

# Fair Trade and Creative Practice: A Participatory Framework for the Globalised World

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*Fair Trade has emerged in recent years as a model for sale of goods that seeks to address global inequity by bringing the rich consumer of the Global North in closer proximity to the life of the poor producer of the Global South. With the interest of creative practice in the global economies of consumption and exchange, a phenomenon called 'transnational art' has emerged in recent years seeking to make transparent the terms of participation engaged by cultural producers. This new ethical sensibility reflects a growing understanding of art as grounded in a political context. The paper examines three examples of artists from the Global North commissioning work from artisans in the Global South. The circumstances of these collaborations vary according to the level of control maintained by those from the Global North. As with Fair Trade, these collaborations can be criticised as failing to reach the state of true equality between participants. A critical framework is proposed to contextualise such works as models of collaboration that extend our understanding of the relative interests of North and South.*

## **Coffee and Fair Trade**

The history of modernity is partly a history of the hidden debt to those poorer countries that have provided the necessary resources for economic growth in the Global North.<sup>1</sup> Since the late twentieth century, there have been attempts to at least acknowledge this debt, if not return it. Robinson's (2000) *Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* argues that descendents of slaves in the USA should be compensated for the unpaid labour their ancestors contributed to the wealth of the new nation. Against this background and in context of the market economies of globalised supply and demand, the mobilisation of sustainable practices of production and exchange aligns market, social and environmental standards. The organisation of this approach is known as Fair Trade. While this model of market trading has been most successful for agricultural products such as coffee and chocolate, this paper considers how the Fair Trade model might be extended to art as a cultural practice with a global, or at least transnational, exchange value. There seem close parallels in the way models of North-South collaboration are changing in both economic and aesthetic arenas of practice. Extending the Fair Trade model to creative practice assists with the task of reviewing the place of art in a global environment.

The emergence of Fair Trade is coincident with the role of coffee in the supply and demand chain of industrialised nations. The mechanisation of production that occurred through processes of industrialisation in the Global North offers an interesting parallel to the regimentation of the human body as a labouring self. Weinberg and Bealer (2001), writing on the historical and social contexts of caffeine, observe that the chronometric standardisation in seventeenth century Europe coincided with the popularity of coffee as a drink. Tracing this situation further shows that following the invention of the pendulum mechanism by Dutch clockmaker Saloman Coster in 1657, workplace changes required ways of regulating the human body to respond to precise temporal regimes. As Weinberg and Bealer point out,

“Once this chronometric standardization occurred, the use of an analeptic became a virtual necessity to regulate the biological organism, allowing people to meet the demands of invariant scheduling” (2001: 125). While previous to industrialisation the standard breakfast beverage in England had been beer, the introduction of stimulants such as coffee served to better predispose workers to the demands of industrial work. The role of substances like coffee goes beyond individual enjoyment, but can be seen to underpin factory production. Thus coffee acted as an impetus to the power relations producing the labouring subject at that time.

A brief genealogy of the cultural associations of coffee since its introduction to the Western diet shows that in the urban literary culture of seventeenth century, Restoration London, coffee lost its oriental roots and became anglicised as a sign of “gentlemanly curiosity” (Cowan, 2005). In post-war USA, coffee was more strongly identified with its origins in Latin America, revealing traces of its sites of production in post-war popular culture, such as in the 1946 Frank Sinatra novelty hit titled “Coffee Song” with its refrain “They’ve got an awful lot of coffee in Brazil”; and in 1962, the best-selling *Jazz Samba* album by Stan Getz and Charlie Byrd started the “bossa craze” (Perron & Dunn, 2001), which grafted the Brazilian middle-class music of Bossa Nova onto North American dance styles. Brazilian culture was further aligned with coffee culture in the USA through the development of the Starbucks chain, whose “Hear Music” retail music concept heavily features Charlie Byrd’s revival of Bossa Nova tunes (Taylor, 2007). These few examples show the way coffee and its origins became a signifier for a progressive West in post-war United States, at least in the minds and imaginations of entertainment and popular culture of the burgeoning social spaces that came to represent the US.

