayers. Drawing on this example, the article explores the disruptive potential of cinematic practice to challenge and nullify the ostensible binary between Islam and queerness, showing alternative ways of being Muslim in contemporary Indonesia, where piety and sexual identity often come together in unexpected ways.

Keywords

LGBT – alternative cinema – performative-art activism – queer Islam

Landscape of Possibility: Community Filmmaking in Indonesia as a Relational Process

This essay is driven by the question of how Candra, the writer and director of *DEWI PULANG* (2017), is able to sustain his cinematic practice, despite the controversial nature of his films. Considering the notion of landscape of possibility, this essay traces processes that precede and go beyond the production of a particular film, but which are nevertheless constitutive of its becoming. These entanglements are explored through concrete stories in dialogical engagement with film practitioners in Indonesia. Adding these to the conversation of what constitutes a film conceptually and analytically, the desired gesture of this essay is less a representation or documentation of Candra's practice or Indonesian film communities but rather a provocation to approaches in film studies that operate on binary assumptions of landscape as an external backdrop (of text and context, film and maker, state and film production). I will argue that the evolution of film communities in Indonesia challenges

commonly held assumptions about the role of the state in ‘independent’ film, and the linear ‘assembling logic’ from ‘grassroots’ to ‘mainstream’.

Keywords

community film – constitutive technicity – collective organizing – film censorship

Situated Assemblages of Un-situated Things

Anthropologist and film-maker Rosalia Namsai Engchuan examines Lifepatch's work at the intersections of community-oriented art, science and technology as well as their DIWO (Do It With Others) ethos and the Indonesian notion of *gotong royong*. Examined through different life situations, science workshops for local communities, or art institutional projects, Engchuan's contribution, based on time spent with Lifepatch, affirms a technicality radically ‘de-coupled from the imperatives of productivity and progress’ inscribed in a cosmological relation with *gotong royong*.²

Attuning to the whisperings: Cinematic epistemologies from within environmental crises

What might be decolonial strategies of acting on the causes, histories, and effects of environmental crises? Aiming at a complex understanding of situated issues pivoting around environmental crises—as experienced, made sense of, and acted upon by those who are affected by it—this writing centers cinematic epistemologies from Indonesia in the study of environmental crises mitigation practices. The intellectual territory and foundational assumptions of mainstream environmental discourse and visibility fail to acknowledge persisting roots in the colonial, capitalist and patriarchal logic of modernity enabled by epistemicide. I will propose to turn the gaze to cinematic epistemologies—as multi-species assemblages—bearing transformative potential for cultivating the grounds for care as a process of relating, for a different way of becoming attuned to the world. Their inherent micro-political potential lies not in putting forward alternative knowledges, but in alternative (intuitive, experimental, affective) conventions of knowledge production and dissemination.

Keywords: cinematic epistemologies, care, environmental crises, epistemicide, decoloniality, anthropological method

² This is from the editors note as the publication format did not have an abstract but a summary.

1. Introduction

Bringing together studies of film, scholarship on collective practices, new materialist positions on agencies of the more-than-human and decolonial positions on knowledge practices, this doctoral thesis is an empirical investigation of the cinematic practices of community filmmakers in contemporary Indonesia, as well as a theoretical contemplation on the social-transformative potential of cinematic epistemologies.

Komunitas film (film community/ies) mushroomed in Indonesia after political reformation in 1998 along with the availability of digital filmmaking technology. Today, mobile screenings and community filmmaking are omnipresent phenomenon in Indonesia with hundreds of *komunitas film* all over the archipelago, who make, screen and discuss short films. An Indonesian film activist once told me: ‘if you want to understand Indonesia you have to watch short films’ (see also Engchuan 2020, 12). In Indonesian film communities, films are deeply rooted in the social experience of the filmmakers and made to trigger discussions on local social issues during the screening events. From this observation a series of question arises: why and how do they engage in cinematic practice to act upon local social issues? Or in other words: what are the conditions, modalities, affordances and effects of cinematic epistemologies? Attending to these questions, this dissertation offers a window onto the modes and conditions of cinematic practices within Indonesian film communities, as well as a local and situated commentary on the social and cultural circumstances the films depict. It is a project of looking at social phenomena through films, together with filmmakers.

The answers, as I will suggest throughout the publications as well as this framework text, pivots around the notion of togetherness (*kebersamaan*), a way of being in the world that is grounded in a relational ontology. In essence, this is a thesis on how cinematic practices come from togetherness, are performed in togetherness and aim at cultivating togetherness. Therefore, I will conceptualize and explore togetherness, its constituents (which include the more-than-human), its moral grammar (which is often related with the Indonesian notion of *gotong royong*), its actualization, instituting and cultivation — through cinematic practices.

Theoretically and conceptually, togetherness calls for an inquiry of forms of relatedness rather than entities (filmmakers, censors, films). Komunitas film should not be taken for granted as an existing empirical unit and is perhaps better described as a relational process and a mode of

collectivity. Drawing on empirical work, as well as scholarship that re-defines technology as a relation, and conceives of agency as distributed rather than located in an individual human, this cumulative dissertation looks at the practices of *komunitas film* as situated epistemic assemblages. Scrutinizing the film as an object and analytical category, I conceptualize cinematic practices of making, screening and discussing film as relational-processual assemblages of collective agency. Through such a processual, relational assemblage perspective, I am following Yuk Hui's imperative to conceive of multiple cosmotechnics 'which are different from each other not simply functionally and aesthetically, but also ontologically and cosmologically' (2016, xiii), re-mapping the dominant technological development narrative with a story from Indonesia.

Departing from a processual-relational assemblage perspective, related questions emerge: what are the affordances of cinematic languages and what is the collective agency of cinematic practices and the cinematic spaces and epistemologies they produce? Using a variety of anthropological methods, which have been adapted to the theoretical and conceptual assemblage perspective and developed over the course of this research, this research derives arguments from empirical, theoretical and dialogical archives: participant observation on film sets and at film screenings, ethnographically informed film analysis as well as para-site situations of *thinking nearby* — spaces where analytical propositions were discussed and created in dialogue with film practitioners.

The individual publications examine four short films from the environment of *komunitas film* that address a variety of situated social and environmental issues: ON FRIDAY NOON (2016, dir. Luhki Herwanayogi) on queer struggles for self-determination against the backdrop of increasingly orthodox interpretations of Islam, SEORANG KAMBING (A GOAT) (2017 dir. Tunggul Banjarsari) on water scarcity and land conflicts in the Gunung Kidul mountains, SAPU ANGIN (WINDSWEPT) (2017 dir. Cahyo Prayogo) on classed urbanization processes in Surabaya and SPECTACULAR HEALING (2019 dir. Lifepatch) a two channel video on 'Lifepatch's ongoing research related to colonialism of the Batak tribe in North Sumatra' (Lifepatch 2021, np).

Conceiving of these films not as representational objects, but as bridges into cinematic assemblages and situated socio-environmental clusters, this research investigates *komunitas*

film as alternative pedagogies that entail both social and cinematic spaces. Films, here are nodes in grander processes of collective knowledge creation and articulation. Situated within a broader analysis of epistemological conventions, each of the cases discussed in this doctoral thesis constitutes and illustrates alternative infrastructures and modes of collective knowledge production — in tune with what Santos (2016, 2018) has called the epistemologies of the South. Epistemology here is social and relational, knowledge is not imposed as a detached object but negotiated in dialogue, it is a process.

Bringing together a complex empirical and dialogical understanding of the co-constitutive relationship between cinematic and social spaces, with the notion of togetherness and critical decolonial positions on knowledge politics, this doctoral thesis concludes that cinematic practices enact a political gesture, which lies in cultivating the grounds for care—as a social and relational configuration. The transformative potential of cinematic epistemologies lies in not merely suggesting or depicting but enacting and performing alternatives ways of knowing and being in the world — in togetherness.

2. Context and evolution of the project: mobile screenings and community filmmaking

Mobile screenings in the Dutch East Indies

Practices of community filmmaking and mobile screenings have a history that goes back to the times of the Dutch East Indies. Film technology entered the archipelago during Dutch colonial occupation and the first public screening of moving images in Batavia took place on October 11, 1896, only a year after the same scenes were screened for the first time ever in Paris.³ In colonial Indonesia, these early analogue film technologies entered already existing spaces of public performances like the *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet theater). Seizing on colonial infrastructures and communication networks, as well as negotiating situated climatic and political conditions, traveling movie exhibitors brought the cinema screen to many corners of the Archipelago. The very early screenings took place in secluded and ‘elitist European venues in the form of European-style theaters or European Club houses’ (Ruppin

³ Refer to Ruppin (2016) for a comprehensive study of the introduction and popularization, the spaces and practices of movie-going from 1896 to the outbreak of the First World War in colonial Indonesia moves beyond mere textual analysis and traces the emergence of movie-going in the early days of cinema in Indonesia. Ruppin gathered this information from the following newspaper source: “Nederlandsch-Indie”, Java-Bode (12 October 1896). According to her research these may have been the Lumière films but there is no direct trace or proof.

2016, 17) but soon spread ‘into canvas tents and later more fixed bamboo tents, which were often located in and around the main town or village square (*Alun Alun*)’ (Ruppin 2016, 18). Up until this day mobile film screenings take place in public and open spaces all over Indonesia. Without the concrete walls of commercial cinema spaces, a more fluid and porous kind of spectatorship is possible.

During the early days of moving images, the role of the local in colonial Indonesia was limited to that of the spectator, while production and facilitation of screenings rested with traveling exhibitors like James Talbot, a ‘Batavia-based French photographer’ (Ruppin 2016, 32). Local audiences voiced a desire for more local content and one of the earliest instances, where the cinema screen became a space to negotiate situated social issues was the 1904 peasant uprising in Gedangan, East Java (see Fernando 1995 and Ruppin 2016, 135, 36).⁴ This puts the cinematic practices pivoting around environmental crisis, queer struggles for self-determination and land struggles discussed in this doctoral thesis into a longer trajectory of the cinema as a space to negotiate situated socio-environmental issues.

Mobile screenings after independence

The colonizers left Indonesia but the mobile screening format stayed. Indonesians have been familiar with mobile screenings of films called *bioskop keliling* (traveling cinema) on so called *layar tancap* (screens stuck on the ground) even before indoor screenings in built movie theaters (see Imanjaya 2020, np). Those screenings were held during the evenings and are sometimes also referred to as moonlight cinema (see Jayasrana 2015). These screenings often took place in rural and remote places where traveling exhibitors are invited on the occasion of weddings, circumcisions or other ceremonial events (see also Imanjaya 2020, Jayasrana 2015, np). Mostly free of charge *layar tancap* screenings have come to be associated with lower-class and non-urban audiences (see also Imanjaya 2020, van Heeren 2012). *Layar tancap* screenings are social spaces where people came together. An Indonesian film scholar, describes them as a ‘joint ritual’ thriving on ‘the instinct of kebersamaan (togetherness)’ (see Imanjaya 2020, np).⁵ Precisely because of the immense potentiality of this social space, it was hijacked by consecutive rulers and governments, who rely on access to

⁴ Ruppin 2016: 135 referring to Advertisement, Soerabaiasch-Handelsblad (1 October 1904). She remarks that since the film is no longer available ‘it is not clear whether this was an actuality or re-enactment of events, or even if this was authentic footage or a re-titling of another riot scene filmed in an entirely different context’ (Ruppin 2016, 135).

⁵ Imanjaya 2020, np, referring to a quote by Perfiki Vice Chair Person as documented in Human Kongres III Perfiki 1993, 13.

audiences. In an attempt to reach as many people as possible, they tapped into existing spaces that were already frequented on a regular basis.⁶ The insertion of films into the *layar tancap* spaces for ‘political purposes’ and ‘development propaganda’ (Prakosa 2015, 8), produced and curated by those officially in power, was an instrument to govern citizens in a top-down project. Under Sukarno (1945-65), the first Indonesian president after independence and post World War II, short film became a medium to fine-tune the glorifying narrative around development as something that is beneficial to Indonesia and its inhabitants at large. This happened at an institutional level and became a constitutive part of the nation state’s bureaucratic apparatus: in 1951, 6 years after independence, the Indonesian government through the organization *Berita Film Indonesia* (Indonesian News Films) and later *Perusahaan Film Negara* (National Film Company, abbreviated to PFN) produced ‘a series of short documentaries on the benefits of development in Indonesia’ (Jayasrana 2015, np). These films were called *Gelora Pembangunan* (literally translated to development surge and certainly carrying an undertone of celebratory enthusiasm associated with the notion of development). According to Forum Lenteng research ‘*Gelora Indonesia* had produced more than 800’ (Arkipel 2019, np) films that were screened in villages in the spaces of *layar tancap* as well as ‘in cinema buildings at the beginning of narrative feature films’ (Prakosa 2015, vii; see also Jayasrana 2015; van Heeren 2012, 63). The subsequent New Order regime under Suharto (1966-1998) marked a time of aspirations for economic development and at the same time a phase of unthinkable repression and violence. The Berkeley Mafia (a group of US-educated Indonesian economists and technocrats) of the New Order government had a vision for Indonesia’s future hinged on an embrace of the idea of development to enter the space of modern, globalized, capitalist nations (see also van Heeren 2012, 88). Development was imagined as aspirational and not present within Indonesia or its inhabitants, but as something that had to be brought from outside to both Indonesia at large and to the villages in particular. The ‘village’ became the space where the alleged ‘backwardness’ was conveniently located by those in power in the urban centers and an internal divide along the lines of modern (scientific) and backward (non-rational) was installed within the country. These propaganda screening practices are well remembered by contemporary film practitioners, who explained to me the significance of making and screening their own films, rather than being exposed to other peoples propaganda work, as they remember it from their childhood days: at the end of

⁶ I identified various references in the literature that the employment of short film as propaganda ‘started to develop during the Japanese military reign in Indonesia around 1942-1945’ (Arkipel 2019, np see also Prakosa 2015, vii, 8 and Hakim 2015, xi). I was however not able to trace any specifics of the films and screenings during those times beyond the mere mentioning of their existence.

the 1970s ‘80% of villages were visited by *layar tancap* shows’ (Imanjaya 2020, np, referring to Sen 1994, 72).

Watching and discussing alternative films in the early kine klubs

The first locally organized film communities emerged during Suharto’s New Order regime, as a response to the perceived lack of interesting and critical content in mainstream media.⁷ Organized around film screenings and discussions these communities were called *kine klubs*. The early *kine klubs* were campus based because the university infrastructure provided students with access to celluloid projectors and movie theaters.⁸ In 1973 the Jakarta Arts Council (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta / DKJ) started to organize a film festival called *Festival Film Mini* at Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM), an important cultural space in central Jakarta in close proximity to the Jakarta Arts Institute (Institut Kesenian Jakarta IKJ), with more than 100 short films submitted in the first edition (see Prakosa 2005, 8–9).

During the times of the early *kine klubs*, access to filmmaking equipment was difficult and the very possibility of making a film was only available to a selected few. Likewise, making films for movie theaters was heavily regulated within an apprenticeship system: a bureaucratic process that required directors to be assistants during three or four productions and to work as a script writer for three to five times. These regulations were defined by the Karyawan Film dan Televisi (KFT) — the only professional film organization allowed by and under the control of the government through the Department Penerangan RI (Ministry of Information of the Republic of Indonesia) during the New Order (Prakosa 2005, 11; Sasono 2020).

The possibilities of new technologies and political reformation

At the dawn of the New Order regime, during a time of economic crisis caused by the Asian Financial Crisis and political unrest, there was a spirit of possibility, hope and collectivity in the air, especially among students. The end of the New Order dictatorship and the beginning of political reformation saw a mushrooming of short films, festivals and film communities.

⁷ The very existence of these practices in the New Order Era, in a ‘condition of almost complete repression’ (Kusurmaryati 2013: 2) under a ‘pro capitalist/militaristic government’ (Kusurmaryati 2013: 4) and a heavily controlled film industry ‘test the boundary and limit of the New Orders panoptical power’ (Kusurmaryati 2013: 2).

