

## The Social Architecture of “Situations”: Heman Chong in Conversation with Lee Ambrozy

Luca Lenglet, *Soft Corners*, 2014, sculpture, in *The Part in the Story Where A Part Becomes A Part of Something Else*, as part of *Moderation(s)*, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam. Photo: Aad Hoogendoorn.



**H**eman Chong is an artist whose work dissolves boundaries among literature and the performing and visual arts. As the chief architect of the *Moderation(s)* project, he expanded his role to include that of institutional curator, employing a range of collaborative methodologies to investigate new ways of refreshing modes of production.

In this conversation, through dialogue with *Moderation(s)* participant and art historian Lee Ambrozy, Heman Chong elaborates on the strategies this multi-platform project employed to expand what contemporary art production can be. He elaborates on the goals and methodologies embedded within the project, revealing how Singaporean art collectives of the 1990s, Contact Improvisation, and graphic design inspired the program for *Moderation(s)*.

The collaborative frameworks that emerged over twenty-four months in *Moderation(s)* revealed the fragility of epistemological hierarchies within the art world and the permeable boundaries between the roles that have come to be established with it. The resulting situations expanded and blurred the roles of the participants, and, similarly, migration between two geographically and culturally divergent centres—Witte de With in Rotterdam and Spring Workshop in Hong Kong—lent *Moderation(s)* an ephemeral character that eluded conventional definition.

Heman Chong’s remarks below demonstrate how artists’ roles have adapted to overlapping cultural contexts and shifting geographies. Developing less

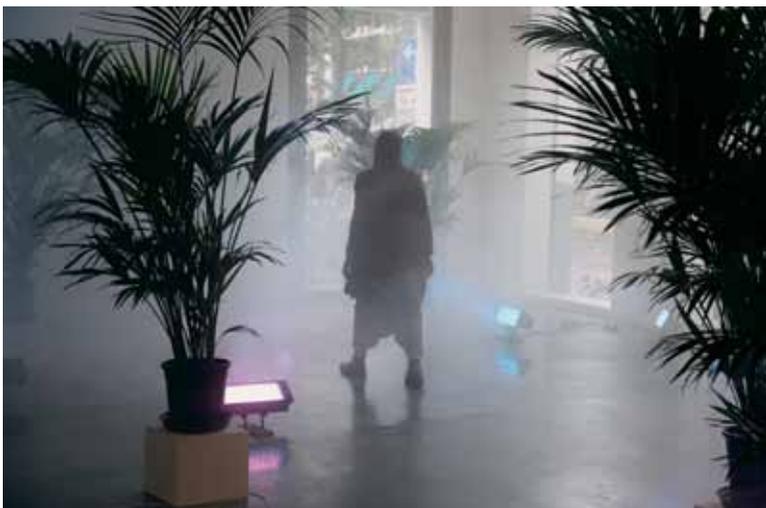
distinct roles for players within the art world is an issue of concern in the so-called Chinese art world, where roles overlap more frequently; that is, artist as curator, or gallerist as art critic.

Is Moderation(s) a potential alternative model for art production in a globalized context? Could similar methodologies such as those found in Moderation(s) displace linear models or provide a framework for multiple value systems to productively co-exist? Such questions have multidisciplinary implications well beyond the increasingly complex art world, namely: How can we create freedom within determined structures?

### **Heman Chong in conversation with Lee Ambrozy, November 8, 2013**

**Lee Ambrozy:** What was your title within the Moderation(s) project? How can we describe your role? Are you the curator, the planner, the Wizard of Oz?

**Heman Chong:** Things somehow got out of control, and now everyone calls me the “moderator,” which I think is inaccurate. But most of my time is spent putting things together, and what is being produced is the result of this process; a lot of the work actually happens during the process of selecting who is involved in what. The entire Moderation(s) project hinges on this. It is about designing a structure in which people can do whatever they want. I don’t define the content within each of the programs with the overall project. People do that themselves, which can be messy at certain points because these are situations where everything could work, or totally fail. But for me it isn’t so important that everything is successful at a level that it is legible, or that it makes a coherent vehicle. More important is that there is a framework where people can build the social structures or relationships they need for use within the Moderation(s) programs, or for use outside of it.