However, if we excavate a little deeper we soon find that while the history of coffee consumption in the West reflects economic and social processes of commodification in the growth of global markets, it also obscures the origins of exploitation in the labour of poor plantation workers.<sup>2</sup> In the case of coffee, its commodification has involved the construction of a consumer culture that secures its enjoyment partly by obscuring the global inequity at play. Along with sugar and cotton, coffee was one of the principal products that made slavery profitable. In the late 1780s, the slave colony of Haiti supplied half the coffee consumed in Europe (Daviron & Ponte, 2005). Injustice can be seen to prevail even after the abolition of slavery. The demand for coffee in the Global North is serviced by impoverished agricultural workers in South America (Bacon et al., 2008).

The Fair Trade initiative emerged from a group of alternative trade organisations, mostly with religious foundation, such as the Mennonite handicraft outlet and its establishment of *Ten Thousand Villages*, a global network of social and economic models of production and consumption. A brief account shows this was founded by North American woman, Edna Ruth Byler following a life-changing visit to Puerto Rico in 1946. Her vision for a more equitable distribution of resources in the labours of production and consumption led to the establishment and growth of more sustainable markets in North America for artisans in the South. In 1986, the first specifically “fair trade” coffee was sold in Massachusetts under the name *Equal Exchange*, where a self-certified process was employed to determine a “fair price” for producers. Fair Trade was eventually formalised as an international standard (FLO, Fair Trade Labelling Organisations International, see Nicholls & Opal, 2005). This has now moved beyond agriculture into the World Fair Trade Organisation whose reach extends into realms

such as business management and culture. Its principal strategy is to support the work of cooperative businesses that are structured to fairly distribute the resources gained through production. As Laura Reynolds (2002) argues, the effect of the Fair Trade label is to shorten the supply chain offering a more direct relationship between consumer and producer. Albeit from a low base, Fair Trade sales are increasing far beyond growth in GDP.<sup>3</sup>

While a degree of commodification is inevitable in Fair Trade, as a system it is built on two basic principles that are designed to more directly engage consumers with producers (Nicholls & Opal, 2005). The first principle is that of transparency, which grants the consumer confidence that certain minimal conditions have been observed, such as conformity to International Labour Organisation conventions, including prohibition on child labour and the freedom of association. This tackles situations where corporations can find larger profits by favouring production in countries whose labour standards do not have to be maintained. The second is direct contact, so that there are no middlemen (sometimes known as “coyotes”) between the producers and the retailers. Fair Trade farmers work for cooperatives that share profits equitably and sell their product to authorised buyers.

Despite these standards, Fair Trade is not beyond criticism as a model for ethical relationships between the Global North and South. A common criticism (Johnson, 2002; Lyon, 2006; Scrase, 2003) is that such enterprises are designed more to make the consumer feel good about themselves than to address the structural inequities at play in the divide between rich and poor countries. This broader perspective is part of an extended critique of the way in which global political realities are commodified into individual lifestyle (James, 2006). The Fair Trade model may not be fully solving global inequity, however adherents of Fair Trade consider this is not reason enough to abandon Fair Trade. As a platform for engagement between Global North and South, Fair Trade as a market model of production and trade offers potential to enable negotiation of broader economic issues.

While imperfect in its current realisation, practices of ethical consumerism like Fair Trade have the potential to reveal the hidden debt that the Global North owes to the Global South. This promises a more open exchange in which the impact of this relationship becomes a matter of negotiation. Recognition of the Global North’s dependency on the cheap labour of the Global South prompts a review of the relationship, such that it might be possible for the consumer to have greater awareness of the impact their purchase has on the lives of producers. For example, Rachel Snyder’s (2007) research on the world of denim production reveals how the ubiquitous Western jeans depends on a global system of subjugation involving exposure to pesticides of cotton-pickers in Azerbaijan and unpaid wages to factory-workers in Cambodia. Awareness of such inequities is the first step to a more ethical relationship between producer and consumer.

### **Fair Trade and Creative Practice**

While coffee is its principle subject, the path taken by Fair Trade contains challenges for other exchanges between Global North and South. Parallel challenges can be found in the cultural arena, where the Global North consumes artistic products from the Global South, including not only artistic goods such as music and craft, but also symbolic materials such as designs and intangible cultural practices. For example, the Whirling Dervishes from Turkey toured Western cultural events including the Adelaide Festival of 1996. How are such performances to be considered in any way other than cultural prostitution? What standards can be adopted

to ensure that cultural products drawing from the Global South are consumed in a fair and equitable manner?