⁸ The first kine klub was founded in 1950 at the University of Indonesia (UI) in Jakarta Liga Film Mahasiswa (LFM) and in 1955 Liga Film Mahasiswa (LFM) was established at the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB). The LFM in Bandung still exists today. In 1969 the off-campus film community Kine Club Jakarta formed at the Dewan Jakarta Arts DKJ.

During the New Order regime, social gatherings were forbidden and regarded with high suspicion of ‘communist’ activity. The more relaxed political climate of reformation made it easier for people to meet: ‘so the impacts of film communities are very simple and visible. People meet and talk and reimagine and recreate forms of gathering’ (Pasaribu, Personal conversation, June 26, 2018). In the mid 1990s, the internet slowly transcended the urban centers and arrived in the villages, starting in the big cities Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta and Surabaya. Digital filmmaking and screening equipment became more easily accessible to non-professionals and video technology ‘began democratizing filmmaking’ (Edwin 2020, 151). With the increased mobility of video and digital, exposure to alternative film content surpassed the space of universities and cultural institutions in the city centers. One example is *Sinema Ngamen* - ‘a form of short film performance that is done spontaneously and in any place or even door to door’ (Pasaribu 2019, 11) ‘using technology that is easy to carry and take anywhere’ (Prakosa 2008:6, see also Prakosa 2001, 12). These pop-up short film screenings in villages still exist today and were a main site of empirical research for this project.

In the early years after reformation, after almost three decades of dictatorship, the promotion of ‘freedom of expression’ was on the development agenda of international NGOs like the Goethe-Institut and the Ford Foundation and manifested in initiatives for local film production. Workshops in collaboration with local film communities and educational spaces were held all over the archipelago to train local media producers. Filmmaking was also added as an extracurricular activity at high schools and vocational schools (Danusiri, Personal conversation, July 8, 2018). Filmmaking became more and more accessible to larger segments of society or in the words of Prakosa: ‘film came to be owned by the people’ (Prakosa 2005, 7). In 2002 and 2003 Surya Citra Televisi (SCTV) organized the Festival Film Independent Indonesia (FFII) with hundreds of professional and amateur filmmakers participating (Prakosa 2005, v). In 2002, 834 films were selected and in 2003, 899 films were selected (Prakosa 2005, 7). For the second festival held in 2003 the filmmakers from the region outnumbered those submitting from Jakarta. This rise in numbers of regional submissions shows that the festival nurtured aspiration among regional filmmakers to make films themselves. Submissions came from almost from all over Indonesia: ‘Berau, Kalimantan Timur, Mataram, Lombok, Batam, Medan, Padang Panjang and a handful of small places like Wonogiri, Cilacap’ (Prakosa 2005, 8). The age of those submitting short films was between 9 and 70

years, ‘elementary school students, junior high school students, state officials, housewives, journalists to officers’ (Prakosa 2005, 9). With those regional films ‘a picture of life in society that only appears through filmmaking’ (Prakosa 2005, 6) emerged. One of my collaborators, Reza a filmmaker from Yogyakarta, once explained to me that it was through film that he learned about the lives and struggles of people in other parts of Indonesia. This kind of ‘imagined togetherness’ and solidarity that is configured through the sharing of situated local stories across various film festivals and screening spaces is a different one than the top-down theorized under very different circumstances of centrally authored mass media by Benedict Anderson (1983).

Today, there are hundreds, some say thousands, of film communities all over the archipelago, who make, screen and discuss short films. Some of the prominent ones are the 2002 established Documentary Film Festival (Festival Film Dokumenter, FFD) in Yogyakarta with a focus on documentary films from Indonesia as well as global stories. The festival holds regular screenings, workshops on pitching, film production and film criticism and welcomes international guests to Yogyakarta. The emergence of this festival as a space ‘to raise issues that are often marginalized in the national media landscape’ (Pasaribu 2019, 16) is indicative of the more democratic climate after the 1998 reformation. In the same vein, from 2002 there was the Q Film Festival in Jakarta with a focus on queer issues. Even though the festival was protested heavily it was a liminal yet important social space for the queer community. In ‘A Political Dance in the Rain’ I situate this festival within the larger context of spaces for queer film in Indonesia. In Jakarta, Forum Lenteng was established by communication students, artists, researchers and cultural observers in 2003. The Arkipel Independent and Documentary Film Festival organized by Forum Lenteng is internationally known and their Forum Festival is a public lecture series and important meeting space for film communities, where representatives are invited to Jakarta for a few days to take part in sophisticated discussions and informal gatherings around film and communities. I met Cahyo Prayogo (Yoyos), one of my main research collaborators, whose film is discussed in the ‘Attuning to the Whisperings’ article during this festival in 2019, when he was presenting his film SAPU ANGIN (WINDSWEPT) (Windswept). In 2006 the Jogja-Netpac Asian Film Festival (JAFF) film festival emerged right after a massive earthquake hit the region in May 2006. JAFF has since then carried on to be not only an important film festival for the Southeast Asian region but also an important meeting point for the film communities and I regularly went to their

screenings to engage with the local film communities. Minikino is a Bali based initiative for screening and discussing films that started in 2002 and in 2015 became the Bali Minikino Film Week festival that holds screenings for the local communities in Bali all over the island. It was during a trip to Jembrana, a remote village in Southwest Bali, as we were building a screen from scratch with a piece of white fabric and wood that we purchased in a hardware store on the way, that I experientially understood how much personal effort it takes to create these spaces. In 2007 another remarkable film festival started in Purbalinga, a small town in Central Jawa that ‘did not — and to this day still does not — have any movie theaters and in the early days of the film community they were banned from screening films in governmental buildings’ (Sarahtika 2017, np). The festival organized by the Cinema Lovers Community (CLC) around local filmmaker Bowo Leksono, a group known as film ‘militants’ for their boundless passion for film who ‘decided to take a guerrilla approach by traveling across villages and schools to hold open-air screenings as well as meeting students after school to teach filmmaking’ (Sarahtika 2017, np). These student films are screened during the festival and circulated to other festivals and screening spaces around Indonesia. There are many more local initiatives, similar to the ones mentioned here and this is only a glimpse into the wide array of practices and spaces created by film communities all over Indonesia.⁹

Komunitas film

Komunitas film assemble around the making, screening and discussion of films. A literal translation of *komunitas film* to film communities, as a group that exists naturally, fails to accommodate the rhizomatic and ever-changing character of *komunitas film*, which — as this doctoral thesis will elaborate — also includes more-than-human agencies and is a process of collective agencies. The term can refer to one *komunitas film* at a particular place or all film communities collectively. In the instantiations of the public screening and discussion events *komunitas film* hold space for even larger temporal communities in open and public spaces, as not only members of *komunitas film* are present at the screenings. These discussions are spaces where situated social issues find a space to be articulated, amplified and related to. There are no official rules for when someone becomes a part of *komunitas film*, but being

⁹ The closest to a quantitative capture is a survey conducted by the Cinema Poetica Research Center with 77 respondents who participated at the meeting of Indonesian film communities TKFI in Purbalinga in 2016 and 78 respondents from another survey in 2017 (Yustriani 2019). The respondents are however not representative of all film communities in the whole of Indonesia and the total number is most likely much higher and also constantly fluctuating as film communities come and go. It is a fluid ever changing assemblage much more than something that we could grasp.

involved on a regular basis and making an effort to travel to events has been mentioned to me as a reason to be considered part of *komunitas film*. One person can spend time making, watching and talking about film with their local film community and will also attend festivals or *komunitas film* meetings (Temu Komnitas Film Indonesia, TKFI), where *komunitas film* from different places gather and meet. ‘There are regular, local film screenings on university campuses, at cafés, or at other improvisational cinemas, where films from the local as well as other communities are screened and on a yearly or bi-yearly basis, depending on funding and manpower, there are film festivals, hosted by the local film communities in their respective cities that take place over several days. At these festivals, film communities from different places meet, present their works, engage in dialogues surrounding the issues depicted in the films, and also reflect on the current state and future of *komunitas film* (how to get funding, how to approach screening spaces, how to facilitate knowledge transfer)’ (Engchuan 2021b, 225). Many film communities are attached to university campuses, high schools or vocational schools. Some of these are funded by the Pusat Pengembangan Perfilman (Pusbangfilm, Indonesian Film Development Board). ‘Those who participate in *komunitas film* come from a variety of geographical, social, and economic backgrounds. The people who watch and screen films are not only urban middle-class Jakartans; they are high-school students from different social classes, who have not even decided what they want to do with their lives. They are university students, not just film students; some of them will become doctors, engineers, or politicians. They are village people or farmers, who use film as a means to communicate, or are simply interested in watching a film. Komunitas film are not mainstream in quantitative terms, but their constituents represent many layers of society (see also Kurnia 2018, 301). The fact that to many, *komunitas film* is a liminal space—something they do during their university years—further increases its impact, as there are a lot of people who float through this space temporarily. And these experiences will reverberate, even when the people themselves are no longer part of it’ (Engchuan 2020, 30).

Many have described the film communities to me as a kind of family and some of the communities own homes as gathering spaces, where people can sleep, eat and hang out. The social aspect of hanging out together is important. These social spaces endured changes in screening culture though the introduction of television, home video and the internet. The activities of *komunitas film* pivot mostly around offline gatherings, rather than online screening practices. The films screened within the *komunitas film* environment were not

widely available for viewing outside of these spaces. Access to the films within *komunitas film* is mostly based on personal relations and presence in its social spaces and access depends on a pre-existing relationship with the filmmaker and a general awareness of the works.

The short films produced and screened in the *komunitas film* environment refuse genre categorization for their sheer variety of topics, styles and approaches. The only common denominator is that most of the films pivot in one way or another around situated socio-environmental issues. An Indonesian film activist once told me: ‘if you want to understand Indonesia you have to watch short films’ (Engchuan 2020, 12). In Indonesian film communities, films are deeply rooted in the social experience of the filmmakers and made to trigger discussions on local social issues during the screening events. Cinematic practice becomes a means to navigate, negotiate and act upon social, political, and religious configurations. The films provide a very particular view on situated local phenomenons, through the interpretive lens of the filmmakers. These films, as situated knowledges (Haraway 1988), are precious because they constitute, analytically, something very desirable: a shift in power in terms of power to define the situation from the outside researcher to the ‘researched’ communities themselves who ‘are able to combine social content and their sharp observations, thus wrapping them in techniques that feel just right’ (Edwin 2019, 152). When making films, the filmmakers research, analyze and highlight experiences, interpret effects and speculate on solutions. Conceiving of these films as ‘data’ is a gesture of making and holding space for the analytical and interpretive labour of the filmmakers and for local perspectives to guide the analysis of situated phenomenon.

3. Theoretical foundations: overcoming the ‘object’ of research

Thinking about the manifold activities described in Chapter 2 on a conceptual level, drawing on empirical observations and relational ontologies (Whitehead 1978; Simondon 1992; Margulis 1998; Massumi 2002; Desmond 2014; Tsing 2015) as well as scholarship that re-defines technology as a relation (Stiegler 1998, Massumi 2009; Galoppe 2011; Simondon 2013, 2017; Hui 2016; Lindberg 2019) and new-materialist positions that conceive of agency as distributed rather than located in an individual human (Bennett 2001, 2010; Barad 2003, 2007) this cumulative dissertation looks at the practices of *komunitas film* as situated (Haraway 1988) assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Nail 2007; Tsing 2015).

On an observational level the core finding of this research, which fundamentally and already determined the framing of the research ‘object’ was that the cinematic practices of *komunitas film*, their making, screening and discussing films in self-created spaces constitutes a mode of situated, collective knowledge production, which I refer to as cinematic epistemologies. An empirical perspective reveals that the spaces and processes of *komunitas film* only made sense in relation. Cinematic practices create both cinematic (short films) and social spaces (production and screening and discussion events) and these have to be thought of as co-constitutive. The cinematic and social spaces together become placeholders for conversations on local social issues that would not be possible elsewhere. The film becomes a vessel to materialize an argument and create the spaces to disseminate it. Cinematic practice is ‘a socio-technical process of reflecting on social reality through the medium of film by constructing a cinematic reality’ (see also Engchuan 2020, 22).

Based on this empirical observation of the co-constitutive nature of cinematic and social spaces, I conceptually conceive of cinematic practices as processes of human-technology-environment relations: ‘the logic of genesis is one of radical related-ness’ (Engchuan 2020, 6). This ontological primacy of the relation (Whitehead 1978; Simondon 1992; Margulis 1998; Massumi 2002; Desmond 2014; Tsing 2015) was a way of understanding and framing life among my collaborators as well. The notion of togetherness (*kebersamaan*), akin to being in relation, interdependency and a relational subjectivity, became a central theoretical framework in my thinking. It is a response to my encounters and exchanges with film communities in

Indonesia and an attempt of accommodating the ontological assumptions of the people I have been working with, not only as a research finding but also and already in the construction of my theoretical and conceptual framework.

Komunitas film as assemblage

This analysis is re-opening the question of what a film can be analytically and scrutinizes it as a theoretical category. Theoretically, I conceive of a film text as a complex network of numerous constituents. This involves the obvious candidates (writer, director, editor, producer, camera, money, shaman, spirits, laws) as well as ever-present absences that are harder to pinpoint (values, ideologies, experiences, dreams, desires, hopes, histories of colonialism, neoliberalism, late capitalism). These are non-exhaustive lists and only the tip of the iceberg. A film text comes into being through the relations among all these elements (see also Lam 2015), it is the culmination of a set of complex relational processes, simultaneously ‘the endpoint of a successful actor-network’ (Lam 2015, 71) of film production and the starting point of its dissemination, as ‘a site and space for critical analysis, inquiry and engagement’ (Harvey 2007, 263) in the social space of the screening at its points of public enunciation (see Engchuan 2021b, 225-26; Engchuan 2020, 28-29). In this doctoral thesis, a film is conceptualized not as a technological object but a set of relations, material and semiotic. This way of conceiving of technology is in line with philosophers who theorized technology from a relational perspective, rather than as an artifact or a tool, arguing that the nature of the relationship between humans and technics is not instrumental but what Galoppe (2011) refers to as ‘constitutive technicity’ (Stiegler 1998; Massumi 2009; Simondon 2013, 2017; Hui 2016; Lindberg 2019).

Scrutinizing the film as an analytical category I propose that the smallest unit of analysis is not the filmmaker, or the film, but the assemblage as an ‘open-ended gathering’ (Tsing 2015, 22-23) among beings from different species. The assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Nail 2007) or the actor-network (Law 1992; Law & Mol 2002; Latour 2007) perspective — that despite many differences in the details assume an ontological primacy of the relation — insinuates a shift in analytical focus towards all that precedes and goes beyond a particular film text, but which is constitutive of its genesis and evolution. Through and with the assemblage, I am moving the analytical lens from the object of film itself towards the wider

spatial configurations and social significance of cinematic practice, from object towards processes, from point towards webs. The assemblage conceives of the context as operational. Conceiving of ‘film as assemblage allows everyone and everything to be constitutive as it overcomes the hierarchical distinctions between the subject and the object, the process and the thing’ (Engchuan 2021c, 43). What applies on the level of one particular film also applies at the level of *komunitas film*, which then can be thought of as a meta-assemblage of assemblages of cinematic practices and their social and cinematic spaces over time and space. Consequently, my research is grounded in a very particular theoretical assumption ‘*komunitas film* is not an entity but a relational configuration, a fluid assemblage of relational processes that territorialize and intersect in particular spaces (cinematic and social)’ (Engchuan 2021b, 225).¹⁰

The agency of assemblages

A processual-relational assemblage perspective holds analytical space for a more complex consideration of the notion of agency in the context of cinematic practices in a non-binary way: not as an inherent ‘capacity localized in a human body or in a collective produced (only) by human efforts’ (Bennett 2010, 23) influenced by some kind of external ‘structure’ which ‘can act only negatively, as a constraint on human agency, or passively, as an enabling background or context for it’ (Bennett 2010, 29) but as ‘collective enunciation’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1985, 84) ‘constantly remade and reconfigured’ (Engchuan 2020, 222-23) in relations. This reframes the question of agency away from the individual towards the collective, which includes the more-than-human (see also new materialist positions on agency such as Bennett 2001, 2010 and Barad 2003, 2007). Agentive capacity is not only in the domain of human intent but ‘differentially distributed’ (Bennett 2010, 9) across a wide range of actants in the assemblage; ‘enactment, not something that someone or something has’ (Barad 2007, 178).