*Trevor Yeung, Mr. Butterflies, 2012, installation, in The Part in the Story Where A Part Becomes A Part of Something Else, as part of Moderation(s), Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam. Photo: Aad Hoogendoorn.*

A lot of Moderation(s) happens between two institutions—Witte de With, Rotterdam, and Spring Workshop, Hong Kong—on different levels. For example, Spring Workshop, because of its location in Hong Kong, is a wonderful site for people to produce mental and creative space in their lives

and do what they want for a month. Witte de With is a different institution; it is almost twenty-five years old, and it functions more like a kunsthalle, so production there is more about engineering modes of seeing things, or ways of plugging into content that would otherwise be part of the exhibition-making processes. This is similar to taking the public programming part of an exhibition and folding it into the exhibition, of making it seamless. At the same time, a lot of the work there is about refreshing the networks of Witte de With, and a lot of the artists associated with it circulate around Europe. The Witte de With space is a pit stop between other institutions; it is also a co-producing institution. This is important, but it is equally important to refresh it and introduce new people into these networks.

**Lee Ambrozy:** I like the idea of a “refresh.”

**Heman Chong:** Yes. This makes sense for me on the level of what Moderation(s) does: getting people to define their own content at different points within the structure.

In a way, there are dual roles that I am playing—one is that of a producer, the other is that of a production manager.

**Lee Ambrozy:** I conceptualize your role as more of a facilitator, not a moderator. You were not moderating during the conference.

Latitudes (Max Andrews and Mariana Cănepa), for *Incidents to Travel*, as part of Moderation(s), Spring Workshop, Hong Kong, February 7, 2013.

**Heman Chong:** This is something I've been very interested in doing from the very beginning of the project: to work with Defne Ayas at Witte de With and build up the team there, where there is a very conservative hierarchy of roles. It was a way of engaging with the curators within Witte de With: to utilize their capacities, knowledge, and time to develop Moderation(s). That is why I pushed the role of moderator to Amira Gad, who was then curator at Witte de With, so that she could take hold of the situation. And it is also the reason I decided that in the final exhibition that takes place in the spring of 2014, *The Part In The Story Where A Part Becomes A Part Of Something Else*, Samuel Saelemaekers, Witte de With's Associate Curator, will be a co-curator and not a mere administrator. It is important for people at Witte de With to take control of the various parts of Moderation(s) and to expand their roles within the institution.



**Lee Ambrozy:** So there is a certain freedom implied in your directives. It was very interesting to observe your working style because there is only one other person I know who works in this manner, Ai Weiwei. In my opinion this is a primary reason for his success, and a characteristic not much discussed. He uses individuals as resources. He trusts people and

gives them very few working constraints. The result is that people working with him develop a sense of responsibility and push projects in directions that he doesn't always anticipate. He facilitates and enables these situations, but he doesn't control them. One example of this in an artwork was *Fragments* (2009), when he gave general instructions to a team of traditional woodworkers to make something out of temple fragments, and they made a shape that resembled China. This management style is similar to what I observed at the Moderation(s) conference.



Mette Edvardsen, *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine*, performance for *A Thing at a Time*, part of Moderation(s), Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, April 19–20, 2013.

**Heman Chong:** More or less. I think in my case there is a lot of enabling, which really comes from a background of working as an artist in Singapore. In the 2000s, in Singapore, there was really no demarcation between a curator and an artist. Everyone performed these two roles as one, simply because there were no professional curators. For example, theatre directors were also directors of art spaces, and they would be programming for their art space while at the same time rehearsing their own work there.

For my entire generation of artists, like Ho Tzu Nyen and Ming Wong, the way we work is that at the beginning of the project we really function like curators. We are writing proposals, talking to funders and to the gallery itself, and there is very little ego involved in defining the role of the curator or artist.

Coming from that background taught me that in order for this professionalization to occur, it is actually more interesting to understand that the skins between these roles are porous, and that one can seep into the other. It's also a way of producing ideas in a more fluid manner, without the involvement of the bureaucracy. It is much more interesting when people overlap their ideas.

Of course, there is also the fact that coming from Singapore, where there was no space for critical thinking, while we were producing we were also reflecting on our work with each other. We formed a critical circle, like a critique group. There were all kinds of feedback loops that existed inherently because the scene there was unprofessional, and we were still just doing things because we wanted to, and out of necessity.