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of art provides a framework for extending a Fair Trade model into creative practice. In his seminal work, *Distinction* Bourdieu argues that the cultural domain can be understood as a means by which class difference is naturalised as a product of innate artistic sensitivity. The principle characteristic of this sensitivity is the detachment of art from necessity. As he argues (Bourdieu, 1984: 47):

This affirmation of power over a dominated necessity always implies a claim to a legitimate superiority over those who, because they cannot assert the same contempt for contingencies in gratuitous luxury and conspicuous consumption, remain dominated by ordinary interests and urgencies.

Later writings by Bourdieu (1996) and followers (Casanova, 2004) focus on the process of "consecration" by which cultural value is constructed. Instances of consecration include exhibition openings, awards and critical reviews. These events enable the circulation of symbolic capital in a way that reproduces institutions that constitute the cultural field, such as museums and art galleries.

According to recent perspectives, "aestheticisation" has entailed a privileging of the conceptual meaning over the process of production. Peter Dormer (1994) argues that the separation of conception and execution in modern art presumes that "mere making" can take care of itself. Glenn Adamson (2007) extends this analysis by taking up Theodore Adorno's theory of the avant-garde as that which defines the limits of art practice in order to escape the process of commodification. For Adamson, this approach positions craft as an invisible yet enabling possibility of modern art practice. He employs Jacques Derrida's concept of the supplement to underscore this position of craft as a "frame" that exists outside the conceptual value of the work while still being essential to its production. For Derrida (1978), the meaning of a work of art depends on the non-meaning of the frame (*parergon*) that marks the boundary between art and the external world. Though the labour of artistic production is not seen as relevant to its conceptual meaning, it can still be viewed as the condition of possibility and thus intrinsic to the work itself.

There are conceptual artists whose employment of artisans is not just a means to an end, but also the source of meaning. For example, in the work of Italian Arte Povera artist Alighiero e Boetti, the use of Afghan weavers in the production of his tapestry *Mappa* was not only to apply their weaving skills to the brief, but also to embody the global relations at play. For Alighiero e Boetti, the mistakes in translation made by these weavers manifest the global dialogue that the work seeks to represent (Cerizza, 2007). In an extreme case, Spanish artist Santiago Sierra pays poor people to perform humiliating tasks such as moving a heavy object repeatedly between point A and B. For Sierra, such exploitation is presented in the interests of exposing inequity. As he says, "Persons are objects of the State and of Capital and are employed as such. This is precisely what I try to show."<sup>4</sup> Sierra's message about global inequity overrides concerns about exploitation of the individual participants. But there is a concern that these participants are being humiliated for a political message that is coded for the exclusive reading of a privileged art world. Alternative to its intrinsic conceptual meaning, such works can be critiqued by reference to the means used to achieve their ends.

But art as a field of cultural and social knowledge production cannot be reduced entirely to ethics. Cultural critic, Clair Bishop (2006) argues that for visual artists the issue of ethics is counterbalanced by the demand for truth. She argues that too much attention to the ethical nature of the process ignores the potential of art to disturb our preconceptions of the work: art exposes a world of contradiction. But we can also argue the converse. The exposure of unethical relations between the creator and producer requires justification as an act that exposes new truths. A criticism of Santiago Sierra may be not so much that he has exploited vulnerable poor people in the production of his work, but that the spectacle confirms what the audience already knows.

If we follow Glenn Adamson's positioning of craft as a limit of possibility for modern art, there are many instances where this possibility follows a global dimension parallel to Fair Trade. Participants in the work of artists such as Jeff Koons, Alighiero e Boetti and Santiago Sierra continue to represent an anonymous force, whose labour silently contributes to the trajectory of artists from the Global North. Critics such as Anita Nettleton (2010) argue that this anonymity, which continues in the representation of traditional crafts such as basketry in South Africa, exposes a limit in the democratic basis of Western art as currently practised. Nettleton finds that the market expectation of "authenticity" projected onto baskets consigns them to the status of anonymous tribal labour, whereas they can in fact be attributed to individual makers with identifiable and unique artistic careers.

There have recently been models for contemporary art that pose alternatives to the Western notion of artistic autonomy. These have entailed ways of representing art in its immediate social context. Elizabeth Grierson (2009) has applied a Foucauldian perspective to creative practice in order to argue that art can no longer be understood ontologically as an autonomous practice. She claims that it must instead be seen as dependent on participatory communities.