In my research, the more-than-human often became an actant, ‘a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient

¹⁰ The notion of territorialization is most commonly used in the context of the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1980), but other scholars have operationalized the notion in other contexts, mostly in relation to the nation. For a good overview please refer to Brighenti 2010. In my analysis of *komunitas film*, I am thinking with the notion of territorialization to conceptualize ‘the interplay between physical space and the organization of relations and functions that comes along with it, within and throughout a territory’ (Brighenti 2010, 59). This allows me to think about the social and cinematic spaces that are created within the *komunitas film* ecosystem: the film screenings, the festivals, the film productions, as well as the films themselves as ‘an act or practice rather than an object or physical space’ (Brighenti 2010, 53).

coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events' (Bennett 2010, viii referring to Latour). In the examples under discussion, agency, conceived of as 'a confederation of human and nonhuman elements' (Bennett 2010, 21), 'extrudes from multiple sites or many loci'(Bennett 2010, 28): In 'A Political Dance in the Rain' I explore the constitutive role of religion and spirituality within the process of film production, not as an abstract belief or ideality, but as a concrete actant. In 'Landscape of Possibility', 'the state is not something that the film encounters as an entity; it breathes through its very being' (Engchuan 2021b, 230). The state is therefore constitutive of the film assemblage, rather than 'an outside actor that steps in through censorship at a time when the film is already finished' (Engchuan 2021b, 230). In 'Situated Assemblages', the Pustaka, a book with ancient wisdoms of the Batak, now in the collection of a museum in the Netherlands, became an actant in a series of processes unfolding around the contemporary relevance of indigenous knowledges. In 'Attuning to the Whisperings' I elaborate how using the title SEORANG KAMBING (A GOAT) (seorang is a linguistic qualifier used for humans in the Indonesian language and kambing is a goat) the filmmaker makes a comment on the agencies of the more-than-human. In SEORANG KAMBING (A GOAT), life is steered by more-than-human powers, water scarcity, goats and an ominous tiger become constitutive actants of how life unfolds in the on-screen world. The empirical part of the film analysis reveals the constitutive character of more-than-human agents in the wider assemblage of cinematic epistemologies already off-screen. In SAPU ANGIN (WINDSWEPT), the pigeon Sruntul is credited as one of the main collaborators of the film, 'Sruntul, the pigeon becomes a cultural producer' (Engchuan 2021c, 41) and 'an analysis of Sapu Angin renders inapplicable the assumption that cinematic practice is a human-centered process, something done by and for humans' (Engchuan 2021c, 41).

All these examples hint at the multitude of more-than-human actants involved in the cinematic assemblage and illustrate the conceptual premise of this research — film as multi-species assemblage. Cinematic practices of making, screening and discussing film are understood as relational, socio-technical processes of collective agency. Thinking with a multitude of more-than-human agencies within the assemblage of filmmaking aims towards mapping an analytical terrain that de-centers the human to think from.

Conceiving of something as assemblage is acknowledging the overwhelming and ever-changing fluidity of social phenomenon and already implies the impossibility of analytical or descriptive capture within a positivist account. The notion of the assemblage and the actor network in my practice does not operate as an ‘explanatory category for empirical realities’ (Quinlan 2012, 2), it is to be understood as ‘a method and not a theory’ (Latour 1999, 20), something akin to ‘a set of sensibilities, a disposition, or an attitude—rather than a rigid framework’ (Baiocchi, Graizbord, and Rodríguez-Muñiz 2013, 324). The point of this research is not to define what film komunitas *is* or to work towards a *capture* of all the constitutive actants of a particular film assemblage. Rather, this doctoral dissertation thinks with the cinematic assemblage and its multitude of constituents as entry points into thought processes on the notion of collectivity, its roles, modes and currencies, the affordances of cinematic languages and the collective agency of the cinematic assemblage.

4. Overarching research questions

This dissertation is interested in the workings of the film communities, as well as in the films and their specific affordances, to provide unique perspectives on situated local phenomenon. In order to make a statement with regard to the overall research question: ‘what are the conditions, modalities, affordances and effects of cinematic epistemologies?’ this doctoral dissertation, in and across the articles, discusses the following related questions:

1. CONDITIONS AND MODALITIES: Why and how do cinematic epistemologies produce and socialize knowledges?
2. AFFORDANCES: What are the affordances of cinematic languages vis-à-vis other, for example scientific or other hegemonic discourses, to negotiate situated social issues?
3. EFFECTS: How can we conceive of the collective agency of cinematic epistemologies — both within the communities themselves and within the society they are a part of?

Over the course of the research other, related sub-questions emerged in conversation with my collaborators, those that I could not even have imagined before. These questions and fields of inquiry were accommodated as part of the methodological adaptations (Chapter 6).

The answers, and the central finding at the root of this research, pivots around the notion of togetherness (*kebersamaan*), akin to being in relation, interdependency and a relational subjectivity. In essence, this is a thesis on how cinematic practices come from togetherness, are performed in togetherness and aim at cultivating togetherness. Therefore, this dissertation conceptualizes and explores togetherness, its constituents, moral grammar, actualization, instituting and cultivation — through the cinematic practices of the *komunitas film* assemblage.

5. State of the art and positioning in the fields of research

At the intersection of film, collectivity and knowledge practices, this is a research into the cinematic practices of community filmmakers in Indonesia as well as a theoretical contemplation on the social-transformative potential of cinematic epistemologies. This is not an established field of research and there is no template for this kind of investigation but there are neighboring fields of research that this work is grounded in and relating to. In the following, I aim to not only summarize the existing research but also address how the research is positioned ontologically, ethically and politically vis-à-vis these existing debates.

5.1 Film in Indonesia

The seminal works on Indonesian cinema during the New Order (Heider 1991; Said 1991; Sen 1995) discuss cinema from the perspective of what it represents and reflects in terms of Indonesian culture, and how it is embedded in, and shaped by, commercial and state powers. There are only very few publications on non-commercial experimental cinema, most of them written by members of the community, like experimental filmmaker Prakosa (2001, 2005) and Kusurmayati (2013). For the post reformation period, as discussed by Paramaditha (2017) in a review on writings on Indonesian Cinema, there is a growing body of research on Indonesian cinema, which is found not just in academic publications. *Cinema Poetica* and *Jurnal Footage* (published by Forum Lenteng), for example, are online publications that publish sophisticated analyses on film in Indonesia without institutional affiliation. Later works look at Indonesian cinema from different angles, grasping its role in the negotiating, contesting and shaping of what it means to be Indonesian (Barker 2011; Paramaditha 2014; Michalik 2015; Ruppin 2016; Hanan 2017 to mention only a few). Others, including (Izharuddin 2016) have looked into ‘Gender and Islam in Indonesian Cinema’. In an environment where there is more freedom of expression, the agency of filmmakers and media producers takes centre stage in research. Several studies have engaged with queer films, looking at representation (Murtagh 2013), making and screening (Coppens 2012), and the politics of screening practices (Paramaditha 2018). There is no established field of research on environmental film specifically from Indonesia, but within the burgeoning field of the environmental humanities, there is an interest in Southeast Asian artist film (Chulphongsathorn and Lovatt 2022), and in

particular one contribution on ‘cinematic animism’ (Ingawanij 2022), which tends to the agencies of the more-than-human in cinematic works.

My research looks into a very particular section of cinema in Indonesia, which is short film and community filmmaking. This has only sporadically been discussed in academic discourse, mostly by film practitioners who documented their practices (Prakosa 2001, 2005; Jayasrana 2007, 2015; Ratna 2007; Kunci Cultural Studies Center and EngageMedia 2009; Imanjaya 2020). An outstanding exception is Kurnia’s work on the Cinema Lovers Community (CLC) Purbalingga, which has ‘contribut[ed] to the revitalization and the redefinition of local independent filmmaking in Indonesia’ (Kurnia 2018, 298), challenging (in terms of both filmmaking style and representations) Jakarta-based independent filmmaking as well as the 2021 edited volume ‘A Short Film Discussion, Candra Aditya’s *Dewi Pulang*’ on the practices of independent film communities in Indonesia, to which I contributed ‘Landscape of Possibility’.¹¹

All of these works do an excellent job contextualizing the films against broader historical, political, religious and/or gender backgrounds, but they do stay within the realm of representation. Often, the method used is textual analysis and cultural interpretation. Within such film studies approaches, the film has never been explicitly scrutinized as a theoretical category. The assemblage perspective, that forms the conceptual theoretical foundation of the series of works brought together and discussed here differs from such content based approaches in film studies, where film as a finished and isolated product is analyzed as a text with a focus on content. Taking a processual-relational assemblage perspective (including the more-than-human) in the study of film is not how many others have studied film in Indonesia. It is also not how film is mostly thought of as a category of the common vernacular, in film critiques and reviews, such as for example ‘Review, the Science of Fictions’ by Balaga (2019). Such writings about film tend to depart from a finished film as the object of analysis, focus in detail on the content of the film and develop arguments in reference to film histories and formal style conventions.¹² Methodologically, the situated context is often generalized

¹¹ Some parts of this literature review, which has been slightly adapted, are from Engchuan 2020: 10,11.

¹² I do not mean to imply that there is anything wrong with these approaches, they do make important contributions towards a more complex understanding of films. However, taking for example the value of ‘production quality’ as a seemingly neutral category, halts many films from the Global South from entering into spaces of international appreciation and commercial dissemination. Such ongoing reproductions of injustices are made possible precisely because one is looking only at the film as a product and blinds out the entanglements of colonial histories and realities. The same applies for films that do not follow a conventional established Western narrative. While these films are celebrated in the film festival and independent circuit, the filmmakers struggle to make a sustainable living with their practice.

and assumed rather than collaboratively explored with those involved in the making of the film. Such occasional references to the context, often operate with generalized assumptions about the socio-political context rather than concrete accounts from the actor network of film production of a particular film. Almost like the object of analysis is separated from its roots of becoming in an analytical act of de-tachment. Focusing on ‘the assumption of the director as the individual auteur whose intent translates into a work reduces a multitude of constitutive actants to a single subject — the artist, producing an object — the film. This assumption crumbles as soon as one looks at the processes of production’ (see also Engchuan 2021b, 42).¹³

In the field of production studies, in other national contexts, there is research using the actor network as an analytical framework in writing and thinking about film, such as for example Lam (2014) who in her book entitled *Making Crime Television* employs actor-network theory in order to examine the ‘material conditions under which’ (Lam 2014: 4) ideas and meanings related to crime are formed. The argument developed is based on ethnographic and interview data. On a methodological and theoretical level, this book likewise argues for moving beyond ‘a content analysis that treats the representation as a final product’ (Lam 2014, i) towards looking at televised representations of crime ‘as the result of a particular assemblage of logics, people, creative ideas, commercial interests, legal requirements, and broadcasting networks’ (Lam 2014, i). Or Amit S Rai’s book *Untimely Bollywood* (2010) likewise moves beyond formalist approaches toward film analysis and conceptualizing media as representational texts, lending themselves to interpretative arguments on subjectivities, arguments *speaking about* those that are represented. In a shift ‘from representation towards diagram’ (Rai 2010, 13) the book looks at contemporary Bollywood practices as media assemblages ‘(contagious and continuous multiplicities, or ecologies of matter, media, and sensation)’ (Rai 2010, 8) in India and the diaspora. In doing so, the author draws on ‘a variety of sources in feminist and queer philosophy, the physical and biological sciences, and biopolitical cultural criticism’ (Rai 2010, 6). There is also an assemblage analysis of graffiti art in Yogyakarta, analytically positioning the street artist within an assemblage and conceiving of street art practices as forms of ‘collective individualism’ (Mansfield 2021).

¹³ Latour spoke of an actant as ‘something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies no special motivation of human individual actors, nor of humans in general’ (Latour 1996: 7).

There are considerable differences between actor-network and assemblage approaches and this is not the space to go into the depths of these discussions. What matters for the questions at stake in this writing is what unites them, namely their desire to make room for the agentic capacities and entanglements of human and more-than-human entities in processes of media production and their focus on process rather than outcome, on practices rather than content and the ontological foregrounding of the relation, away from representational concerns.

5.2 Collective practices: the Indonesian notion of *gotong royong*

Researching *komunitas film* with a processual-relational assemblage perspective, the question of collectivity became a central concern of this research. Collectivity and ‘Indonesian’s associational spirit and organisational tendency’ (Lengauer 2021, 311) has become a topic of many works of research on Indonesia (see also Aspinall 2018, Panimbang 2021) and researching ‘collectivity’ in a locale of the Global South runs danger of falling into the trap of reinforcing racist and essentialist stereotypes about Asian Societies such as for example in Hofstede’s classification of cultures into simplistic and generalizing binary categories. To counter this, rather than arriving at generalizing statements about Indonesian society as an assumed whole, Lengauer looks at ‘komunitas perdamaian, literally peace communities’ (Lengauer 2021, 309) in Bandung as modes of social organization that ‘capitalize on peer solidarity, creativity or friendship’ (Lengauer 2021, 309). Similar to *komunitas film* these spaces, made by and for the communities, offer alternatives to the top-down bureaucratized and institutionalized spaces of mass media and established organizations, for ‘young urbanites who emphasise notions of caring (*peduli*) and sharing (*berbagi*)’ (Lengauer 2021, 311). Similarly, *komunitas film* emerged as an alternative space of sociality to the bureaucratized film associations of the New Order regime.

Komunitas film should not be taken for granted as an existing empirical unit and is perhaps better described as a relational process and a mode of collectivity. Therefore, rather than taking the existence of *komunitas film* as a given due to a ‘cultural tendency’ or locating explanations in character traits of individuals, my work is interested in the relational becomings and the moral and social grammars by which this kind of collective sociality is organized.

During conversations on collective practices the notion of *gotong royong* (often translated as mutual support or mutual collaboration) came up many times. Even though I never planned to research *gotong royong* in Indonesia, through my empirical work, this notion became a central analytical entry point into questions of collective practices and the moral grammar of human and environment relations during my research. Situating the term *gotong royong* in the existing literature, one can learn that *gotong royong* has a long and complex trajectory, ‘used, indeed exploited, by different regimes’ (Hanan 2017, 13) ‘the term corresponds to genuinely indigenous notions of moral obligation and generalized reciprocity, but it has been reworked by the state to become a cultural-ideological instrument for the mobilization of village labor’ (Bowen 1986, 256). During the Dutch colonial occupation, Johannes, Count van den Bosch who was the governor of the Dutch East Indies from 1830-33, appropriated the situated notion of *gotong royong* to justify forced labour to produce export crops to help the Netherlands on the brink of financial collapse due to ongoing wars in the colonies. *Tanam paksa* (forced planting) was framed as ‘a policy package based on local wisdom’ (Santosa 2016, np). During the Japanese occupation ‘officials often substituted the expression *gotong-royong* for the Japanese term for corvée labor, *kinrō hōshi*’ (Mark 2018, 360; see also Slikkerver 2019, 309). The first Indonesian president after independence, Sukarno moved *gotong royong* to a national-ideological level in an effort to foster the unification of thousands of islands, languages and practices under the umbrella of the newly independent nation (Bowen 1986, 551). The second president, Suharto, instrumentalized *gotong royong* for the mobilization of village intelligence systems and obligatory village development projects (Bowen 1986, 553; Hanan 2017, 128). Capturing the various historical instantiations of *gotong royong*, scholars have categorized *gotong royong* under different types of support and collaboration. Indonesian anthropologist Koentjaraningrat who was part of the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project and undertook fieldwork in Central Java in 1958 and 1959 differentiated between spontaneous help and mutual assistance. Bowen delineated a third type of *gotong royong* ‘labour which is mobilised on the basis of political status or subordination’ (Bowen 1986, 548). *Gotong royong* is often described as something that is imposed upon or done by villagers who engage in a ‘joint bearing of burdens’ (Geertz 1983, 211).