**Lee Ambrozy:** You are speaking about a very specific historical moment. About how many people were involved? Ten? Fifteen?

**Heman Chong:** The group expands and shrinks. I can speak only about the people who I personally engaged with over a span of ten years, between 2000 and 2010. The artists would include Ho Tzu Nyen, Ming Wong, Matthew Ngui, Ang Song Ming, Genevieve Chua, Chun Kai Feng, Charles Lim, Ho Rui An, and Michael Lee. I have also managed to maintain a dialogue with the curator Ahmad Mashadi, whose advice has been invaluable to my work.

One of the reasons artists are very independent in Singapore has to do with administrative policies. Usually it is the artist who applies for grants, not the curators. It is an online process, and you can log on only with an account, and it is a government website. A curator can't do this for you. Maybe they can for a group show, but for solo projects and presentations, the artists have to crunch it out themselves.

Anthony Marcellini, *Slowly Breathe in . . . and Out . . . Through the Object*, 2012, performance for *A Thing at a Time*, part of *Moderation(s)*, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, April 19–20, 2013.



A lot of this generation surfaced around 1999—this was the year that we all met—during a series of exhibitions at The Substation, the first independent artist-run space in Singapore. Somehow at this point there were no freelance curators.

Even people like Kuo Pao Kun or Vincent Leow who organized exhibitions did not call themselves curators. All the curators were institutional, and by that time the Singapore Museum was almost seen as the enemy. So we took on these roles, forming not so much a defined group, but a loose network of people who used the same space—The Substation.

RoseLee Goldberg, lecture for *A Thing at a Time*, part of *Moderation(s)*, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, April 19, 2013.



Of course, there was a long history that came before us, such as the evolution of different collectives that began in the 1980s in Singapore, such as Tang Da Wu and The Artist's Village, but at a point it became evident that these collectives were tripping over themselves and

that new models of collectivity needed to surface. In a way, *Moderation(s)* is an extension of these modes and attempts to stage similar projects in itinerant modes.

**Lee Ambrozy:** It is interesting to view *Moderation(s)* as an instantiation of activities happening in Singapore a decade ago. In a way, you've encapsulated that creative tension by building a framework that imitates the creative incubator you experienced there.

**Heman Chong:** It is clear if you look at most artists in Singapore that we all play multiple roles. There really isn't one artist who is just a painter's painter type of person. Even if there were, he or she would be doing something else, like running a lecture series or something in the public library.

There is always a duality to most artists in Singapore that I think is healthy for the scene as a whole, but the question remains whether or not this is a good thing for individual practices. I guess I'm talking about how we cope with our limited resources and time. One of the reasons we haven't encountered an internationally recognized artist from Singapore is that we spread ourselves so thin. Everyone is doing too much.

How thin can you spread yourself before your own work suffers? I have witnessed my art practice suffer as a result of my role in Moderation(s). I just didn't have enough time to look at it. It is a rational equation. When you free up space for other people, you are taking up your own time.

**Lee Ambrozy:** If you want to look at it in a different way, the question I would put to you is: Do you consider your work with Moderation(s) to be an artwork?

**Heman Chong:** That is one of the main differences between me and how you discuss Ai Weiwei. His projects are consolidated back into Ai Weiwei's own studio, but I don't think that I do that with Moderation(s)—these projects are not consolidated back into my own practice. To answer your question, I consider the structure of Moderation(s) an artwork, but have refrained from appropriating the content.

**Lee Ambrozy:** So the structure itself is an artwork, but you do not claim authorship of whatever is transpiring within it.

**Heman Chong:** Correct. I do not claim authorship of what is inside this structure. Although in a way letting go of authorship is also part of the artwork for me. This is how I define it for myself.

Do you think there are similarities between Moderation(s) and MadeIn Company, for example?

**Lee Ambrozy:** No, I don't. What I see as the major difference between these two projects is that MadeIn Company collective employs a quasi-corporatism. MadeIn models itself on corporate structures to such an extent that they even have time cards and have to punch in when they come into the office/studio. That type of activity—even though it is done somewhat in jest—clearly shows their model.

The fact that members of MadeIn refer to Xu Zhen as “Xu Zong” (similar in Chinese as to how one would address a CEO) makes it clear who is at the top of the hierarchy, whereas Moderation(s) is outstanding precisely because it lacks that clear power hierarchy. It allows for a certain type of

freedom that is often stifled by more common types of social structures, systems, and frameworks. In the act of interpretation, we tend to ignore the models that do not have a clear leadership. There is something inexplicable about Moderation(s) in this sense.