Such a move reflects the emergence of relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002) in the way art may be constructed and the social relations it can engender. The focus of relational aesthetics has been the development of performance-based work, in which art is used as a device for bringing audience together in spontaneous formations to enhance the participatory nature of democracy. Rather than focus on the aesthetic product, which too easily becomes a mere commodity of the art market, relational aesthetics seeks to position art as a space for utopic social formations. As Bourriard writes (2002: 9), "The relationship between people, as symbolised by goods and replaced by them, and signposted by logos, has to take on extreme and clandestine forms, if it is to dodge the empire of predictability." Relational aesthetics privileges the social relations that art makes possible.

Fair Trade and relational art share parallel trajectories. Both attempt to remove the fetishised element of products that serves to mystify their conditions of possibility. Fair Trade provides an alternative to branding through a system of accreditation that reflects the conditions of production. Relational art de-mystifies the art object and instead reflects art that is the product of those who participate in it.

Fair Trade and relational art are also subject to similar criticisms. Both have been criticised as largely symbolic gestures that do little to affect the broader power structures at play. Relational art has been criticised (Martin, 2007) for reproducing a closed art world that does not engage with communities otherwise excluded for economic or educational reasons. Like

Fair Trade, it can be seen as promoting a local sense of equality without affecting global structural inequities.

Fair Trade responds to these criticisms by broadening its scope beyond agricultural commodities to include areas like business management. How can relational aesthetics go further? One response is to extend the field of participation beyond the Global North. Audience empowerment is a limited goal if that audience is limited to a global cultural elite. The challenge is to extend participants to include those whose labours enable the conditions necessary for relational art exercises to occur—most immediately, for example, the Sudanese migrant who cleans the art gallery.

But such extension of audience confronts the limits of the Western art model. The purely autonomous nature of relational art events makes them suitable for a particular audience: it requires surplus capital to invest in symbolic events between strangers. While it is possible to find potential participants in the Global South, these are likely to come from the educated classes in metropolitan centres. It is not easy for a peasant living a subsistence life in a village to embrace a model that demands his or her time to participate in deliberately useless activities with unknown collaborators.

One way to include the Global South is to re-introduce production into the relational paradigm. Collaboration, which involves the exercise of traditional skills, offers the person from the Global South more tangible reasons for participation. The subject of the work then becomes the relationship between the creative practitioner of the Global North and the producer of the Global South. Such work can then be critiqued according to how this relationship creates new modes of engagement that reflect the interests of those involved.

Recent moves in contemporary art follow this trend. Such projects activate a working relationship between the creative practitioners of North and producers of South. The result is to be read not only as an autonomous work of art, but also as a process that engages Global North and South in dialogue. Such work can be understood to operate within a transnational context. In the late twentieth century, the category of “transnational” emerged in international law to describe the development of private regulatory systems (Friedman, 1996). These systems often govern supply chains that cover a number of individual nation states, as witnessed, for example, in the jewellery industry. Applied to art, the transnational category offers a space between the artist’s own location and the ubiquitous global condition. It concerns a bilateral relationship between two parties as they seek to find a workable common ground.

Three examples discussed below reveal a diversity of paths taken by creative practitioners of the Global North in commissioning work from producers of the Global South. The works are reviewed in terms of way in which the producer’s perspective is incorporated into their manifestation. They are considered as a balance between the ethical standards of collaboration and the revelation of new truths.

In these cases, creative practitioners have commissioned work from traditional artisans. The discourse that attends these works will be examined for the evidence of dialogue between participants and revelation of new insights about relations between North and South. This discourse is constituted by the discursive practices of artists’ statements, interviews, catalogue essays and documentary materials. In these cases, the veracity of the producer’s perspective

is difficult to establish. Codes of politeness can destabilise confidence in expressions of support. There is little to gain for the producer in confessing truly felt beliefs or points of view if they are at variance with how they are officially represented. This study focuses on the official discourse itself, to critically examine how producers are represented in these domains of practice.