These scholarly representations are in stark contrast to the way I encountered this notion during my fieldwork with contemporary Indonesian film collectives. The stories of corvée labour during colonial times and village intelligence systems under Suharto, albeit historical facts, are not the stories that contemporary practitioners of *gotong royong* are telling. When *gotong royong* was introduced to me it was characterized as something that can be enjoyed. *Gotong royong* is a notion that the people I spoke to take tremendous pride in as being something very uniquely Indonesian that has always been part of Indonesian society. Hafiz from Forum Lenteng told me that it is ‘internalized in our culture for hundreds of years’ (Personal conversation, August 23, 2019) and during a public presentation at the Arkipel Forum Festival 2018 Otty, one of the founders of the art collective Forum Lenteng remarked that ‘helping one another is part of our tradition’. Their framing of *gotong royong* in a much more positive light is found in various publications by practitioners themselves, such as a collection of essays on collectivity entitled *Things we do together: the post-reader* (2020), the publication resulting from an exhibition-meeting with the title *Gotong Royong. Things We Do Together* at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw (2017/2018), as well as *Also-space, from hot to something else: how Indonesian art initiatives have reinvented networking* (Vanhoe 2016) ‘on the Jakarta-based artists’ initiative ruangrupa, [and] of how Indonesian artists organise and manifest themselves individually as well as collectively’ (Vanhoe 2016) and an essay entitled *The democratization of knowledge and curiosity through gotong-royong art* by Grace Samboh (2014).

Adding to existing scholarship that argues that ‘conceptions of communal labour have a long and complicated genealogy, starting from a romanticized rural past, through political mobilization and forced labour’ (Engchuan 2021a, 41), this doctoral dissertation is situated in the context of *komunitas film*. Eventually, this initial research interest led me away from a close fixation on the term *gotong royong* itself towards the spaces where it unfolds, its rituals and ontological groundings. I came to understand *gotong royong* and its contemporary expression in community filmmaking practices and discourse not as a symptom in and of itself, but as symptomatic of a relational subjectivity, interdependency and a radical recognition of togetherness.

5.3 Knowledge practices

The science of Science and the myth of the fact

Encountered as objects, the films that this dissertation engages with would normally not be taken seriously, would always be ‘art’, ‘experimental’, ‘amateur’ but never on the same hierarchical level with scientific ‘knowledge’ or ‘data’ to be acted upon in political decision making or funding allocations. The reason why these films would run into problems trying to enter the domain of ‘real’ or ‘scientific’ knowledge is due to an artificially imposed yet highly productive hierarchy that makes encounters between different knowledge system unequal, that makes us grasp one thing as ‘knowledge’ and the other as ‘tradition’, one as ‘culture’ and the other as ‘science’. In order to argue for the value and validity of other knowledges, this dissertation builds on studies and critiques of Science with a capital S (as rooted in evidence) and of the valuation of facts (allegedly objective and neutral) upon which the modern world is built. Both have been debunked as highly contestable. I would like to believe that it is now a common ground that scientific knowledge is a social construction and that ‘there is a lot of fiction involved in creating and upholding the facts’ (Wark 2020). Donna Haraway’s influential essay *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective* (1988) debunks the alleged ‘objectivity of science’ not only as constructed and made but also as ‘the un-marked positions of Man and White’ (Haraway 1988, 581 see also Rogowska-Stangret 2018), hinting to the colonial dimensions of modern Science.¹⁴ The social construction of science was interrogated by many (see for example Latour & Woolgar 1979; Knorr-Cetina 1980, 1995; Zenzen and Restivo 1982; Star 1983; Traweek 1992) who by looking closely came to the conclusion that there was no ‘rationality’ in any method or lab to be found.¹⁵ Going to the labs these researchers found that ‘all knowledge, including “scientific facts”, is indexical, situational, contextual, and opportunistic’ (Restivo 1988, 215). Santos refers to the killing of knowledge systems as epistemicide (Santos 2016, 2018), a process of exclusion that creates the hierarchical dominance of the modern scientific ‘fact’. Facts are not strong in-and-of themselves because of some inherent quality. They need their supportive networks of institutions and practices that make and shape

¹⁴ She often mentions thinkers like Karen Barad, Nancy Hartsock, Sandra Harding, Patricia Hill Collins and Dorothy Smith, who were working on Feminist Standpoint Theory to channel their concerns into as her companions in thinking to say that knowledge is not neutral but entrenched in gendered power relations.

¹⁵ Traweek investigated the world of particle physicists, Star looked into neuroscience research, Latour’s argument is grounded in two years of ethnographic research in the laboratory of the biologist Roger Guillemin at the Salk Institute in San Diego, California in 1975. The British sociologist of science Steve Woolgar found a liking in his ideas and in 1979 the two published ‘Laboratory Life: the construction of scientific facts’ and it has become one of the most cited works of the emerging field of science and technology studies (STS).

them and only exist in relation with their producing and legitimizing apparatuses. Coming back to the films discussed in this doctoral dissertation, the problem is not to be located in the nature of this or that knowledge, as something that exists as a disentangled entity or object, but in the legitimizing and world making apparatus that dismisses some and makes others real.

Modern Science acquired an almost naturalized hegemonic position because of its entanglements with power, its monetary and military support structures and because with a detached object perspective, these things can be easily ‘black-boxed’ (Latour 1999).¹⁶ Decolonial thinkers have pushed for an acknowledgement of all these entanglements and point to the ongoing socio-political condition of coloniality (Quijano 2000; Mignolo 2011, 2017; Grosfoguel 2013; Escobar 2015; Cupples & Grosfoguel 2018; Yusoff 2018). Moving beyond a detached knowledge object perspective and looking into their wider entanglements bears a decolonial gesture and the topic of inquiry then becomes relational processes, epistemic modes and conventions, cinematic epistemologies— rather than only films and the topics they allegedly represent.

Fujimura made an important point on ‘issues of authority and control’ in knowledge production: ‘what kind of science should be practiced, and who gets to define it?’ (1998, 347). This question is still relevant today. What is this space, where we arrive at consensus over stories, label them as ‘fact’ or ‘knowledge’ or ‘wisdom’ or ‘myth’? Where is it and what can it be? How can we conceive of cinematic epistemologies as knowledge practices? This thesis and the articles suggest that an assemblage perspective unveils their value as situated knowledges. Looking at films not only from a detached ‘object’ perspective but from an assemblage viewpoint is motivated by a decolonial desire. Framing of cinematic practices as cinematic epistemologies reminiscent of the epistemic assemblage, an ‘amalgam of places, bodies, voices, skills, practices, technical devices, theories, social strategies and collective work that together constitute technoscientific knowledge/ practices’ (Turnbull 2000, 43-44) is a gesture to valorize and situate the cinematic and social spaces of *komunitas film* within larger epistemological processes and knowledge ecosystems, not as fiction, experimental art

¹⁶ The term is used by Bruno Latour to talk about ‘a process that makes the joint production of actors and artifacts entirely opaque’ (1999, 183) making it ‘difficult to measure, with any precision, the mediating role of techniques’ (1999, 183). This interest in ‘the mediating role of techniques’ (1999, 183) is what drives me in my study of film.

but as situated knowledges (Haraway 1988) and valuable entry points into situated social and environmental issues.

Towards an ethical and political framing: cinematic practices in Indonesia as epistemologies of the South

In the interest of epistemic justice, one can argue for a re-valuation of the violent and dangerous prejudices against all things too easily dismissed as ‘imagined’, ‘fiction’, not making ‘sense’ or ‘subjective’. Or as Santos put it the ‘identification, reconstruction, and validation of nonscientific, artisanal knowledges emerging from or utilized in struggles against domination’ (Santos 2018, 108). Santos calls this project epistemologies of the South. The epistemologies of the South are described by Santos as ‘a set of inquiries into the construction and validation of knowledge born in struggle, of ways of knowing developed by social groups as part of their resistance against the systematic injustices and oppressions caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy’ (Santos 2016, x).¹⁷ What the epistemologies of the South argue for is not the opposite of modern Science or its replacement. This is decidedly a trap that it seeks to avoid. The desire is to overcome the binary, ‘not to erase the differences between North and South, but rather to erase the power hierarchies inhabiting them’ (Santos 2018, 7). The ideal space aspired here is one where alterity can be endured and difference is valued. A space where not one person has Science and the other one ‘culture’ or ‘tradition’, a non-hierarchical space of pluriversality (Escobar 2018), a mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa 2012). Thinking with the epistemologies of the South, does not demand a complete dismissal of scientific knowledges or a complete turning our backs to the scientific community but rather needs us to invest in the ‘production of scientific knowledge geared to engage with other kinds of knowledges’ (Santos 2018: 108). As an ideality, epistemologies of the South is placeholder for the many projects committed to epistemic decolonization to accomplish social justice. An ideality is something that is ‘not yet’ but still can be felt as a ‘warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality’ (Muñoz 2009, 1). It is the imperative, desire and promise of the epistemologies of the South to ‘valorize and maximize their transformative potential’ (Santos 2016, 42) a promise that is perhaps in tune with Stengers ‘taking care of the possible’ (Bordelau 2011 see also Conley

¹⁷ Also refer to Santos (2018).

2016), and ‘a commitment to take care of futures yet unknown, but that anthropologists should be careful to keep open’ (Duclos & Criado 2020, 19).

The imperative, desire and promises of the epistemologies of the South did strike many chords with my desires and research. This is exactly what the people I am so lucky to be working with and unlearning from are doing: performative, non-scientific, criticism that moves beyond mere critique. Even if they don’t operate literally under that banner, the cinematic practices in film communities in Indonesia are in tune with the imperatives, desires and promises of the epistemologies of the South. While there is already a comprehensive body of research on the workings and operations of Science, this research looks at modes of knowledge practices outside of the official scientific system, those modes of knowing that have been at the lower end of this artificially imposed hierarchy based on the false myth of the fact: the cinematic epistemologies of film communities in Indonesia. These are concrete empirical examples of practices that already perform the gesture that decolonial critics and the epistemologies of the South argue for discursively. Here the ideality, of moving towards criticism and of building a pluriverse of knowledge practices is already a reality. I argue that these practices constitute latent possibilities that are embryonically present as other and more desirable ways of being in the world.

6. Overarching discussion of methodology

In the following overarching discussion of methodology, the conceptual assumptions, as well as decolonial ethical and political considerations that influenced and shaped the methodological toolkit of this doctoral dissertation, will be discussed.

This research and analysis draws on empirical and theoretical work with community filmmakers in Indonesia, where I was based for several stays between November 2017 and December 2019, as well as subsequent engagements with my collaborators both on- and offline. The time spend with my research collaborators evolved more and more away from being a method for gathering data to represent and instead became a space to ‘study with people, not to make studies of them’ (Ingold 2017). My research became a hermeneutic process, explicitly guided by new insights that came up during these analytical and interpretative encounters. Knowing here was not something out there, to be analytically

grasped, but a process of dialogical engagement.¹⁸ Methodologically, I relied on a two phase process: the first was a period of immersion involving participant observation as a way of learning (Ingold 2017), semi-structured interviews and in-depth conversations as well as *nongkrong*, akin to 'deep hanging out' (Clifford 1997; Rosaldo 1994) and friendship as method (Tillmann-Healy 2003, Davis 2011).¹⁹ As a response to this initial divergent process I decided for *gotong royong* as a key analytical entry point into questions of collective practices and I entered the second convergent phase, with specific and precise field of interest and questions. The methods involved during the second phase were ethnographically informed film analysis as well as engaging in spaces of *thinking nearby* for dialogical knowledge production. The methods employed during the second phase were developed by myself, as a response to the particular research situation and inspired by a decolonial ethics of *speaking nearby* (Minh-ha 1982) and non-tangential Anthropology (Ingold 2017).

6.1 Immersion phase

During my empirical work I spent a lot of time with community filmmakers, mostly on the island of Java, where I was based between Jakarta and Yogyakarta. Other important places in my 'multi-sited' (Marcus 1995) research were: Solo, Bandung, Malang, Purbalinga, Sukabumi and Bali. After having seen the first short films produced within and for the film communities and being utterly impressed with the kinds of things I learned through them I got interested in the spaces where these films were made and screened. Over the next months I went to a lot of screenings and talked to producers, actors, directors, film festival and community organizers. I went to various community organized film festivals in Indonesia, mostly on the island of Java as these were the places where film communities from different places would meet, present their films, discuss them and also reflect on the practicalities

¹⁸ This is also reflected in the way I frame certain phenomenon in my writing: when I was writing *Dancers in the Rain* I was still speaking of *gotong royong*, while in *Lifepatch* and *Cinematic Epistemologies* I am taking it towards *gotong royong* itself being symptomatic, of a relational subjectivity.

¹⁹ The term 'deep hanging out' is often presented as coined by Clifford Geertz, whose 1998 book review of James Clifford's 1997 'Routes: travel and translation in the late twentieth century' in the New York Book Review was titled 'Deep Hanging Out'. In this writing Clifford Geertz misinterprets James Clifford's usage of the term, suggesting it referred to 'localized, longterm, close-in, vernacular field research' (Geertz 1998). Consulting the original source of the book however it becomes clear that Clifford with 'deep hanging out' was actually referring to 'repeated visiting, collaborative work' (Clifford 1997: 55, 56) positing an **alternative** to the classical fieldwork approach of 'intensive dwelling (the 'tent in the village') (Clifford 1997: 55) that Geertz seeks to defend. In the book, James Clifford (Clifford 1997: 56, 90) mentions Renato Rosaldo as the originator of the term and in an endnote further elaborates: 'Renato Rosaldo, comment at the "Anthropology and 'the Field'" conference, Stanford University, April 18, 1994. The context was a comparison of ethnography by postexotic anthropologists and cultural-studies scholars. What, in the absence of extended co-residence, guarantees interactive "depth"?' In a 1996 article entitled 'Anthropology and/as Travel*' Clifford also credits Renato Rosaldo. This is a long footnote and might seem irrelevant to the point I am making here. However, the fact that this notion is now so often and so uncritically related to Geertz, as if he coined the term, even though he misinterpreted Clifford and Rosaldo's initial usage of the term. Worse even, in doing so Renato Rosaldo, a Chicano Anthropologist Poet, is completely erased from this intellectual debate, even though Clifford was always transparent about crediting him. Bringing Renato Rosaldo (who himself was influenced by Haraway's situated-ness (1988) and Strathern's (1991) partial-ness) back into the conversation is an imperative for me as scholar with decolonial desires.

concerning film communities overall. The festivals became important spaces for me to get introduced to and meet people. My initial encounters were supported by introductions through mutual friends and also by my persistence and awkwardness of showing up at all the events and introducing myself as a researcher. My constant presence at every film community related event gave me the nickname ‘hantu festival’ (festival ghost) — that which haunts all the festival and is always there. Through these initial encounters and connections I arranged semi-structured interviews and in-depth conversations with film practitioners, not only directors but also festival organizers, actors, scriptwriters, editors, sound artists, producers and government officials.