**Heman Chong:** Moderation(s) functions on this level, and I am a buffer zone between institution and artists. I don't make the artists do the press release, etc., and I'm freeing up a lot of the constraints of the bureaucracy that come with working with this type of institution. I've become a curator! In a lot of the meetings they would refer to me as "the ghost," so I take on the role of the specter and can be molded to do many different things within the project.

For example, with *The Fictional Residency*, because of time restraints I was also the book designer. To function as graphic designer when you are the director of a program is crazy. The only other person I know who does this is the guy who ran the Stedelijk Museum in the 1970s, Willem Sandberg. He was crazy enough to work on the catalogues and posters for his own shows.

**Lee Ambrozy:** Why do you choose to do such additional work? Why would you act as a book designer?

Benjamin Seror, *Mime Radio*, performance for *A Thing at a Time*, part of Moderation(s), Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, April 20, 2013.



**Heman Chong:** Because it facilitates a process in which we can work up until the last minute. People have the chance to produce a short story right up until the last minute, where I am sitting with them. You can't do that with graphic designers because they would go crazy, unless it was their own project; here graphic designers like David Reinfurt and Stuart Bailey from Dexter Sinister come to mind. But I didn't want to just hire a graphic designer and have him or her be a slave to the project. It defeats the idea of Moderation(s).

So, in order for the project to gain a certain traction that is not possible with other projects I appropriated myself as the graphic designer. This dual role enables a different way of writing.

**Lee Ambrozy:** I hesitate to use the word "ad-hocism," but I think you could find a similar term for what you are doing.

**Heman Chong:** Moderation(s) grew out of another project that I did in 2006 with Mai Abu ElDahab, at Project Art Centre in Dublin in which we had seven days to write an entire novel. One of the writers, David Reinfurt, whom I mentioned before, was also the graphic designer for the book, and I saw how working with the graphic designer in-situ while writing a book changed everything. It is a totally different thing, because both the design and literary aspects become a visual experience, and this is then encrypted within the work as a part of text.

What David brought to the book was this notion of Post-Fordism, the idea of “just in time,” or print-on-demand—the idea that you are producing for a specific time and audience. It’s also a way of resisting modes of production that tend to fall into a kind of complacency.

There are certain steps to take to produce an exhibition. You begin with a proposal, the institution says yes or no, and then there is a process of negotiation. But I think that is where Moderation(s) works, because there is no actual linear trajectory that is applicable for all the projects, so each of the projects was negotiated and produced within their specific sets of value systems.

**Lee Ambrozy:** That is interesting, and I like that you frame things within each project’s own value systems and allow for their potential to develop on their own terms.

**Heman Chong:** Exactly, and that was what we talked about in the first meeting we had last October, at Witte de With, where it was really about using what people bring to the table rather than building something from scratch.

So I think a lot of what I do in Moderation(s) is to identify and encourage what people do best and when it is best to use their abilities. It’s a method that is close to what many contemporary dance choreographers use, to work with what dancers bring to the piece. So in this case, rather than going to an artist or a curator or a designer and saying, “I want this to be done,” it’s saying, “How about you do what you do and we see how it will all fit, and if it doesn’t fit, it doesn’t fit, maybe we can use it another time, in another context.” In that sense, this has a lot of potential as a model for working in today’s context; one where artists are often pushed by market forces to develop a signature style or an iconic reference in their work, and, in turn, are only interested in consolidating everything for their work. I feel that I wanted a space that allows for active participatory roles within the art world, and, more importantly, to create spaces where a generous exchange of raw ideas and materials can occur.

What Moderation(s) actually taught me is that it is much more interesting to work with artists and have them work in a range of roles, rather than use assistants to produce one thing. I prefer this format because it is so much more social, and there is more you can learn from the other artists rather than constantly perform the genius mode of telling someone what to do.

**Lee Ambrozy:** After the Moderation(s) conference, I realized that personal interaction on the project was irreplaceable. The textual components leading up to the experience, or anything that might follow it in terms of videos, press releases, websites, etc.—nothing can recreate the importance of the inter-personal relationships. This highlighted for me the importance of human interaction, which is something increasingly precious in this digital social age.