### **Fair Trade art**

#### *Polly&Me in Pakistan*<sup>5</sup>

The Sydney designers Polly & Me have been employing embroiderers from North-West Pakistan in the development of their fashion accessories.<sup>6</sup> But in 2009 they launched a creative project that sought greater creative input from the women involved. They wanted art works that originated from the women, rather than themselves as designers. To achieve this, they worked with a group of thirty, mostly unmarried, women from Chitral near the border with Afghanistan. These women lived in Purdah and were relatively isolated from the outside world. Through a series of workshops, an Australian (Cath Braid) and a Lebanese (Rolla Khadduri) woman encouraged the development of their own creative expression, including use of digital camera and drawing exercises. The drawings emerging from these exercises then formed the bases of a series of embroideries that were exhibited in Karachi and Islamabad, with support from the British High Commission.<sup>7</sup>

The exhibition was titled *Gup Shup: The Domestic, the Narrative and Cups of Chai* (*Gup Shup* is Urdu for “chit chat”). Works were exhibited away from the wall, enabling visitors to read the stories on their reverse. The catalogue reproduced stories composed by the women as inspiration for their work, alongside initial drawings and photographs. Names of the producers accompanied the 23 embroideries. They were largely collective works—only five were by individuals.<sup>8</sup>

In one such work, titled *The Bet*, Shehria and Rahmat tell the story of a girl who broke her arm just before Eid. This girl lied that it didn’t hurt as a ruse to avoid having to wear a cast during the Festival. The story is translated into English, but uses the first person, beginning with the sentence, “I tricked a doctor.”

More than half the works on display were sold and Pakistan media, including satellite television, covered the exhibition. Interviews conducted afterwards with participants included discussion about the outcomes of this project for the women. The responses were positive, reflecting on both the pride that comes from having their work shown via satellite television and also the extra income that helps build confidence for the future of their children. Zaibunissa, a mother of three, described the experience of attending the exhibition: “I felt a certain confidence in me for the first time. Meeting such high level people who were there to see our work was something we had not even thought of in our wildest dream.” She says that the money from the sales will be spent on her son’s education. The embroiderers varied in the uses of their extra funds, but seemed consistently to find the exhibition’s publicity to be a positive influence in their lives.

Given likely codes of politeness, the absence of negative comment does not necessarily indicate total acceptance. What can be acknowledged is that the benefits to the producers are seen as an important framing condition for the project. The women are named, their stories are reproduced; they own the works and are the beneficiaries of sales and publicity.

*Gup Shup* does present a picture of everyday life for the women contrasting with stereotypes of oppression under *Purdah*. Their stories reveal a life of games and conviviality. They have embraced new modes of expression and not confined themselves to traditional embroidery patterns. As such, it is a creative context in which the producers are seen to exercise agency. However, *Gup Shup* does not reveal anything particular about the relationship between the world of the village and the city. It does not reflect on its own processes as a way of packaging life of the embroiderers for the foreign urban gaze. While this is understandable given the extraordinary cultural gap that this project covers, it does limit its meaning as a work of “transnational art” as previously discussed.

#### *Rodney Glick in Indonesia*<sup>9</sup>

The second case study involves Rodney Glick, a Perth-based artist whose work reaches out beyond the studio. As well as maintaining a personal career as a professional sculptor, Glick has been interested in creative ways of establishing new spaces for visual art. While these have been beneficial for the visual arts sector in Western Australia, they can also be read as part of Glick’s conceptual practice in testing the boundary conditions of art as a knowledge practice. Frustrated at the lack of recognition for West Australian artists, he helped establish the fictional Glick International Foundation, which served to reflect on the role of overseas recognition as a form of legitimacy in Australia. He continued this institutional critique by co-founding the Kellerberrin International Art Space, set in the “nowhere” of the West Australian wheat belt. Glick has continued to question how local art production is conditioned by an implied relation to the global structures.

Recently, Glick developed the international context of his work further by outsourcing its production. For a 2008 Perth exhibition, *God-Favoured: Rodney Glick Surveyed*, Glick commissioned a Balinese wood carver, Made Leno, from the village of Kemenuh south of Ubud. Leno had trained as an artist at the Fine Arts Institute in Denpasar. Feeling that Leno would understand the nature of an artistic commission, Glick asked Leno to carve a life-size version of the multi-armed Hindu god, based on a likeness of Western figures, including himself. This commission involved technical challenges for Leno, as traditionally the subject of these statues had been only iconic divine figures. The accompanying catalogue included discussion about the conditions of this commission, including price and cultural sensitivity.