Many of the things I learned from just hanging out for extended periods of time, an activity that is called *nongkrong* (see also Dahl 2016, Mansfield 2021) in Indonesia. The notion of *nongkrong* is something I had to do many times before I felt less uncomfortable with it. Doing fieldwork is often reminiscent of being the new kid in school. Not knowing the rules of the game but desperately trying to fit in. Often when I scheduled interviews people were surprised by my insistence on setting an hour ‘just come by anytime, there is always someone here’. I then made my own schedule and allocated two hours for an interview, which I thought would allow me enough time to do the next one afterwards. I recall one instance when I went to a local production house in Yogyakarta and watched their films and then asked the filmmaker, who was invited to join this conversation, questions afterwards. We were sitting around a table and more and more people joined. Eventually we started to talk about other things. People also left the room and there were times when no one said anything or just played with their phones. It was such a moment of unbearable silence when I went to the other room and grabbed my bag. I felt that I had overstayed my invitation and was ready to leave. On the way out I ran into one of the editors who looked at me in shock ‘are you leaving?’ I intuitively knew that my behavior was not appropriate and mumbled something like ‘oh no I am just...’. I joined the table again and we kept on talking for hours. Came night, we all went on our motorbikes to get food at one of the food stalls and talked more. During these hangouts I learned things I did not ask about but most importantly I gained trust and became part of something. A few weeks later when I went to visit a film festival in Bandung I was not traveling alone and I was part of the WhatsApp group where new meetups were scheduled. From then on I tried not to schedule two things on one day. Most of my scheduled interviews would lead to hours of hanging out and some of them resulted in friendships that I still value

today. *Nongkrong*, just being present, not having a predefined goal in mind but just allowing connections to happen became part of my methodology, as a situated mode of gaining trust and entering into relations. By hanging out a lot I got a good sense of what the conversations were during that time and I developed a common ground with my collaborators that would allow us to dig even deeper in our in-depth conversations. Such methods of ‘repeated visiting, collaborative work’ (Clifford 1997, 55-56) rather than the classical Malinowskan fieldwork situation, where researchers co-habitated in villages, was referred to as deep hanging out by Chicano Anthropologist Poet Renato Rosaldo (see also Clifford 1996, 1997; Walmsley 2018). When I came to Indonesia I already had a basic understanding of the Indonesian language and did a two-week intensive language training with a focus on film vocabulary at the beginning of my fieldwork at Wisma Bahasa in Yogyakarta. After a couple of weeks I was fluent in Bahasa Indonesia. It is important to know however, that in Indonesia there are a lot of local dialects, people in Yogyakarta for example speak Javanese, in Bali, the local language is Balinese. Bahasa Indonesia is spoken by the majority of the population and it is also the language that is spoken at the big film community gatherings since people come from different parts of the country. However Bahasa Indonesia to most of the people I was working with is the second language. Some people I was working with were fluent in English and since it was easier to communicate in English we switched to English. Sometimes I would switch between English and Bahasa Indonesia and sometimes we would speak Indonesian, only. Especially when people were present who do not understand or speak English or when more people were involved.

During all that time I took meticulous notes, on notebooks and on my phone, sometimes rushing to the bathroom to voice-record ideas. It did not always feel appropriate to write down notes or have a recorder, as it changes the situation a lot I had to stretch my memory and handwriting skills to new limits. I mostly took the time to sit down and go through the notes and write them up more clearly in the evenings, often finding myself falling asleep doing so. Especially during the early months, I was definitely overwhelmed working under the assumptions that I have to grasp it all and cannot miss anything. I also did voice recordings during interviews when it seemed appropriate and my counterpart was okay with it as well as video recordings during public and semi-public events. I also took a lot of photos and recorded videos to stimulate my memories. Some of these I have used in my conference and workshop presentations to convey a feeling of the social spaces that the film communities

create and inhabit.

Refining the parameters of the research

Over the course of the fieldwork, my initial broad interests in the film communities became more precise and refined. During the immersive phase of my fieldwork and over many conversations *gotong royong* crystallized as a central analytical concepts that I decided to further investigate. At the end of this immersive phase I had set the parameters for a more refined research project on film communities and the relation to and role of collectivity as a practice. This was a major decisions made by me as a researcher in shaping the direction of the research, since focusing on *gotong royong* would necessarily mean that I could not focus on other things.

Ethical challenges

After the initial phase of empirical work, one of the main challenges I found myself facing in transitioning from researching to writing was related to the multiple and inherent violences of representation (Said 1979, Clifford & Marcus 1986). Writing *about* poses questions of epistemic extractivism (Rivera Cusicanqui 2020) — the mutating but persistent practices of extraction, that started with the removal of physical materials from locales of the South for the consumption and benefits of the global North and ‘extends itself to the production of knowledge’ (Institute for Cultural Inquiry 2021) reproducing ‘the colonial and subordinated condition of the so-called peripheral countries’ (2021). In research projects where the tasks are clearly divided, the labour of analyzing and interpreting social situations are activities that mark the domain of the researcher. Something that is done in isolation, geographically and temporally detached from the places where ‘data’ was collected. Those disciplinary conventions create external researchers who become experts writing *about*, an act of domination, even with the best of intentions. The violence of speaking about is then already built into the form of the process. Who has the right, the power, and institutional affiliation to have their interpretative and analytical labor be legitimized and acknowledged as such? When do I myself become complicit? When and how does my own practice, under the vast umbrella of Anthropology, run danger to become a ‘modern science (...) produced by outsiders studying insiders, the latter conceived of as research objects, probable providers of information but never of knowledge’ (Santos 2018, 150-51)?

6.2 Methodological adaptations

The way I answered these questions for myself was to move towards a practice that attempts to not perform the act of analysis and interpretation in isolated solitude, where no opportunity to respond was given to my research collaborators. Instead, I wanted to create spaces where my collaborators analytical and interpretive labour could be valued as such. In developing my own methodology, I am deeply indebted to filmmaker, writer, literary theorist, composer, and professor Trinh T. Minh-ha and her notion of *speaking nearby*, instead of *speaking for* or *about*. She introduced the term in her film *Reassamblage* (1982) where she declares: ‘I do not intend to speak about; just speak nearby.’ This ethos translated into two methodological adaptations: ethnographically informed film analysis and a return to Indonesia for practices of *thinking nearby*.

Ethnographically informed film analysis

On first sight one might say the films I am thinking with in the articles are not of much use because they are ‘experimental’, ‘subjective’ and ‘weird’. When I watched these films for the first time I could not make much sense of what I was looking at and was left with more questions than answers. Any attempt of sense-making of the film as object, based on my assumptions and speculations felt like an enterprise of tapping in the dark. These films do not make sense in and of themselves. And this has to be true because they are made out of and for a very particular context. They are made by and for the film communities and constitute situated knowledges (Haraway 1988; Nygren 1999; Rogowska-Stangret 2018). This means that the situated context here is not just a backdrop but a constitutive element of the film assemblage. As long as the focus is on the outcome as de-contextualized object only and scientific representation remains the ideal benchmark, the intrinsic value of these films to provide insights into local situations is all too easily dismissed. Because the value is situated, in the relations that make it, it is something one can only grasp in conversation. Ethnographically informed film analysis is a methodology for tracing these relations through concrete stories. Once the focus is on the process and the larger assemblage, conceiving of cinematic epistemologies as an equally legitimate way of meaning making, becomes thinkable.

Ethnographically informed film analysis is the consequential methodology of the assemblage perspective, it takes film not as an object but instead adds the element of situated context through concrete stories. It implies ‘going beyond a discussion of the film as text, or its socio-political backdrop, to consider ethnographic insights into the production of the film’ (Engchuan 2020, 8) ‘by focusing on the micro-processes of film production’ (Engchuan 2020, 8). My analysis was generated over a series of dialogical encounters, embedded in my long-term empirical work with the film communities. When engaging in these specific conversations I already had a nuanced background on the film communities as well as a relationship of trust with the filmmaker, elements that would allow more in-depth conversations to take place. The film, in these conversations, acted as an entry point into conversations on questions of both the specific and concrete genesis of a particular film in the wider assemblage of film communities as well as the situated social and/or environmental issues addressed in the film.

Working with and through the cinematic assemblage towards a particular understanding of situated local phenomenon, rather than dismissing these films as ‘fictional’, ‘experimental’ or not ‘scientific’, is a gesture of acknowledging that these films hold the analytical and interpretive labour of the community filmmakers who themselves are engaged in labor, very similar to that of a researcher (Rabinow et al. 2008), yet with a different way of enunciating their knowledges (Beech, MacIntosh, and MacLean 2010). Accessing local social issues through this avenue requires the researcher to become attuned to and hold space for languages other than merely scientific and fact-based ones, such as sound (Abels 2022), affect (Massumi 2009; Pink 2015) and speculation (Gabrys and Yusoff 2011).

The labor that ethnographically informed film analysis did for me is that it created conceptual dialogical spaces where the researcher and the filmmakers look at a situated phenomenon together through the film assemblage. By taking the film as an entry point into these conversations, not only the topic but also the particular angle of looking at it was already determined by the local collaborators who have made these films before the researcher even entered the field. Thinking of this conversation analogous to a table, rather than inviting ‘locals’ to the table of ongoing conversations within established spaces of modern science, often imposing topics of concern, it is the constituents of the cinematic assemblage, who make the table and also choose the topics of discussion, languages and epistemic conventions

which are brought to the table. Of course, this is not a binary scenario where the power inequalities in the production of academic knowledge are turned upside down: it is still for the researcher to decide, which tables to join and how to respond to these experiences in the process of writing. Ethnographically informed film analysis is an approach to the problem, not a solution. It is a method for researchers to tap into and get enmeshed with already existing situated epistemic projects instead of imposing those from outside. The ideality of *speaking nearby* therefore also applies to *speaking nearby* the film assemblage as situated knowledge. It entails a performative critique concerning questions of power and authority in the legitimization and acknowledgement of knowledges on local social issues. This kind of avenue does not arrive at representational access to lived realities. Ethnographically informed film analysis arrives at a very particular view on situated local issues, one that is determined but not defined by the filmic assemblage. Filmic assemblages here should be understood as analogous with bridges into situated and localized practices of meaning making, not as mirrors reflecting ‘what is’.

Thinking nearby

The tangential nature of many research projects determine a certain kind of hierarchical structure that delegates interpretive and analytical labor to the researcher alone. This is not always an appropriate or ethical form of engagement with collaborators, and it was not in the case of this doctoral thesis. The relationships developed during the first phase of research turned into friendships and when friendship becomes a method (Tillmann-Healy 2003; Davis 2011), there is a responsibility to guide the research into a direction that is mutually beneficial, as the friendship is expected to extend beyond the research project. In such instances of ‘unconditional relationality [...] the relationships formed during research have a life outside of the research and are not solely beholden to the condition that these interactions service the anthropological project’ (Cox 2018, np). An ongoing and future-oriented relationship is guided by a different ethics than a tangential encounter for the sake of data gathering, even if the collection of data is also part of the exchanges that are taking place. During the second phase, I was able to tap into already existing relationships of trust and friendship and engage in more in-depth conversations. This was the foundation for modes of collaboration that would allow for my collaborators to comment upon my initial analysis and interpretations around the key analytical concept of *gotong royong* that I had identified during

the first phase of immersive fieldwork and subsequently played back to the practitioners, to be discussed and theorized in dialogue. The closest name from the methodological toolkit of Anthropology to these encounters is the para-ethnography (Holmes & Marcus E. 2006, 2007; Deeb & Marcus 2011; Islam 2014). A methodological approach that takes into account that collaborators, such as in my case the film practitioners, were ‘producers of cultural analysis rather than sources of raw data’ (Islam 2014, 1). The para-site (Deeb & Marcus 2011) is a space for the researcher and those who are studied to engage in analytical and interpretive conversations.

During the research for this doctoral thesis, some of these para-site encounters were planned in advance and some happened spontaneously. The first para-site was a presentation at the Arkipel Forum Festival, a discursive forum where film practitioners and scholars from Indonesia and internationally engage in a conference-like setting over the course of two days before the beginning of the film festival, where I was invited as a speaker. I felt that this was a wonderful chance and space for me to put forward my argument about the role of *gotong royong* in the film communities with the ‘researched’ present in the audience. It was also here, one year before that I listened to Otty, one of the founders of Forum Lenteng, speaking about collectivity and *gotong royong*. I presented my arguments in a presentation entitled ‘An approximation towards *komunitas film*’ where I honestly admitted my hesitations to speak *about* the film communities as an outsider and proactively asked the audience to support me in this process. Irwan Ahmed, an Indonesian artist, who was in the audience, commented that he feels like *gotong royong* is ‘like the match, that keeps all of these initiatives alive’ (Ahmed, Audience response, August 20, 2019), while others remarked that *gotong royong* often stands in the way of professionalization and the establishment of a ‘real’ film industry in Indonesia. After the presentation Irwan invited me to come pass by the residency that he and his partner Tita Salina are running in the outskirts of Yogyakarta. From here on my research into the notion of *gotong royong* developed a life of its own. A few days later I followed up on this invitation together with Yoyos, one of my other research collaborators, whom I also met at this Forum Festival presentation. I assumed that this would be a no research day only to find out that Tita and Irwan had spend months researching *gotong royong* during a residency at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Poland and presented an exhibition entitled *Gotong royong. Things we do together* in 2018. They showed me a *gotong royong* map, which they created for the exhibition, as a result of their reflection on *gotong royong*. I

was happy to see that we had some overlaps in our analysis and even happier to learn about other aspects that were not on my radar before. We ended up in a long conversation, not only on the notion of *gotong royong* itself, but also on the difficulties of speaking about it to people not familiar with the Indonesian context.

During the same trip I had another pivotal conversation with Yoyos. The conversation with Yoyos was the moment from which on I came to propose that *gotong royong* was symptomatic of a relational subjectivity of togetherness and not a phenomenon in and of itself. We were hanging out (*nongkrong*) in the backyard of my hostel on pillows during the evening hours. We were joined by Daulay, from the critical media collective Kunci, who was waiting for us to get dinner and mainly listened but after a while also shared his perspective. These encounters, planned and unplanned, shaped and pushed the way I was able to think about and with *gotong royong*.

During that same trip I had another formative encounter, with members of the media arts collective Lifepatch. Together with three members of the collective as well as a frequent collaborator and friend who was also present we were hanging out (*nongkrong*) from the early afternoon hours until late at night in their collective's house in Yogyakarta 'practicing *nongkrong* and philosophizing about *nongkrong*' as Nopel (December 6, 2019) remarked laughing, the importance of space as well as the currency of trust. As a response to this encounter and grounded in my ongoing research into *gotong royong* I wrote 'Situating Assemblages'. This text went through multiple feedback loops and discussions via google docs, also with those members of the collective who were not present during our hangout in Yogyakarta and a follow up zoom call with the editors. When I was opening the google doc to the whole collective, I felt like I had opened a Pandora's box. Many disagreed, with what I had written and also with what other members had said. These comments made me open up space for more nuance and diverging narratives to coexist, as well as to consider more critically the challenges related to doing something the '*gotong royong* way'. The publication in its end-form also allocated space for the self-representation of the collective, for which they chose a collage that illustrates the social spaces of togetherness created through their activities (see Engchuan 2021a, 37 and 45). This mode of proposing analytical arguments into iterative feedback loops with the 'researched' was also my methodology for the 'Landscape of Possibility' article, where in the preparation of a special issue, we had collective Zoom sessions with all contributors and I had individual WhatsApp conversations and follow ups

with Candra, the filmmaker whose film and wider practice became the central point of analysis in this publication. In the same special issue he was also given the space to present his practice.

My conversations with Richard Oh, were hour-long engagements on the meta-theoretical foundations and references of this dissertation. He introduced the world of relational philosophy and the ontological turn to me and was a conversation partner to talk through and challenge my still embryonic theoretical arguments. Even though I did not have the names for it when it was happening I consider our relationship as an example of *thinking nearby* in practice, of engaging in a collective and dialogical theorization, rather than a practice of ‘speaking about’. As long as he was still with us Richard also always commented on my writing drafts.

At no time in this writing did I change the names and places of the people I was working with. This practice is still common in ethnographic writing under the well meant pretext of protecting the people one is working with, and makes sense in many cases. In the specific situation of this doctoral thesis however it constituted a practice that does not run smoothly with the imperative of *speaking* and *thinking nearby*. Once a person’s life is extracted and converted into a story, detached from its origin through anonymization, there is no space for dialogue or speaking back. Those stories that would indeed endanger my collaborators or bring them in impossible situations were therefore categorically filtered out from entering the realm of academic knowledge production.