**Heman Chong:** It is not new. There was a wave of French artists in the 1990s who already explored the significance of relationships. It centered on artists Dominique Gonzales-Foerster, Pierre Huyghe, Pierre Bismuth, and is the core of relational aesthetics, more or less. In a way I don't want to use that term, but that was their approach.

For example, Pierre Huyghe's 2013 solo show at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris was really both a group show and a confluence of attitudes. You walked into the space and there was a library by Dominique Gonzales-Foerster, but Pierre Huyghe built the shelf, and Rirkrit Tiravanija did the labels. It is kind of like that with Moderation(s), not so much about confining it to making artworks but also moving away from a certain form of production that often results in a *gesamtkunstwerk*. I don't know—I might be totally wrong to deny the surfacing of such productions—but my intuition tells me that there is a much larger format to be explored than having to consolidate things into one place.

**Lee Ambrozy:** But I feel that there is a distinction between this mode of working and what we call relational aesthetics. I would like you to elaborate on that. What might those be?

**Heman Chong:** Moderation(s) is not bound to the doctrine of relational aesthetics. Nicolas Bourriaud encountered that group of artists very early on, and he was very prolific in justifying what they were doing, and he translated that into a theory. But Moderation(s) doesn't rely on those theories; it simply doesn't have a master plan laid out at all. In a way, it locates itself closer to the progressive education and integrated, experience-based programs that the Black Mountain College in North Carolina exercised from the 1930s to 1950s.

**Lee Ambrozy:** Exactly.

**Heman Chong:** The projects functioning under Moderation(s) have a totally different lexicon. We are not imposing one model upon all the programs, which I think relational aesthetics does, where the mode of performance or exhibition becomes a method. There is little method involved in Moderation(s). Every time we come together, we reinvent what each project is. I think it is interesting at that level; again, I like the analogy of using what is on the table, rather than what is not on it. It's kind of like avoiding reading between the lines, really.

**Lee Ambrozy:** This is a literal “what you see is what you get” experience. But I feel that you could define it further by making participation mandatory for an authentic understanding of the work.

**Heman Chong:** I guess so.

**Lee Ambrozy:** But when I say “participation,” I mean also that an observer or witness would be participating as well.

**Heman Chong:** There is another factor that contributed to how I designed Moderation(s), which was my involvement with dance choreographer Boris Charmatz, who has a project called Musée de la Dancs.

Boris’s project is interesting in that he is a choreographer and a dancer who has also taken on the role of directing a dance institute in Rennes, France. When he got the job he transformed the name from Centre de la Choreography into Musée de la Danse, which is a ridiculous name. How do you even begin to create a museum for something that is evolving every time it is being produced?

When I worked with him for Performa 2011, in New York, we had a workshop with choreographer Steve Paxton. Steve Paxton was part of the whole Judson Church movement in the 1970s, with Yvonne Rainer and Merce Cunningham. Steve Paxton introduced something very key to that whole group of people, the method of contact improvisation; he coined the term.

I think that a lot of Moderation(s) is contact improvisation, you know?

**Lee Ambrozy:** Yes, I can see that.



**Heman Chong:** So when I come into contact with you something happens, which translates into something that happens with you and Brian, and that feeds back to Amira Gad, which goes back to Witte de With, then transmits to

Spring Workshop, and then comes back to me. And it is one movement, really, and I like the analogy to contact improvisation. Also, in the workshop that Boris Charmatz organized, Steve Paxton said something very interesting that convinced me of something that happens within Moderation(s): When they were performing in the 1970s, a lot of the audience for the works they were performing were artists themselves. And they were making a type of academy; they were forming a school with each other. They were teaching each other things, and the only people looking at the work were members of a close circle of people.

This is not what I’m working toward in Moderation(s), but I think this is a very important base value for me—that the initial audience for the work

Xiaoyu Weng, lecture for *Stories and Situations* conference, part of Moderation(s), Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, October 5, 2013.

*Stories and Situations* conference, part of *Moderation(s)*, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, October 5, 2013.

is the artists themselves, involved in the work itself, that we are looking and re-looking at something we have made before it seeps into a larger framework of communicating with the world.

