Positions through Dialogue

Dialogue 1 is with Deshna Mehta, a visual artist.

In conversation with Deshna Mehta, we discussed the topic of my previous project: how intergenerational relationships and identity are expressed through daily rituals and visual systems. My idea was that by using specific objects and gestures, we could gain insight into the lives, memories, and cultural shifts of three generations. This project represented a deeply personal emotional exploration. She provided an important external perspective: how to eventually organise private, abstract systems into a coherent narrative work of public significance. Deshna discussed her own project, the Kumbh Mela initiative (Studio Anugraha, 2015). She believes that documenting an event can begin with individual "fragments"—for example, the Kumbh Mela revolves around the river, highlighting the people and events across and around it: slogans, crowd noise, photographs of the space, and conversations with attendees. Following multi-layered data collection, she labels and categorises all elements. Once structured, narratives can be organised around themes. Thus, our discussion suggests that instead of "concealing" or simply displaying divergent behaviours, we should document and tag them, resulting in a visual language that reveals patterns and connections. Enter separately, then converge.

We also discussed visual style. My current visual approach leans towards the playful and bright, which may reduce the emotional weight of memories. Perhaps incorporating textures and a sense of passage via collage, photography, or a printed aesthetic would better emphasise the tender intimacy I want to convey while remaining universal. I recognise that using mixed media—photographs, handwritten fragments, abstract textures, and even overall typographic layouts—could help distinguish personal recollection from collective resonance.

Another insight gained was the conflict between private experience and public value. Deshna reminded me that not all details require explanation. Instead, I should distinguish between what is "universal" (such as the daily experience of breakfast) and what is "specific" (such as my mother turning the kettle on). This approach preserves the personal nature of my work while making it accessible

to viewers. Furthermore, because my project spans three generations, each with their own unique rhythms of life, Deshna suggested conveying these differences through stylistic transitions between generations rather than imposing a single aesthetic framework.

This delightful dialogue with Deshna Mehta resulted in not only practical strategies but also a change of perspective. Whether it is the collection of gestures, the creation of stylistic variations, or the development of a visual language for memory, it has provided me with an effective framework.

## Dialogue 2 is with Jian Pan, a bibliophile.

After some reflection and organisation, I engaged in a dialogue with Professor Pan Jian. Following my presentation of insights into breakfast rituals and gestures, she emphasised, with profound erudition, that "breakfast should not be regarded as the subject itself, but rather as an entry point for broader exploration of generations, cultures, and their contemporary substitutes". Indeed, following conventional wisdom, I had consistently attempted to narrow the scope of my investigation. However, during this project, I realised I had boxed myself in. The concept of "invisible breakfast rituals" that I proposed was, in her opinion, so common across all meal times that it no longer constituted a meaningful or distinctive ritual. It reflected the "convenience of technology" rather than deeper symbolic behaviour. Instead, I should concentrate on the tangible, physical gestures and socio-cultural variations that people make when preparing and eating their meals.

'You must capture points that resonate with the audience,' she explained. I understood that 'points of resonance' represented 'public value'. She suggested beginning with the most relatable visual elements: gestures and objects on a table. Although simple, these symbols have the ability to evoke shared memories and emotions. I thumbed through Atelier HOKO's *Science of the Secondary*, which catalogues overlooked everyday phenomena centred on objects (Atelier HOKO 2024). Consider teacups and the act of drinking tea, for example. The authors meticulously document everything, from people's postures while sipping to teacup types and grips. Overall, it's remarkably

commercial but fascinating. This resonated strongly with my goal of redefining the breakfast ritual as symbolic and conceptual.
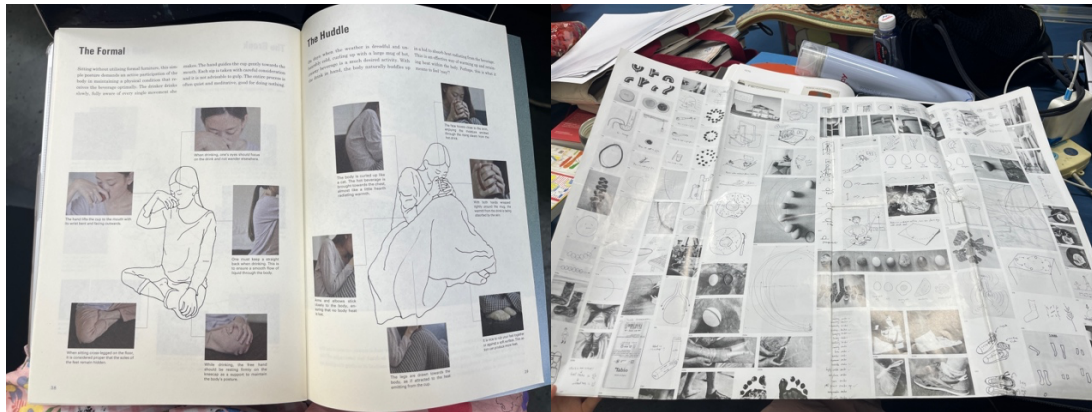
Professor Pan Jian also proposed the concept of "threads that interweave": a central narrative supported by multiple exploratory sub-threads. For example, my primary focus could be the ritual of "eating", while secondary threads could include tracing individual objects (such as coffee or hamburgers), documenting generational differences in gestures, or documenting daily life rhythms. 'Even if they appear independent,' she explains, 'these minute threads should interconnect, weaving a narrative throughout the project.' Hatje Cantz's book *Liam Gillick: Half a Complex* is another compelling read (Gillick 2019), demonstrating how abstract narratives can mirror complex social systems—a framework that may guide the structural organisation of my project.
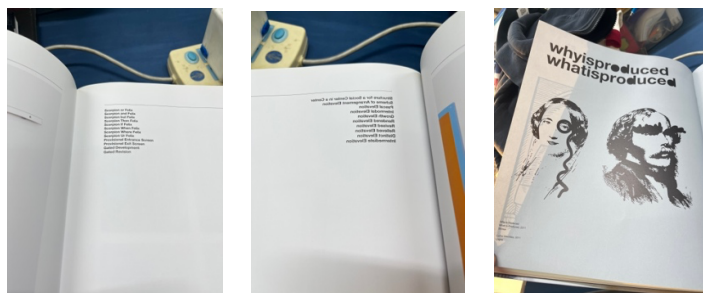
Overall, we discussed many kinds of ideas, including time/space positioning and the inherent relationship between form and content. I've gained a lot of insight for the work ahead.

References

Atelier HOKO (Firm) (2024) Science of the secondary : an atlas of the everyday.

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Gillick, L. (2019) Liam Gillick : half a complex. Berlin: Hatje Cantz.

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