What kind of knowledge claims do practices of *thinking nearby* generate? I wanted my writing to hold space for the interpretative and analytic perspective of my research collaborators, this is reflected in the inclusion of long and many direct quotes from our conversation. These are positioned alongside my own analytical and interpretive propositions, which were inspired during and constitute a synthesis of these post-fieldwork follow-up dialogical encounters of *thinking nearby*. My arguments, which I will present in the findings section of this writing, on relational subjectivities, cinematic strategies beyond representation and care as a relation are a response and a synthesis emerging from all these encounters. These arguments are not to be taken as a representation in the sense of a ‘distillation of the views of the people among whom I have worked and studied’ (Ingold 2017). They are, in their

very nature, less ethnographic (as defined by Ingold 2017, 21: ‘ethnography aims to describe life as it is lived and experienced, by a people, somewhere, sometime’) and more Anthropological (as defined by Ingold 2017, 21: ‘an inquiry into the conditions and possibilities of human life in the world’). Over time, and also beyond this doctoral thesis research project, my practice moved more and more towards creating spaces for collective assemblies around shared concerns with future-oriented questions, akin to a ‘philosophizing in the world, in conversation with its diverse inhabitants’ (Ingold 2017, 24).

7. Which aspects are covered in the individual publications?

The guiding question of this doctoral thesis ‘What are the conditions, modalities, affordances and effects of cinematic epistemologies’ is addressed across the articles that make up this cumulative dissertation. ‘A Political Dance in the Rain’ and ‘Attuning to the Whisperings’ focus on particular short films to think through the affordances of cinematic epistemologies to generate insights onto situated phenomenon, while ‘Landscape of Possibility’ and ‘Situated Assemblages’ foreground analytically the assemblage of cinematic practice as a whole — its conditions, modalities and effects — how it relates with state bodies such as the censorship board and state funding agencies, as well as how these relations change over time.

CONDITIONS AND MODALITIES: Why and how do cinematic epistemologies produce and socialize knowledges?

Investigating the conditions and modalities of cinematic practice led me to questions of collectivity and collaboration, often linked to the notion of *gotong royong* by my collaborators. The research for this doctoral thesis consequently became an investigation of the roles and modes of collectivity and *gotong royong* in cinematic practices. As a central analytical theme, these topics are touched upon in all of the individual publications. There is an evolution in the way I conceive of *gotong royong* from an early attempt at grasping it as something akin to a cultural phenomenon, almost like a character trait in ‘A Political Dance in the Rain’ towards the notion itself being symptomatic of a deeper phenomenon, a relational ontology of togetherness (Attuning to the Whisperings) and eventually a critical consideration of the limits and challenges of collective practices (Landscape of Possibility) in their long durée (Situated Assemblages).

In 'A Political Dance in the Rain', 'Landscape of Possibility' as well as 'Situated Assemblages' the analysis is grounded in conversations with the filmmakers on the role of *gotong royong* in their practice, both on the level on individual film projects as well as on the long term. In 'Attuning to the Whisperings' and 'Situated Assemblages' the focus is on the modes of *gotong royong*, its ontological groundings, currencies and the spaces that it needs to flourish as a collective and relational practice. These latter publications address the research question in slightly different ways than the earlier ones that relied mostly on participant observation and in-depth conversations. It was during the research for these later articles, when practices of *thinking nearby* were added to the methodological toolkit and arguments build on my initial research and first (yet retrospectively superficial) explanatory categories to arrive at an even deeper level of analysis, which was developed in dialogue with my collaborators.

AFFORDANCES: What are the affordances of cinematic languages vis-à-vis other, for example scientific or other hegemonic discourses, to negotiate situated social issues?

These questions are addressed in 'A Political Dance in the Rain' as well as 'Attuning to the Whisperings', which build on an ethnographically informed film analysis, embarking on an inquiry into situated social phenomenon through films with the filmmakers. These cinematic languages are concretely situated in the local social issue assemblage: *ON FRIDAY NOON* looks at moral panics related to queers and religion through the 'fictional' story of a transgender woman on her way to perform the Friday prayers, obligatory for Muslim men. 'Attuning to the Whisperings' shows how cinematic practices, are part of locally situated and specific negotiations of environmental crisis in the form of water scarcity, land conflicts in a mountainous region in Yogyakarta as well as classed urbanization in Surabaya. The situated cinematic languages presented in the films are other to mainstream and scientific discourses on climate crises as well as queers and in the publications the ways in which they are different as well as the specific affordances of cinematic languages are traced and elaborated in detail.

EFFECTS: How can we conceive of the collective agency of cinematic epistemologies — across intertwined spaces and scales — both within the communities themselves and within the society they are a part of?

An overarching question behind all of this was the ‘effect’ or ‘doing’ of these practices. How can the transformative potential of activities of grassroots initiatives like these be grasped theoretically — within the communities themselves and within the society they are a part of? This question extends from the space of *komunitas film* and the cinematic assemblages towards the temporal communities that are created and fostered during the public screening events. Answers to this larger question are informed by long term empirical work and participant observation at numerous screening events and film festivals. ‘A Political Dance in the Rain’ investigates this question through an ethnographic account of a screening and post screening discussion. This empirical data is then put in dialogue with Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics (2002) and Guattari’s molecular revolution (1984), who both theorize on the politicality that emerges from relational encounters. Eventually the article makes an argument on the collective agency of cinematic epistemologies to not only rhetorically but also performatively intervene in mainstream hegemonic discourses through the creation of publics. ‘Attuning to the Whisperings’ thinks through empirical data from an ethnography of screening spaces alongside my arguments on relational subjectivities and togetherness (which I developed as a response to collaborative engagements in spaces of ‘thinking nearby’) and arrives at a speculative proposition on the notion of care. Relating empirical and theoretical work to Akomfrah & The Otolith Group’s (2020) notion of the post-cinematic the publication is making an argument on the potentialities of cinematic epistemologies to create the grounds for care as a relation.

[Following is an insert of the four articles discussed. Please note that these have different page numbers, according to their initial publication. The page numbers for this framework text will continue with Chapter 8, after the insert]

8. Central findings

In the following I will briefly summarize and discuss in detail the larger implications of the central findings of this doctoral thesis as pertains to the research questions, on the conditions and modalities of cinematic epistemologies, the affordances of cinematic languages as well as the collective agency of cinematic assemblages.

8.1 Conditions and modalities of cinematic epistemologies

This doctoral thesis has investigated the following research question around the conditions and modalities of cinematic practices: Why and how do cinematic epistemologies produce and socialize knowledges? The mushrooming of film communities all over Indonesia after political reformation in 1998 is often explained as resulting from more freedom of expression and the availability of filmmaking technologies. Adding to these explanatory conventions, a central field of inquiry in this doctoral thesis was the roles and modes of collectivity in cinematic practices. In following this path, beyond the individual level of the publications, the research was able to unpack how cinematic practices are enabled not only by the political climate after reformation in 98 and technological advancements but also by a particular form of collaborative mentality and practice that is not based on material exchange and alludes to a particular way of doing things together, often referred to as *gotong royong*. On a meta-level both more freedom of expression and the availability of filmmaking technology increase the potential for relations. It is now easier to meet other people to do something together and get hold of a camera than it was during the Suharto regime. Yet, assemblages are not already and forever given facts and the potential to relate is not something that is actualized as a default function of some kind of inherent magnetic power. Therefore a vital question is still open: how is this potential activated? Rather than assuming that relations happen by default or are already existing I became interested in the grammar of relation-making. Instead of locating this answer in character traits of individuals, which would entail an act of interpretation or judgement on the side of the researcher, I engaged in dialogical practices of *thinking nearby* which ultimately led me to questions of ontology and relational subjectivities.

Gotong royong as a moral grammar of human-technology-environment relations

According to one of my collaborators *komunitas film* is ‘a model for community participation in film through informal work and *gotong royong*’ (Pasaribu 2020, 20). All of the filmmakers I have spoken to for the articles have at some point engaged in cinematic practice that was done using the ‘*gotong royong* way’, a mode of production where ‘most *komunitas film* members do not earn money from their cinematic practices’ (Engchuan 2020, 18). In my *thinking nearby* session with Lifepatch for the ‘Situated Assemblages’ article, this mode of collaborative creation was referred to as the ‘communal way of doing things’ (Engchuan 2021a, 41), something that is expressed through the concept of DIWO (Do it With Others) by the collective in their self-conceptualization on their website and in their self-descriptions. In ‘Landscape of Possibility’, Candra also referred to it saying that some of his films ‘the one that did not get funding was made via *gotong royong* with my friend’ (Engchuan 2021b, 227). What all these terms (DIWO, communal way, *gotong royong*) and refer to is ‘a mindset and practice of doing something for a greater common good, a form of exchange without direct material outcomes’ (Engchuan 2021a, 41). Adding to existing scholarship that argues that ‘conceptions of communal labour have a long and complicated genealogy, starting from a romanticized rural past, through political mobilization and forced labour’ (Engchuan 2021a, 41) I situate my research into *gotong royong*, in the context of the film communities and modes of collective practice in contemporary art ‘as a situated moral grammar, a protocol that governs human-environment-technology relational dynamics. It is a force that actualizes the potential for relations, ‘an organizing principle in the dynamics between humans and technology [and] [...] a moral grammar that structures and opens up new relations at the intersections of the human, the environmental and the technological’ (Engchuan 2021a, 41).

The currencies and rituals of *gotong royong*

How can we imagine the actualization of *gotong royong* as a vernacular and embodied knowledge in processes of cinematic epistemologies? How does *gotong royong* translate into practice? How can one ‘see’ or ‘experience’ it as a researcher? This empirically informed process-oriented gaze reveals that instead of an outcome focus there is a process orientation. In ‘A Political Dance in the Rain’ I elaborate on my observations from the time spent on film sets, where the ‘process-focused mode of cultural production’ (Engchuan 2020, 18) played a central role, the process here is more important than the outcome and ‘for many, the

motivation to take part in these project is not a capitalist, transactional one. There were some common sayings on film sets that are reflective of some of the characterisations of *gotong royong* projects: ‘what is important is that it is fun’, ‘tired but happy’, ‘just enjoy’ was standard jargon in many spaces that I have joined. What is created is not only the film but also the experience of making it *together*, with emphasis on the collaborative process rather than merely the result. Rather than immediate material exchange, such collaborations are thriving on other currencies: friendship and trust which lead to relationships of reciprocity. These were mentioned over and over as important factors in *gotong royong* projects, which are running on a logic that ‘I also help friends with their production’ (Engchuan 2021b, 227) or ‘always [having] some people who will help [when] encounter[ing] difficulties’. But friendship and trust are not existing in and of themselves, they ‘need to be nurtured by spending time together’ (Engchuan 2021a, 41). Trust here is a relational currency, becoming in a process of relating that ‘happens organically, people spend time together and then do things together. Often using *gotong royong* instead of money’ (Engchuan 2021b, 41). For friendship, trust and these kinds of relationships of *gotong royong* reciprocity to emerge, spaces where people can spend time together and enter into relations are essential. ‘The Indonesian word for this is *nongkrong*. It happens when people meet with no pre-defined goal in mind. Someone might sleep or eat and people come and go as there is no official beginning or end. I learned that spaces for *nongkrong* are the birthplaces of many art collectives in Yogyakarta, where people met to hang out long before they had even labelled themselves as ‘collective’” (Engchuan 2021a, 41). Having access to spaces and time to hang out together are fundamental requirements for trust relationships to form and projects running on the reciprocity of *gotong royong* to be initiated. Trust here emerges out of a process of relating, it is not a decision made by an individual or something that can be outsourced into the bureaucratic conventions of contracts and liabilities. Trust is a relational process and the ritual of *nongkrong* offers fertile grounds for it to develop.

There is more to be said about the significance of ‘spending time together’ for *gotong royong* projects. An awareness of *nongkrong* and its relevance for building trust in the process of forming projects enables to better understand the local-rootedness of the films produced within and for the *komunitas film* assemblage. In *komunitas film nongkrong* is a way of doing

things — a method.²⁰ Project ideas emerge from these hangout spaces, where everyday issues are discussed in an organic but not organized manner. Thoughts come and go like waves and then suddenly everyone jumps on one and rides it towards new horizons. It is a method of coming up with project ideas that are relevant because they are rooted in the direct experience of everyday life. They have a stake in it — they act ‘par le milieu’ (Stengers 2010, thinking with Deleuze). *Nongkrong* is a ritual of collectivity that allows being attentive to the situated context in an open and flexible manner rather than entering spaces with predefined project ideas. Projects that emerge from here are ‘invariably useful for all involved parties as it starts off from a common idea, a common need’ (Samboh 2014, 93).

One of the first analytical steps in this doctoral thesis was proposing that rather than explaining cinematic practices as something that ‘good’ people who don’t ask for money or as something that ‘Indonesian’ people do because of the ‘cultural practice’ of *gotong royong*, these practices need to be thought as only possible in relation to the spaces (both temporal and spatial) and rituals (*nongkrong*) of spending time together to nurture friendships and trust as well as becoming attuned to the situated context. In retrospective, these insights were only a first step in an ongoing analytical and interpretative trajectory. In the following I will outline how the inquiry of this doctoral thesis moved beyond the notion of *gotong royong* towards ontological questions and arguments on the notion of togetherness.

The ontological condition of togetherness

In our conversations my collaborators often stressed the importance of relations: ‘many people I spoke to in Indonesia conceive of themselves as part of a world where everyone and everything is intimately enmeshed with the extra-corporeal. This is a conception of the world, in which subjectivity is relational, translating into a fundamentally different way of acting in the world, where no being is separate from their surroundings. In this world, everyone is response-able’ (Engchuan 2021a, 41). The notion of response-ability is used by critical feminist theorists such as Haraway and Barad and refers to the ability — rather than some kind of rights-based responsibility or ethical ideal — of responsibility. Such a recognition of interdependency as togetherness explains on an ontological level, why so many films engage with and act upon local social issues without financial compensation as a pre-condition. This

²⁰ Nongkrong as a method has also been mentioned by other art collectives from Indonesia, such as for example *ruangrupa*, the artistic directors of the documenta 15, to be held in Kassel in 2022.

led me to propose that the mindset (and practice) of *gotong royong* is symptomatic of something deeper: *gotong royong* is grounded in a relational subjectivity. Perceiving oneself as part of something, being always already related, interior not exterior, makes you responsible to be response-able. The coalition emerges out of a recognition of togetherness. As soon as you know of an issue: transgender Muslim women being discriminated (ON FRIDAY NOON), farmers being evicted (SAPU ANGIN (WINDSWEPT)), people losing their land capitalist expansion and the myth making of officials (SEORANG KAMBING (A GOAT)), you are part of this relation and you are responsible to respond, making a short film is one way to do so. For example, ‘The story of ON FRIDAY NOON started when Luhki was working on a commissioned documentary with a transgender community in Yogyakarta, an experience that triggered him to question his own internalized prejudices against transgender. SEORANG KAMBING (A GOAT) started with the filmmaker’s own experience of land struggles and changes in habitation in the area where he lives. SAPU ANGIN (WINDSWEPT) started with Yoyos support of the communities being evicted. The common denominator here is an experience and awareness of relation. Togetherness is situated and it emerges from being attuned to relational constellations. What all these examples make very clear is that collectivity/togetherness/interdependency does not always take the form of the romanticized ideal of harmonious coexistence. We do not get to choose only the good relations. We are related with violent histories and their ongoing reverberations, as they manifest in social and environmental issues. Cinematic practices are situated instantiations of response-ability vis à vis all these entanglements that constitute togetherness.