In the exhibition catalogue, Glick is concerned that these works might be seen as disrespectful. However, when he inquired about this with the local Balinese, he was surprised to see how warmly they were received. As collaborator Chris Hill notes in the catalogue, “While the sculptures do show Western people in poses that suggest Hindu gods, or in one case Buddha, they have been generally seen in Bali not as suggesting that their gods have been belittled, but rather as suggesting a divine presence that is in everyone and that links all humanity” (Hill, 2008: 14). Far from being perceived as irreverent, Glick’s works appeared to be embraced by those Balinese involved in making the works. Local Balinese clients soon started to enquire whether they could have statues made of their family in this manner. A nearby stone carver also began to make likenesses. Glick became concerned about this. According to Hill (14), “We have talked to the carver about this and he accepts our point of view that Rodney should retain some control over works done according to his idea, not because he wanted some financial reward but to protect the integrity of the concept.”

Eventually, Glick gave up trying to control the reproduction of his concept in Bali. He focused



instead on other projects not directly related to his art, such as starting up a local agricultural initiative and helping develop a contemporary puppet theatre. In 2009 he produced new work including sculptures with Made Leno and two local painters for an exhibition titled *Everyone - Punching the Devil* in an art gallery in Ubud, Bali. Glick's engagement with Indonesian artisans has moved beyond simple commissioning for Australian exhibitions to more partnership activities.

Compared to *Gup Shup*, Glick's commissioning of local artisans can be read as biased towards his particular aesthetic project. He did not engage in formal developmental work in order to nurture creative expression from the carver. The dissociation of body in sculptural representations of multi-armed individuals, including those of himself, reflects an ongoing exploration of non-being, evident elsewhere in works such as the *Defaced* series of photographs that erased the faces of those represented. Like *Gup Shup*, the work can also be read in terms of the development model as serving the interests of producers. It is framed by a broader engagement beyond production of exhibition work to include assistance in economic development. The works also incorporate the points of view of producers. For *Gup Shup*, this is a carefully managed process of channelling creative expression, while in Glick's case, the producers' perspective emerges more in the unexpected contest of cultural standards. Glick's project inadvertently exposes a contradiction between the Western concept of intellectual property as a private possession and the shared nature of ideas and designs in a Balinese context. Rather than settle this privately, the nature of the argument is published alongside Glick's exhibition.

#### *Danius Kesminas in Indonesia*<sup>10</sup>

An alternative use of Indonesian artisanship can be found in the *Punkasila* project engineered by Danius Kesminas, an Australian performance artist who embraces the anarchic energy of popular culture, particularly that which can be seen to challenge elite tastes. For Kesminas authentic art comes from the street rather than the studio.

Kesminas obtained a three-month residency in Jogjakarta, Indonesia, organised by Asialink, an organisation promoting Australian culture in Asia. Kesminas had little knowledge of the local culture, other than a text book on Indonesian politics which he found filled with acronyms. Soon after he arrived in Jogjakarta, Kesminas started collaborating with some art students who were playing heavy metal rock. At his suggestion, they formed a punk-style band that performed songs, which took their lyrics from the Indonesian acronyms he had been reading. This corresponded with a local word game called *Plesatan*, which consisted in alternative expressions for official acronyms. For example, the acronym TNI stands for *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (Indonesian National Military), but is sung as *Tikyan Ning Idab-Idabi* (Poor but Adorable). In a similar vein, they called their band *Punkasila*, in irreverent allusion to the official ideology of Indonesian nation state, *Pancasila*. *Punkasila* consisted of not only performances in secret locations, but also the paraphernalia of popular music, including CDs, rock videos, t-shirts and band uniforms.

The way Kesminas tells the story, much of *Punkasila* was beyond his control, particularly the production of stage paraphernalia. A textile artist used batik printing to create camouflage patterns on the band's uniform. A woodcarver made an electric guitar in the shape of a machine gun out of mahogany. New expressions of *Punkasila* emerged spontaneously without the artist's intervention, including websites, stickers and t-shirts. Kesminas emphasises that

these were produced spontaneously without this control or permission—“you’re a catalyst lighting this wick.” For Kesminas, punk is a part of DIY, a do-it-yourself mentality that encourages participants to become directly involved in the creative process. Given the potential danger for locals in defying the military, Kesminas claimed that he “always had to defer to them for limits. We never did anything they didn’t want to do.” The main negative reaction came from “NGO do-gooder missionary types” who thought he was showing disrespect for Indonesian culture. Kesminas countered that his collaboration was more authentic than the seemingly traditional performances staged for tourists.