**Lee Ambrozy:** Put in these terms, I absolutely see the comparison. But I think one way to frame what you are doing is to say that the outcomes hover between the plastic arts, graphic arts, and performative arts. This is an elusive way in which to discuss issues, but your definition of what



you are doing with *Moderation(s)* is precisely why your work is not similar to relational aesthetics, something that has been a buzzword over the past few years. It is different, and it has to do with your experience in the 1990s in Singapore; working with people did not emerge within a context where roles within the “art system” are determined before one begins acting.

**Heman Chong:** The 1990s was a beautiful moment in Singapore because if you wanted to be an active player, you could be. There were no rules; you could do whatever you wanted to do. There were no gatekeepers. This is an important point to make about the scene in Singapore in the 1990s. It was ridiculous. You could make an exhibition and write the text about the show yourself, and no one would stop you. Whereas today it is no longer possible, you have to go through an application process for the space, and you have to think about the work in relationship to other spaces, and everyone is competitive with programming. Back in the nineties, there was just the one exhibition space for contemporary art.

**Lee Ambrozy:** In that sense, even though you are relying on models that are inspired by the performing arts and Steve Paxton, you are mobilizing them in a very different, expanded framework. New possibilities and potentials can emerge from this model that you are describing.

**Heman Chong:** In a way, we can more or less agree that it is not so interesting to produce every project in the same manner. It becomes repetitive and leads to a slow march into banality, to be honest. In a way, what I am trying to do in *Moderation(s)* is to somehow exhaust the resources that are given to me in order to continuously refresh these modes of production.

**Lee Ambrozy:** I like the idea of exhausting human resources, as opposed to conserving them.

**Heman Chong:** Exactly. Everyone goes crazy working on *Moderation(s)* because I’m 24/7 on their tail, e-mailing Witte de With and asking them to do something that they’ve never done before, or to do something that

sounds totally crazy. And I'm also telling Mimi Brown, the founder of Spring Workshop, with regard to Moderation(s) and Spring Workshop, that I'm transforming it into a space that is pretty similar to what The Substation was in the 1990s: a place where artists hung out.

Spring Workshop too is slowly becoming a space where artists come and hang out. That is really important to me, because the minute that you put five artists in a space and you tell them they don't have to do anything, something wonderful happens, always. And I really like that: there is no protocol to make them work together, but you know that because of their energies something will surface.

In a recent interview between Nadim Abbas and Christina Li about Moderation(s), Nadim said something really insightful: "I think Heman is the one who brought all these people together in different situations. It's like being in someone's kitchen standing around doing something, but then not feeling like you are obliged to do anything. It is pretty much a reflection of what I would be doing anyway, but by myself. I think there is a lot to be said about engineering these kinds of situations that makes it easier for people to relax and put their guard down."<sup>1</sup>

This is especially important for a context like Hong Kong, where there is literally nowhere for artists to come together do things. Sure, everyone has their studio where they pump out more stuff for Art Basel HK. Sure, you recently have all these new cool galleries for artists to show their work. But, really, there is no space where people come together and think about what they are doing, and I think that is something that we all have to start to actively construct.

**Lee Ambrozy:** So do you think that Spring Workshop is succeeding in filling this void? Are they stepping up to the task?

**Heman Chong:** It is happening slowly, but it is starting to happen. People come and spend five hours here just hanging out, which is ridiculous in this context. But I like that people come and use it for their own purposes.

**Lee Ambrozy:** What are people doing when they are hanging out at Spring?

**Heman Chong:** Well, Nadim comes, reads his books, and then leaves. He'll come back with a Filet-O-Fish from McDonalds and eat it while talking to Christina. You know? We cook lunch together, sometimes dinner. It's a lot about having a moment where things become slow.

But what I like about the situation is that the tempo can change within a second. Suddenly, we are in an intense discussion about our work, or we'll just take out our computers and work. For example, I often use my colleagues as editing machines. I'll show them something I'm working on, and they will say, "Come on, this part sucks." We talk and work at the ground level of ideas. There is a lot of value in that, where people offer points of view that you wouldn't necessarily consider.

**Lee Ambrozy:** It seems that many of your productions are ephemeral. The things I see you busy with these days aren't the same kinds of things that I see in your catalogue raisonnée.<sup>2</sup> It is hard to assign a value to things that are ephemeral, but perhaps the greater need lies precisely in such a task, or perhaps their effect resonates deeper in society.