On the limits and long durée of an ideal

Gotong royong as a situated moral grammar of practices of relational care is pre-destined to act as an antidote to neoliberal transactional capitalist individualism. This however, would be an idealization washing over the many challenges related to the translation of interdependency and togetherness into practice in the long run. When we talked about cinematic practices not on an individual project but on long durée and ecosystem level, many conversations on *gotong royong* had a bitter aftertaste and suggest that an abstract romanticization of *gotong royong* does not do the situation justice. Cinematic practices are never outside of neoliberal capitalism but always already in an interesting relationship with it. Making a film or hosting a screening has operational costs and *gotong royong* sometimes is not enough. Even volunteers

need to eat on the film set and renting a camera costs money. This is one of the main reasons that most of the films produced in *komunitas films* are short films, as they require only one day to a week of shooting. A longer production and the usage of more sophisticated filmmaking technology is only possible if these operational costs can be covered. Most practitioners told me that there is a limit to doing things the *gotong royong* way in the long durée. In ‘Landscape of Possibility’, Candra makes it very clear that he does not want to be dependent on *gotong royong*. His ‘reluctance to depend solely on *gotong royong* reflects the fact that we live in a world where there is no outside to capitalism. There is a desire and need to make cinematic practice sustainable for film practitioners, to find some kind of future and space in the world with filmmaking. And this requires the entrance of funding into networks of film production’ (Engchuan 2021b, 228). The funding structures facilitating Candra’s cinematic practice are now a mix that does not rely exclusively on the support from friends. He has made other films with the anti-corruption and tourism board, which are bureaucratic bodies and part of the Indonesian government. He also got funding from the private sector through his connections working at Provoke magazine (see Engchuan 2021b, 232). Luhki, the director of ON FRIDAY NOON runs a production company and produces content for a range of commercial clients. He and his friends, who have their own companies and work as freelancers, have made a commitment to always — no matter how busy they are—work on ‘idealistic’ projects (see Engchuan 2020, 21).

Over the long term, many practitioners actively seek alternatives to doing things the *gotong royong* way for various reasons. The relational currency of trust needs time and space, both are diminishing with the need to make a living after university years and the disappearance of spaces where hour-long casual hangouts are possible due to changes in urban spaces because of gentrification (see also Engchuan 2021a, 41-42). In addition to these outside and contextual influences, doing things the *gotong royong* way, when the process matters more than the outcome within a form of organization that is ill-defined, contextual, speculative, improvisational was sometimes described as ‘unprofessional’ and ‘unproductive’ by film practitioners. In order to be legible by funding bodies, collectives need to be named, registered at an address, project timelines are introduced and responsibilities need to be contractually defined (see Engchuan 2021a).

All these factors push and pull towards a ‘systematization of *gotong royong*’ — assuming other, more tangible and structured forms of organization. The meta-conflict and cul-de-sac here seems that organizations have a template for organizing that runs on a fundamentally different logic than that of organic *gotong royong* based collectivity: ‘accountability instead of trust, contracts instead of friendship, deadlines and clear responsibilities instead of improvisation’ (Engchuan 2021a, 42). Does the systematization of *gotong royong*, towards standardization and systemization, professionalization, turn collectives into a Weberian ideal-type organization? The short answer is now.

The longer and layered answer is presented in and across the individual publications. The people I have been working with often continue their relations with the communities they are engaging with beyond the temporal and pre-defined responsibilities of an individual project out of a sense of response-ability and togetherness. Cinematic practice in many cases is only a node in processes that are punctuated but not defined by the film and these processes do not end when the final file is exported or the screen turns black. When Luhki was researching with the transgender community, ‘in the middle of the research process, the project was put on hold for administrative reasons. Luhki still wanted to make the film’ (Engchuan 2020, 22). The moment the project was put on hold the transactional monetary gains of a project were replaced by another driver for Luhki to go on making the film. His time spent with the transgender community created a sense of togetherness and he choose to act on his response-ability by making a film and disseminating this experience to other people beyond himself. Likewise Yoyo’s film is a node in his still ongoing, year long work with communities who are suffering from eviction due to rapid urbanization. He frames his activities from a sense of togetherness and response-ability: ‘because they are friends. This is not my job’ (Engchuan 2021c, 40). This response-ability rooted in togetherness is also evident in the practices of Lifepatch and their engagement with the communities in Sumatra — even after the bureaucratic temporalities of a commissioned artistic research project have ended, they continued translating the Pustaka. ‘Why do this after the project had ended? Because a collective is not a modern institution. Because a relational subjectivity made Lifepatch a part of the community the moment that met the people from lake Toba’ (Engchuan 2021a, 42-43). Even in constellations when *gotong royong* is not always or not anymore used as a mode of production the relational subjectivity is the constant that remains and continues to translate into a particular way of being and acting in the world. These examples suggest that what is

happening when *gotong royong* is being systematized is not so much the assumption of institutional form but situational and improvisational practices of instituting (Raunig and Ray 2009), particular responses to particular situations, the outcome of which is still being negotiated by contemporary Indonesian film collectives who have ‘an assembling logic of their own’ where one ‘continuously adapts—there is no template or path [...]’. It is at its core an improvisational practice (Engchuan 2021b, 232 see also Engchuan 2021c, 41-43).

Summary and Conclusion

Gotong royong informed practices do not run primarily on monetary transactions but on the relational currency of trust rooted in a recognition of interdependency. It is not a symptom in and of itself but a situated moral grammar symptomatic of a relational ontology. Responding to it through *gotong royong* practices is neither a default nor an essential characteristic of Indonesians, but a process that requires tremendous effort, a task that remains. *Gotong royong* is more than an echo from the past, a decision for the now and a potential towards a livable future. *Gotong royong*, the way I have come to see it, is not a cultural programming and not a character trait of an individual, it is a way of doing things that is always at stake. *Gotong royong* is the choice to make an effort. It is a choice against extractive capitalism and the alienation of labor. It is a choice against modernity-as-development. It is a choice for freedom of speech and freedom in life. It can also be a choice that is made out of lack, lack of official institutions, lack of financial support and lack of space to address certain topics in institutional spaces. It is not an absolute choice, most of the people I have spoken to improvise their practice as they go along and the *gotong royong* method is one of many strategies in their toolkits to make projects happen. The constant that remains is the radical recognition of interdependency and togetherness, one that can be actualized and continues to be actualized, when other forms of fundings and other currencies enter the cinematic assemblage.

8.2 Affordances of cinematic epistemologies

Breaking with the assumption that the representational constitutes the only passage to reality as one objective ‘truth’ accessible through scientific method this doctoral thesis investigated the affordances of cinematic languages in providing other pathways towards social experience and situated social and environmental issues. Pathways that are rooted in the realities of their

makers, both human and more-than-human, albeit not representational. Cinematic languages are other to rational, logo-centric ways of articulating and disseminating knowledges and in what follows I am collating my findings across the articles into a mapping of four possible strategies of meaning-making around situated social and environmental issues that are other to, and therefore complement, conventional modes of representation.

Pathways to realities beyond representation

None of the films discussed in this doctoral thesis is a documentary in the conventional sense, these are stories from the realm of fiction, sci-fi and experimental art cinema. Yet, as the assemblage perspective of ethnographically informed film analysis reveals, all of the films are concretely rooted in the social experience. This relation however, does not manifest into an indexical representation on screen. Candra for example ‘makes fictional films which are grounded in reflections on the experiences that he and his friends have had living in Jakarta. He told me ‘Dewi is 75% me’ (2020) (Engchuan 2021b, 222). SAPU ANGIN is concretely rooted in Yoyos engagement with the pigeon communities who are experiencing eviction. ON FRIDAY NOON, despite its decidedly melodramatic and fictional form is deeply rooted in the research with the transgender community: ‘On Friday Noon is an assemblage of stories that Luhki experienced during his research with the transgender community. Luhki remarked that ‘all the scenes are things that have been experienced’. SPECTACULAR HEALING is a part of an ongoing collaboration with the community in Sumatra and changing institutional partners in Europe pivoting around the knowledges contained in the Pustaka, their colonial extraction and representation in European museums as well as the contemporary relevance in the local communities (see Engchuan 2020, 24). A GOAT, likewise, even though on first impression it seems a product of fabulation ‘is [...] [a] direct reference to the situated experience of life in Gunung Kidul. Only in conversation with the filmmaker, the existence and agentive capacity of an ominous tiger, a tiger that no-one has seen but everyone is talking about in the film, off-screen is revealed (see Engchuan 2021c, 37). The mythical story and the ominous tiger whose existence is ontologically vague is not something invented on and for the cinematic space of the film but actually experienced off-screen. Myths might not indexically represent but they do make realities, and this already off-screen.

The cinematic languages of these films go beyond the representational as a conscious and strategic choice for various reasons. For *ON FRIDAY NOON*, taking into consideration the socio-political climate, the fiction form here was a strategic decision as ‘LGBT is considered a sensitive issue in contemporary Indonesia, and the sociopolitical climate makes it dangerous to expose transgender subjectivities on screen’ (Engchuan 2020, 24-25). The film was never meant to be a ‘real’ documentary style representation of their lived reality. In addition to this ‘turning to the fiction genre is making a creative choice to work around the ‘crisis of representation’ because the filmmaker has to deal with the same kinds of considerations as an anthropologist. Resorting to fiction alleviates the pressures related to making a documentary for the filmmaker, who himself is an outsider to the transgender community. Thus, for pragmatic and creative reasons, he consciously relocated his practice ‘from the realm of “reality” to fiction that references reality’ (Nannicelli 2006, 135)’ (Engchuan 2020: 25). In *SAPU ANGIN (WINDSWEPT)*, Yoyos wanted to introduce a more-than-human perspective on the experience of urbanization and land reclamation and the representational does not have templates for this kind of positionality in storytelling so he created and crafted his own unique way, symbiosis with a self-constructed camera device and a pigeon. *SEORANG KAMBING (A GOAT)* became a space for the filmmaker to channel his feelings of frustration about the unfolding of the situation in the Gunung Kidul region that he observes in his everyday life. Rather than representing only *what is*, he accelerates the story and urges audiences to imagine what *could be*, if things continue that way. *SPECTACULAR HEALING* ponders upon questions of the legitimacy of facts and modes of capture, classification, extractivism and representation. Pointing to the intrinsic violences of these relations, the work introduces, the humility of not yet knowing the answer, and ambiguity, as another way of relating to indigenous wisdoms.

Ethnographically informed film analysis has exposed factual representation of *what is* as being one — but not the only — pathway to truth and that sometimes, as in the examples mentioned in this doctoral thesis, even though the outcome regarded as an object is experimental, speculative and fictional, there is a lot to learn about the concrete local situated social issue through non-representational forms of meaning making. Safety concerns, making space for more-than-human storytellers, communicating uneasy feelings and formally addressing the violences of inherent in representation, are all reasons to move beyond representation when addressing situated social and environmental issues. Films here do not

act as mirrors of the local situation *as is*, because they are not interested in upholding a status quo, but as bridges and portals into a unique understanding of and relation with a situation.

Cinematic strategies to convey meaning beyond the representational

Cinematic languages beyond the representational are other than scientific, fact based, objective mirrors of *what is*. They convey meaning in other cinematic forms. An analysis of the films discussed in this doctoral thesis has mapped four different pathways of cinematic sensing as an open process: the cinematic evocation of empathy in ON FRIDAY NOON, cinematic acceleration in SEORANG KAMBING (A GOAT) , cinematic counter-mapping in SAPU ANGIN (WINDSWEPT) and cinematic humility in SPECTACULAR HEALING.

The cinematic evocation of empathy in ON FRIDAY NOON: in ON FRIDAY NOON, the alternative argument on being Muslim and being Queer is packed into narrative structure of the mono-myth, where we encounter an unconventional hero (a queer muslim person). From conversations I understood that making a film was about evoking a feeling and creating empathy (see Engchuan 2020, 25). In this particular case the filmmaker ‘wanted the audience to experience what it feels like to be Wina’. An intention that ‘translates into a very particular kind of filmic language, and cinematic tools’ (Engchuan 2020, 26). Various examples from scenes, such as children throwing stones at Wina, to thematize how the sociopolitical climate translates into ‘violence against queer subjectivities’ (Engchuan 2020, 27) as ‘a cinematic tool to exaggerate and expose on screen the brute absurdity of the situation off-screen’ (Engchuan 2020, 27). Or Wina, walking, ‘shoes in hand, on a stony road that is not made for walking barefoot’ (Engchuan 2020, 27). The echoing of the children’s voices as well as a ‘high, sharp cricket sound [...] that ‘is unbearable and becomes a metaphor for the situation Wina finds herself in: not a comfortable place’ (Engchuan 2020, 27). Combining an analysis of the film with the conversations with the filmmaker where he expressed the wish to create empathy with Wina I conclude by calling this rhetorical strategy ‘the cinematic evocation of empathy’. A desire that translates into the choosing of storyline, soundscape as well as the making of the characters.

Cinematic acceleration in SEORANG KAMBING (A GOAT): SEORANG KAMBING (A GOAT) conveys to audiences a feeling of uneasiness, which is both an auto-ethnographic

reflection of the filmmakers feelings about the situation unfolding around him as well as a warning tale. SEORANG KAMBING (A GOAT) is a film that channels the filmmakers taking issue with human greed and human exceptionalism over animals, using animals in ‘socio-materialistic struggle’. Growing up and living in the Gunung Kidul region the filmmaker developed a sense of uneasiness with the situation around him. The film conveys precisely this feeling ‘in his opinion people are confusing and stupid and the cinematic language that he employs is one that echoes back this feeling of looking around you and not understanding anymore what is happening’ (Engchuan 2021c, 38). The language is ‘complex, angry and subjective’, ‘neither a truth claim nor a representation’ but the filmmakers ‘interpretation’ of the situation, which he diagnoses as resulting from human greed and mastery of natural resources and animals. This is evident in the title, ‘mocking humans’ and in the plot, that is accelerating these behaviors into the future and exposes the consequences and also in the audio layer of the film that adds an uncanny layer. Humans in this world already have become the victims of their own actions. ‘Human greed as a complex phenomenon with many causes and effects: colonialism, water scarcity, poverty, capitalism, is ever present but cannot be easily caught on camera. The filmmaker renders uncanny the relation between causal structures and behaviors in a decidedly speculative stance to make tangible audio visually what will happen if things continue this way’ (Engchuan 2021c, 38). This rhetorical strategy can be called ‘cinematic acceleration’ the film is the space where the filmmaker echoes back these feelings and takes his observations to the extreme and exposes the consequences of human exceptionalism.

Cinematic counter-mapping in SAPU ANGIN (WINDSWEPT): Yoyos himself described his ongoing engagement with the pigeon communities as mapping: ‘I wanted to understand this better. I started to make a map. Mapping for resistance, But I did not use text, it was visual mapping. From the air. I used non-human labour. This was a co-production’ (Engchuan 2021c, 41). The form of the film is experimental and there is no story in the conventional sense but we do experience 5 minutes and 17 seconds of noise and image slices. Based on an analysis of the film and my conversations with Yoyos I came to propose the notion of cinematic counter-mapping, a practice ‘that moves beyond a contestation on content towards a speculation on form. [...] The countering act here lies in the form. The film opens again the question of what a film is and what it can do’ (Engchuan 2021c, 42). Instead of conveying ‘a feeling of controllability and mastery over objects through absolute vision [...] the cinematic

countermap is offering a different experience and view of the changing surface of the earth. The cinematic map works on an affective level, it is experienced. It resorts to an abstract, mechanical language to convey an uncanny feeling about a situation that is eerie indeed. The cinematic map holds affective potential, it distorts with confusion and unknowability of the future and the impossibility to grasp the actor. It argues towards a changing not a conservation of the status quo' (Engchuan 2021c, 42). The situated value of the cinematic countermap in this situation I am proposing is that it 'is closer to the experience of and makes more sense in a situation where corporations are taking over homes?' (Engchuan 2021c, 42).

Cinematic humility in SPECTACULAR HEALING: SPECTACULAR HEALING is a two channel work, 'herbs, fruits and roots merged into jamu, a traditional medicinal drink' as well as 'blood being sucked out of a body, needles into and hot metal coins on skin' (Engchuan 2021c, 43). The subtitles are not indexical with the audio layer and refuse to perform the service of translation. The English language letters on screen speak of 'epistemological violence' — and state an imperative: 'we do not follow imperial needs, colonial wants on Indonesian identity representation' (Engchuan 2021c, 43). These English language words are targeted at audiences in the Museum in Amsterdam, the country of the former colonizer. The audio layer — not translated into subtitles — in Indonesian language 'offer a conditioned glimpse into another temporality of the work: the process of making it. The tone here is more ambiguous suggesting that this process was about collective contemplation about the contemporary relevance of the Pustaka. The creative process here is a dialogic journey' (Engchuan 2021c, 43). Presentation and process merge — and process is not blackboxed in a mode of knowledge production where only the finished result is presented as an object of knowledge, a fact. Nowhere does the film arrive at another black and white truth but instead gives insight into a process guided by humility and ambiguity. Knowledge production here entails sensing, not making sense.