Kesminas continues to work with his Indonesian collaborators. In 2009, he sourced Australian funding to bring the band to Cuba, for the Havana Biennale. While he is not directly involved in broader development issues, like Polly&Me and Rodney Glick, he does profess to an ongoing commitment beyond individual exhibitions. Like Glick, Kesminas’ work can be seen as part of his individual artistic career. His previous projects, such as the band *Histrionics* and *Slave Pianos* have involved musical collaborations with an ironic message. Also, like Glick, the work is characterised partly by the artist’s loss of control in the process of collaboration. However, while Glick represents this as inadvertent, in the case of Kesminas it is seen as a virtue.

Like *Gup Shup*, *Punkasila* allows an alternative picture of Indonesia to emerge that is at odds with stereotypes of Muslim fundamentalism and demure folk artists. However, *Punkasila* lacks the kind of tangible community benefits that were offered by *Gup Shup*. On the other hand, its realisation through local performances in secret venues around Jogjakarta contrasts with the outcome of *Gup Shup* in official exhibition venues far from the women’s villages. *Gup Shup* connected with the world of remote Chitral through satellite news broadcasts, but the terms of the exhibition still reflected the official control of bodies such as the British High Commission. Yet unlike Rodney Glick’s work, *Punkasila* does not critically reflect on the process. Even the modest position of the white artist as mere catalyst still places the Global North in the role of active agent.<sup>11</sup>

### **Critical evaluation**

The three examples examined here all involve creative practitioners from the Global North seeking to make work through collaboration with producers in the Global South. Following the Fair Trade model, such collaborations can be read in terms of the interests of producers. This practice contrasts with previous practices that confine the artisan within a private commercial arrangement.

But there are clear limits. Such ethical engagement has as its horizon an equality between Global North and other. Following this principle, it should be possible to conceive of a reciprocity in the relation between Global North and South. Just as Northern artists can initiate partnerships with traditional artisans of the Global South, so we should expect the reverse—that a Southern creative practitioner might initiate a partnership with Northern producers.

Though the projects examined here provide greater reciprocity than do previous cases of North-South creative collaboration, they are still far from equal. Each follows the broadly asymmetric relation of the Global North to the South as an active agent seeking to change the condition for a relatively passive recipient. Historically, such interventions are seen as less violent with time. Contemporary interventions as developmental assistance are more

empowering than previous attempts at radical dispossession of resources and culture under colonisation processes. Yet the flow of agency remains the same. The benefits continue to be accounted largely in Northern terms; this is not just in economic terms via sale of works, but also gains in the symbolic capital of Northern artists, and changes in social and cultural economies.

What does this mean for transnational art at this point in time? That these examples fall well short of equality links them to a continuing history of cultural hegemony. The breadth of this criticism is parallel to that of the shortfall of Fair Trade in its hopes for rectifying global inequity. Yet, it needs to be acknowledged that these examples do constitute some incremental steps towards social and political change in the conditions of labour in the unequal terms of cultural production and the power relations of labour between North and South.

One means of acknowledging the need for change is to avoid presenting transnational aesthetic or cultural productions, such as art, as a conclusive project. In such a scenario, works would not be seen as final statements about what is considered to be fair trade in creative labour. Rather they would be seen as ways of better understanding the alternative value systems of Global North and South, including the relations between art and the market. What is critical is not that these collaborations should avoid mistakes, but that they should be freely admitted and incorporated into the work. Lack of understanding, if it becomes conscious, can become a virtue of such work when it leads to the revelation of cultural difference. In the case of Rodney Glick, there was an obvious disconnect between the two systems of intellectual property, the Northern value on individual ownership versus the local Balinese practice of free circulation of designs. This difference exposes his work as an attempt to impose a foreign system of closed individual intellectual property on a local system of open communal knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

It is important that the dialogue accompanying such collisions is reported as part of the work. It adds to the overall fund of experience on which future projects might be based. While this knowledge is important, it still must be acknowledged that it is inherently one-sided: the source of understanding continues to be located in the Global North; there is no sense of reciprocal recognition by the Southern producers. How this might happen without always being recovered as a point to be made in the North remains a limit to this cultural system. Nevertheless, in terms of steps towards greater dialogue, such knowledge plays an incremental role. In this sense, elements of creative practice that are normally considered ancillary packaging such as catalogue essays and labels become critical components for broadening the dialogue.