**Heman Chong:** I think that it is unproductive to attempt to describe the processes that occur within Moderation(s) when so many of them are transparent. Much of art history concerns description, but, having said that, a lot of its failings come from the inability to describe a work using the critical language available to the field.

**Lee Ambrozy:** But—just to defend my field here—I find that your most compelling work is that which is indescribable. To me, this type of work really elevates the bar in artistic production, and yet it is the work that you don't feel comfortable talking about.

**Heman Chong:** I do feel more comfortable talking about Moderation(s) nowadays. But I still haven't found a better way to document it.

**Lee Ambrozy:** Precisely. As you haven't found a way to document it, it acquires a different layer of authenticity. I guess what I see in Moderation(s)—and you can tell me if I'm wrong—is a type of artwork unified by participation and a common goal. Within this framework of implied productivity, the product, or the outcome, as you said yourself, is unknown.

This is an unusual type of artistic productivity: a process working toward an undetermined end, collaborative but non-hierarchical. In the sense that the end is unknown, the process is exploratory. I don't like the word "authentic," but in a certain sense it is a more valid creativity because it has fewer predetermined outcomes. This creates a different type of space from artworks that would fall into the category of relational aesthetics because I feel that these establish a framework in which a specific type of interaction occurs, taking into account small variations, but the outcome is essentially known, whereas in Moderation(s), the production commences despite the lack of clear goals and with the outcome as an unknown variable. In that sense this project shares something with the working habits of Ai Weiwei. His model enables and facilitates people to produce, but they are producing under the workshop name of Ai Weiwei/Fake Studio.

Here, although you have a similar mode of working to Ai Weiwei, you do not invest in your personal identity as a brand name. I'm fascinated by the potential that can be unleashed with this mode of working and surprised that no one has discussed this aspect of his studio's output and the corporatism that is alluded to by his name as a brand. But here we have something different, a dissimilar collaborative model.

**Heman Chong:** Since 2009 I've run a small group—I would hesitate to call it a collective—but a small group of artists who look at each other's work. It is based in Singapore and is called PLURAL.

When I started the group, I wrote rules that the group would adhere to, with the first rule being that we will never rent a space as a group. So every time we needed a space we would gather in someone's studio or home or we would ask an institution to give us a space to meet. The second rule is that we will never produce exhibitions as a group of artists, so nobody takes on that role and says, "oh, let's do a group show"—it's not allowed!

The third rule, which I think frees the group from any engagement with the state, is that we are not allowed to apply for funding as a group. We can apply for funding individually, and an individual may use that funding with another member of the group, but no one allowed to use the name PLURAL to apply.

Rule four: We are not allowed to register as an official society in Singapore. This is what a lot of groups do; they become an art society so that they can apply for funding. So PLURAL is a concise denial of the system that has been created to facilitate artistic production in Singapore and thereby controls it. And it has worked very well so far in that when we meet, we know that it is only about work. Meetings are not to talk rubbish about the art scene, or whatever; they are also not about consolidating resources in that we aren't there to help each other get into documenta or something.

When we sit down we are taking each other's works and breaking them down so that everyone can process it. It is more or less a model that reflects information moving through the Internet. There is no mainframe. Everyone crunches ideas according to his or her own capacities and then dumps it back into this pool. It is all very nebulous. This is very interesting for me, this analogy of the nebulous area as something that also exists in Moderation(s). Right at the centre is this very fluid concept that no one can use in a very direct manner, but when people do use it, it becomes concrete. I kind of like that. It becomes very hard to commodify.

I'm not resisting the market. I'm literally transferring what I earn from making paintings, a practice I define as my "day job," into these projects. It is about sustaining a dual system for me—channeling one thing into something else. For example, I don't expect payment when it comes to work I put into PLURAL, because the money I earn from my painting "day job" is enough to pay my rent. I want the cake, and I want ice cream and chocolate on top of it, and I want to eat it all in one go.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Nadim Abbas, interview with Christina Li, "Pyramid Time Machine," *Moderation(s)—A Witness* blog by Christian Li, <http://witnessModerations.tumblr.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> Heman Chong and Pauline J. Yao, eds., *The Part in the Story Where We Lost Count of the Days* (Hong Kong: ArtAsiaPacific, 2013).