Cinematic languages for affective and situated togetherness

On a meta-level, despite the diversity of approaches and issues these cinematic languages work towards cultivating a sense of being in relation (with a pigeon, a community being tricked into structural poverty, longings for indigenous wisdoms, or the experience of transgender Muslim women as the alleged others). As I mentioned earlier — the coalition

emerges out of a recognition of togetherness — this recognition of and acting on togetherness as a response-ability is an ethos that is also relevant at this node of the cinematic assemblage: the film. The film is intended by the filmmaker to extend this sense of togetherness (of being in relation with the transgender woman, the pigeon, the uneasy feeling and the persistent violences of colonial relations) to audiences. Togetherness is situated and it emerges from being attuned to relational constellations. The films are intended by the filmmaker to do something in the situated context and the cinematic languages presented here gear towards establishing a relationship, not a neutral one but a very particular kind of affective relationship: Luhki thinks there is a need for people to have empathy with the transgender community. Tunggul thinks that people are too comfortable need to be shaken up. Yoyos believes that people need to experience and understand they are not in the center of everything and Lifepatch wants audiences to be confronted with extractive and epistemological violences. Cinematic languages are employed by the filmmakers strategically to create the grounds for a recognition of togetherness with the local social issue assemblage addressed in the film. The affordances of the cinematic languages analyzed in and across the articles can be summarized on an abstract level as gearing towards evoking a feeling of togetherness, with the transgender community, the pigeon, the feeling of frustration and confusion as well as the critical and humble search for the contemporary relevance of indigenous knowledge systems. In doing so they employ a whole repertoire of cinematic languages, which are not exclusively scientific but also extend to the affective, audio-visual and speculative.

Cinematic languages of ethnographic refusal

These cinematic strategies and languages, despite their differences all move beyond the representational. What does it mean that content from and about the global South is not representational and not feeding the urge for transparency once so idealized in colonial ethnographic representations? They claim what Glissant has referred to as the right to opacity (1997). They are moving beyond ‘the West’s hyperfixation on a method of understanding based in “transparencies”—the reductive ways in which we classify others against existing dominant structures of worth. For Glissant, transparencies are limited and limiting’ (Greiner 2019). The notion of opacity and the possibilities of communication beyond the transparent and representation has inspired many artists and thinkers, especially those who do not inhabit the benchmark positionality of the middle class cis-gendered White man, those who from

personal experience know the struggle of making themselves legible to regimes of classification that are not their own. Moving beyond representation through various languages, forms and modes, all of these films speak the cinematic language of ‘ethnographic refusal’ (Roshanak 2000 reflecting on Zora Neale Hurston’s practice). Opacity is the strategy of ethnographic refusal. The films discussed in this doctoral thesis — taken as objects and not regarded from a situated assemblage perspective — do not make sense to us as outside researchers, because they do not need to. The researchers striving for transparency and thick descriptions comes at the expense of the right to opacity of the researched. Ethnographic refusal is not a dead-end, it does not imply refusal or foreclosure of communication. It merely refuses a mode of encounter where the researcher is dominant, a refusal of the passive roles allotted to the researched by disciplinary conventions and histories. It is a refusal to continue playing that game but also at the same time an invitation, to engage differently, to play another game. SPECTACULAR HEALING, is a beautiful example: commissioned for a group show entitled ‘On the Nature of Botanical Gardens: Contemporary Indonesian Perspectives’ at Framer Framed in Amsterdam, the work is not targeted at Indonesian, but primarily at Dutch audiences (which makes it different from the other works under analysis). The work is rendering explicit the interdependency of colonial extraction and ongoing violences as a mode of uncomfortable togetherness with the formal colonizer, still in possession of the Pustaka. The conditions of moving forward are sketched out in the film: the form and tone of the cinematic space are a speculative proposal of the grounds from which relation will be possible going forward. This way forward comes with a shift in power over who defines the modes of encounter, the artist collective from Indonesia and the communities in Sumatra, the makers of the film. Through the lack of subtitles access becomes conditional, upon understanding of the local language. Through the form of the film with two parallel screens and additional layers of narrative in the subtitles and sound, truth is presented as always multiple and open for interpretation. This, is a wonderful illustration of how the ethics, imperatives and promises of the epistemologies of the South can materialize in concrete cinematic entanglements. It also shows that the cinematic language of ethnographic refusal does not necessarily imply a conscious or conceptual decision; it emerges where people stay true to their languages and modes of meaning making.

8.3 Effects: on the agencies of cinematic assemblages

Cinematic epistemologies create spaces, both material and social and a processual-relational assemblage perspective ‘suggests that these techno-poetic assemblages bring into being so much more than mere artefacts’ (Engchuan 2021c, 39). Cinematic epistemologies are geared towards a cultivation of togetherness. Ultimately, because films are made to be screened and discussed the ecosystem of *komunitas film* creates social spaces. Spaces that facilitate togetherness, because they bring together people who then become part of the epistemological process. Ultimately, ‘what is at stake in these cinematic practices is the creation of public spaces, because without them arguments will have no effect [...] the logic is not that a ‘good’ argument will have an impact but that an argument with access to space will have an impact’ (Engchuan 2020, 19).

The creation of publics and social transformation

The politicality of cinematic epistemology lies in the insertion of non-mainstream content and perspectives into the public sphere. In the temporal community that forms at the time of the public enunciation of a film this togetherness is spatially achieved by the coming together of bodies and stories in the screening space. It is activated through cinematic languages that are geared towards evoking an awareness of togetherness. Cinematic practices, therefore inhabit a particular kind of agency that is collectively enacted (Bennett 2001, 2010; Barad 2003, 2007) and not intended by a single human actor. ‘My argument for the disruptive potential of such occasions is based on the premise that the mere existence of the film creates the potential for societal transformation, by exposing audiences to alternative perspectives that are shunned in mainstream media. [...] Thus the potential to rupture mainstream hegemonic discourse lies in the mere creation of spaces for alternative arguments. The significance of these practices lies not in everyone agreeing — the aim is not consensus — but in having options and a debate’ (Engchuan 2020, 29). I am thinking here with Chantal Mouffe’s theoretical considerations on agonistic democracy with ‘clear differences and clear alternatives, between which citizens can choose’ because ‘the aim of democracy is not consensus’ (Hansen and Sonnichsen 2014, 267). These spaces are not an echo chamber but a public and open constellation. Looking at the modes of knowledge circulation within *komunitas film* as a

collective, speculative, dialogical process, I suggest to conceive of cinematic practice as study rather than knowledge production. I borrow this term from Moten and Harney (2013) who (inspired by Agamben's notion of study) speak of study in a different context but likewise theorize activities with an improvisational and speculative stance. Togetherness in study lies in being critical, not in having the same perspective or opinion. Cinematic practice then is a critical practice that moves forward alongside important questions rather than providing answers. It is reminiscent of what Donna Haraway portrayed as play, a practice that is 'rooted in taking chances with one another' (Haraway in Davis and Turpin 2015, 261). Cinematic practices create publics and constitute epistemic assemblages outside of the official spaces of education. These spaces are where people learn with and from another, it is a mode of knowledge production in dialogue. What cinematic epistemologies propose is not only other knowledges but other conventions of production and dissemination, which are ongoing, coexisting, dialogical, and improvisational. Epistemology here is social and relational, knowledge is not imposed as an object from outside but negotiated in dialogue, it is a process. In its ideal form, then perhaps, knowledge is an endeavor that can never arrive, that can only ever succeed if it remains an attempt.

Referring to Guattari's molecular revolution in 'A Political Dance in the Rain' I propose to think of these cinematic epistemologies as offering a 'glimpse into a democratic 'micro-utopian' space' (Blanes et al 2016, 9), as 'concrete instances of intersubjective and social encounters (Blanes et al 2016) and "hands-on strategies' in everyday social life' (Bourriaud 2002: 31). In 'Situated Assemblages', I refer to cinematic epistemologies as 'situated processes that enact change beyond the mere articulation of critique' (Engchuan 2021a, 40). Cinematic epistemologies, in their situated instantiations can be conceptualized as micro-revolutionary acts of worldmaking with potential for social transformation. Cinematic practices inhabit the potentiality of a particular kind of change, not the kind that comes 'in the form that we think of as "revolutionary" — not as a masculinist surge or an armed confrontation' (Moten and Harney 2013, 10-11; see also Engchuan 2021a, 40) but through cinematic practices.

Care as a relation

‘We are not divided, we have never been. And cinematic epistemologies act as reminders of this fundamental ontological condition’ (Engchuan 2021c, 44).

Thinking about the cinematic and social spaces in dialogue with the findings on relational subjectivities, a further interpretive avenue opens up, ‘a contemplative speculation on care’ (Engchuan 2021c, 43). In order to act differently in the world we need to be attuned to it differently. This doctoral thesis has argued that cinematic assemblages have the potentiality to reconfigure how we perceive of our being in the world. And the performativity of the cinematic assemblage in its creation of spaces cultivates this capacity. The social space of the screening, when a temporal community assembles to watch and discuss a film, then is a space where attunement happens. ‘Attuning to the Whisperings’ elaborates on the notion of attunement: ‘being attuned to something is different from understanding something intellectually. Attunement needs more. Attunement is relational and it carries an element of response-ability’ (Engchuan 2021c, 21). It emerges out of the recognition that we are *related* in togetherness, and not *relative* to each other in separated silos of otherness. Cinematic assemblages act as ‘portals for audiences to become aware of and attuned to our entanglements. They are invitations, offerings, and openings to relate to other ways of sensing, understanding, and knowing. They offer ‘multiple registers on the one hand and new relations on the other’ (Akomfrah and the Otolith Group, 2020, np). These portals for becoming mutually sensitive can generate forms of care. A kind of care that comes from a place of a radical recognition of interdependency and relatedness. A kind of care that is not normative or an inherent character trait of a good person but a process of relating’ (Engchuan 2021c, 44). The cinematic assemblages do not represent but they act as bridges to relate to the movement of the pigeon, the journey of the transgender Muslim woman and the ominous tiger, the experience of living in an area in the aftermath of deforestation and in the advent of commercial mass tourism. Caring then becomes relational and is ill-defined as a psychological attitude or character trait. To put it differently, caring is not about being nice!

9. Contributions to the fields

The challenge and at the same time beauty of this dissertation project has been the lack of a pre-defined field of research or template. My work contributes to field of research on film in Indonesia by proposing the relational-processual assemblage perspective, as a complementary gaze and method for an entangled multi-species analysis of film, not as an object but as a situated and relational construct. This approach and methodology is not limited to a national context and also can be considered as a template for decolonial analyses of film in other contexts and locales. My work also adds to the existing scholarship on modes of collectivity and particularly *gotong royong* in Indonesia by adding another site and temporality of research: contemporary art collectives rather than traditional village settings. The work is also adding on to existing research by posing ontological questions of togetherness rather than situating explanations and locating difference in the realm of ‘culture’ or character traits of individuals. This line of argumentation is also found in Amerindian critical theory and the ontological turn. As an ethnography of knowledge practices, my work builds on and adds to debates on knowledge practices by proposing cinematic epistemologies in film communities in Indonesia as concrete examples of practices that are attuned with the promises, desires and imperatives of the epistemologies of the South. Knowledge practices here a decidedly not analyzed as objects but investigated from an assemblage perspective. My ethnographic exploration and dialogical untangling of the rooted-ness of fictional, experimental and sci-fi speculations in concrete social realities brings into question the assumption that these do not consider valuable knowledges and ultimately brings the hierarchical positionality of the scientific fact under empirical attack. Looking at the modes of knowledge production that cinematic epistemologies — as epistemologies of the South — cultivate from a relational-ontological position the work conceptually argues for thinking of universal notions such as trust and care as relations, rather than character traits.

10. Conclusion and outlook

A major contribution of my work is in the realm of decolonial Anthropological methodology. The methodologies of ethnographically informed film analysis and *thinking nearby* are not universal solutions because every situation between researcher and researched is utterly unique and what works here might not work elsewhere (sometimes it is absolutely necessary

to not disclose the names of research participants). These are approaches to the problem of cognitive extractivism and the sole authority of legitimized analytical and interpretive labour being in the realm of the researcher. The methodologies proposed here are not solutions to the persistent violences of knowledge production in Anthropology and elsewhere, they are humble approaches to at least make the effort to try to experiment on methodologies that make and hold space for dialogical encounters that are less hierarchical in both form and process. This is an ongoing process for me as a researcher that extends the scope of this dissertation. These writings still constitute spaces where my voice dominates. By giving Lifepatch the space for self-representation in the collage and having Candra contribute to the special issue we were trying to counter these tendencies. From these experiences I have learned that as long as the modes of expression and the epistemic conventions remain inflexible, as long as the table is already over-defined by academia, these invitations to the table remain mere gestures as they are not able and not willing to truly accommodate other modes of being in, knowing and engaging with the world.

On the limits and potentialities of non-tangential Anthropology

In my own practice as a researcher and artist, I am working towards an overcoming of these challenges and limitations outside of the scope of this doctoral thesis and in proximity but not exclusively within the space of the academia. Non-tangential Anthropology is a commitment to not think in isolated silos but to engage marginalized communities in the production of knowledges, it is a commitment to engage in ongoing (not tangential) conversations with the people we are working with, it is the abandonment of the assumption that only the researcher can engage in analysis. It is a promise to make explicit and work against the hierarchies of coloniality penetrating our world. It is a commitment to make and hold space for others to join. Non-tangential anthropology involves ‘the researched’ in a different way.

In 2020 I hosted a Rushes episode together with the Indonesian collective Forum Lenteng and the Savvy United Screens project — as a conceptual space to valorize and explore the potentialities of community-based cinematic practices as alternative modes of collective knowledge production and dissemination. What I liked about this space is that I was able to invite my collaborators to speak for themselves. Unlike during an interview or participant observation when there is no time for collaborators to prepare they were given enough time and space to form their position and story. In processes of ethnographic knowledge production

the researcher has, by conventions of the form always the advantage of preparation and reflection of their arguments while the researched is observed and surprised without being allowed the time, space and support structures of literature, reading groups and peer reviews, to develop sophisticated arguments. How often have we thought back to a situation and the smart thing to respond only comes to us in retrospect. Good arguments take time to mature and this time should be allowed to everyone. During our conversation for this Rushes episode we collectively speculated on the notion of collectivity. Something that was relevant to their practice as well, not only interesting for me as a researcher. We came together around a shared concern. In this format, the boundaries between process and presentation were blurred and it was not me working on and presenting the final product in the form of a single authored article. Rather, we ended up with a digital archive, where both the conversation and additional materials can be accessed (<https://rushes5.common.garden>).

In order to continue the conversations with Yoyos, together with the Forest Curriculum, we set up a project that brings together land right activists and artists from Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Australia. To catch a bird with a cloud is a project, funded by the Australia Council, that looks into the possibilities of ‘solidarity without similarity’. During the pandemic we had regular zoom meetings, where Yoyos was presenting on his practice. He is more fluent in Bahasa Indonesia and we wanted to accommodate the space to that, so my role was that of translating. Importantly though, I did not need to speak *for* him or *about* him, because he was present in this space. At the moment, Yoyos together with Zeke are working on an experimental Zine, funded by the Sharjah Art foundation and commissioned by the Forest Curriculum. Zeke is on his way to Germany to present at our public symposium ‘How to Not Build a Nation’ at the Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum for Contemporary Art in Berlin. In the creation of this space my role was that of conceptually conceiving the questions and curating the conversations but mostly it was in activities such as applying for funding as well as making sure that Zeke will get a visa, which included the writing of various letters of recommendations and numerous calls at embassies and Goethe-Instituts. This doctoral thesis is situated in my larger and ongoing engagements with these communities. To me being a researcher means engaging in a process that is punctuated but not defined by knowledge objects and tangible outputs, like the writings that are making this dissertation (single-authored peer reviewed articles), which are the currencies of academia. These are only nodes in much larger relational processes of collective action.

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