Transnational art provides a forum for exploring the politics of global divide between North and South. In this sense it follows the lead of Fair Trade in exposing the conditions of producers in consumer products. However, unlike Fair Trade it is not concerned with finding one fixed model for solution. Ethical conditions of art production are balanced against the potential to reveal new perspectives about how the metropolitan world of art galleries and museums connects with the cultural producers of the Global South.

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## Notes

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1. The terms Global North and South are regularly invoked in the discourse associated with Fair Trade (see Nicholls and Opal, 2005). These are alternative terms for 'developed' and 'developing' world. Though their geographical reference is approximate, the designations 'North' and 'South' do not have the same hierarchical associations as present in the temporal process of development. In broad economic terms, the Global North is the location of the major consumer markets and global corporations that draw wealth and resources from the Global South.
2. Commodification is understood here as articulated by Marx in the first chapter of *Capital* as a process of obscuring the use value of objects that reflects the quantity of human labour in its production. It must be acknowledged, as argued by Kopytoff (1986), that commodification is not a fixed state, but rather a phase that objects can enter and leave.
3. In 2006, Fair Trade recorded a 42% increase in worldwide trade ([http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/press\\_office/press\\_releases\\_and\\_statements/archive\\_2007/aug\\_2007/global\\_fairtrade\\_sales\\_increase\\_by\\_40\\_benefiting\\_14\\_million\\_farmers\\_worldwide.aspx](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/archive_2007/aug_2007/global_fairtrade_sales_increase_by_40_benefiting_14_million_farmers_worldwide.aspx)). In 2008, the increase was 22% despite the economic downturn ([http://www.fairtrade.net/single\\_view1.html?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D105&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D361&cHash1082e96b5e](http://www.fairtrade.net/single_view1.html?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D105&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D361&cHash1082e96b5e)).
4. See <http://www.postmedia.net/02/sierra.htm> Retrieved March 14, 2010.
5. Information about *Polly&Me* is sourced from interviews with Cath Braid (January 2, 2009) and Ange Braid (April 14, 2009), catalogue *Gup Shup: The domestic, the narrative and cups of chai*, website (<http://www.pollyandme.com>), Summer (2006) and transcripts of interviews with participants conducted after the exhibition.
6. Work in Pakistan started under the name *Caravana*, run by designers Kirsten Ainsworth and Cath Braid. In 2003, they took up residence in the Chitral Valley in partnership with a locally run NGO AKRSP (Aga Khan Rural Support Program). They commissioned local women weavers to make designs for their fashion range, which was first exhibited in 2004 as part of Sydney Fashion Week. In 2006, they exhibited their second collection at Melbourne Fashion Week, under the title "a label of conscience." They worked with a network of ten community centres, each with a female manager. They employed approximately 500 skilled women who largely worked from home. Kirsten Ainsworth and Cath Braid stopped working together in 2007. Cath Braid partnered with her sister Ange Braid and moved away from purely fashion to community development, under the new name *Polly&Me*.
7. The Islamabad exhibition was launched on International Women's Day.
8. There was one collective work titled *Prayer* which consisted of a series of buttons embroidered with the names of male family members. These were produced by a much broader group, involving 200 women. The catalogue explains that the women wanted to demonstrated their calligraphic skills, but felt it inappropriate to use their own names.
9. Information about Rodney Glick was obtained from an interview (5 July, 2009) and catalogue *God-favoured: Rodney Glick Surveyed* (University of Western Australia, 2008).
10. Information about Danius Kesminas was obtained from an interview with the artist (June 29, 2009).
11. During the interview, Kesminas raises the suspicion that he was just used by the locals as an alibi for their activity: "There was a nice unspoken agreement. I gave them a kind of cover, as a naïve Westerner."
12. Yet it is the spontaneity of production that Northern artists find appealing about working in Indonesia. Kesminas contrasted the scene in Indonesia with the situation in a country like Australia where everything has to be paid for – "over there it's different. You just do things because you *do* them."