

Transcription

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Episode 19: Who is welcome? Hospitality and contemporary art.

<https://soundcloud.com/user-760891605/episode-19>

Sound clips: “It's not so much durational work but rather, what hospitality is as practice. Art teaches me what it is I would say in ways which theory cannot.”

“Within the constraint of maybe a 10- to 15-week semester or quarter, it might be very difficult to be able to teach this, which what I think it is teaching individuals or human beings how to have a certain posture of hospitality, how to think through hospitality and generosity.”

Host intro: Amid xenophobic challenges to America's core value of welcoming the tired and the poor, Irina Aristarkhova calls for new forms of hospitality in her engagement with the works of eight international artists. In *Arrested Welcome*, the first monograph on hospitality in contemporary art, she employs a feminist perspective and asks who, how, and what determines who is worthy of welcome. With a focus on lessons that contemporary artists teach about the potential of hospitality, Aristarkhova looks at Linda Hattendorf's documentary, *The Cats of Mirikitani*; the Serbian-born installation and performance artist Ana Prvački's project, *The Greeting Committee Reports ...*; American artist Faith Wilding's performance, *Waiting*; Taiwanese American artist Lee Mingwei's aesthetics of hospitality; American bioartist Kathy High's project, *Embracing Animal*; Mithu Sen's artworks that explore questions of radical hospitality and crossing borders; Pippa Bacca and Silvia Moro's art project, *Brides on Tour*; and Ken Aptekar's exhibition, *Neighbours* in Lübeck, Germany. Aristarkhova is professor at the Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She is joined today by Jorge Lucero, an artist and author from Chicago who is chair and associate professor of art education at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and co-editor of the international journal *Visual Arts Research*. This conversation was recorded in February 2021.

Irina Aristarkhova: Hello everyone, my name is Irina Aristarkhova, and I'm the author of [Arrested Welcome, Hospitality in Contemporary Art](#). I'm very pleased to be today in conversation with [professor Jorge Lucero](#) who is an artist and chair and associate professor of art education at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. I know Jorge since we both were at Penn State University,

and his practice both as an educator as well as an artist has been close to the topic of hospitality. And so, I'm looking forward to our conversation today. Hi Jorge.

Jorge Lucero: Hi Irina, it's so good to hear you.

IA: One of the first topics that we plan on addressing is this larger question of invisibility, and one of the reasons I wrote the book was how much of practices of artists whom I'm discussing, such as Lee Mingwei, Faith Wilding, Ana Prvački, Mithu Sen, Pippa Bacca, Ken Aptekar, how many practices of their art projects remains invisible. And therefore, I saw writing as one path through which a wider audience might experience their works. What [does] invisibility mean to your own practice as an educator and artist?

JL: I feel like it's the very edge of the work that I'm trying to do. It's the part that fascinates me the most because in many ways, it's the part that I have to contend with my own posture in the world through; and what I mean by that is, my training as an artist — and I would include within that the years that I was in school but also all of the time that I have been making art, so somewhere between the last 25 to 30 years — my training has always had this one component, which is the show-your-work component. It's the part that you're supposed to, in some way or another, even if it's in the mere act of talking about what you've done or showing a terrible photograph or a piece of documentation that there was still this component where you had to demonstrate that the thing that you do or the thing that you say you've been doing exists in some way or another.

Documentation has been probably one of the most important components of what I've done as an artist. And of course, that maps over almost 100% with my practice as a teacher and the practice of many teachers, which is typically an activity that is mostly unseen. It's not that it isn't perceived. It's not that there aren't people who are not registering that it's happening; for the most part, all of the participants and the teachers and sometimes, the communities around them — whether it's parents and administrators and other staff in the school buildings — everybody perceives that it's happening, registers it in the body somehow or another, but in terms of having a one-for-one documentation or having something that does the experience justice, that's almost nonexistent in teaching. These two things sort of run parallel with each other — artworks that are perceptible but mostly invisible are very difficult to look at, very difficult to show evidence of. And then, teaching, which I think is a parallel practice.

IA: Indeed, and sometimes, I encounter writing about this work, for example, Ana Prvački's project, *The Greeting Committee Reports* ... that she did document in Kassel; part of this project was video art pieces that she did, which were shown

to the public during the exhibition over summer; but most of this work, which is more radical, which I find more challenging, like for example, training — and also more controversial, potentially — of training staff of the exhibition in practices of greeting and in practices of how to handle difficult visitors. That part was invisible, and when I spoke to Prvački, she talked about her conscious decision of not documenting that, and that there is a feeling that in hospitality when you document your hospitality, you are kind of looking for gratitude, or you're looking for praise, and here, I wrote about the tension, on the one hand, of how the lack of documentation works in the art world, especially, works against an artist, there is no trace of the work itself — but on the other hand, it lives up to this promise of what ideals of hospitality have to be. So, I find for me, this question of invisibility is important. In the introduction of *Welcome As Resistance* and the chapter in the book on Ana Prvački called *One Relcaimed Civility*, I found that her approach to reclaiming what it means to be hospitable to each other contains this invisibility, and what do you think about this fact, that, the invisible label of those who [have] already been invisible in hospitality, like janitors at exhibitions, like people who sell tickets, like artists who take on those roles or who try to pay attention to those types of practices. Then, by not documenting it, they themselves become invisible, and very often, they are women artists. And then, we again go back into the cycle of a form of self-erasure as we're trying to live up to some great expectation of being ideal hosts while we're trying to reframe invisibility and make the labor of hospitality more visible.

JL: Yeah, I mean I think it's one of the questions that comes up maybe the most whenever I have to give a public talk, and it creates the most amount of tension because there's a kind of negotiating that an artist has to capture or an artist has to do in order to figure out how and when to present what they've done and with who they did it with. So, actually, your introduction to the book captures that magnificently because when you talk about the director, Hattendorf, I think is the way to pronounce her last name, and her working with this street artist, a homeless man —

IA: — Jimmy Mirikitani

JL: Yeah, so when she's confronted with this situation where she's making a movie about him, and then, 9/11 happens, and she has to make a decision about whether or not she's going to let this homeless man come into her home and that's the first decision that she's making where she's trying to figure out, “Who am I doing this for?” But then, as the maker of the film, she then has a second decision that she has to make, because obviously, all of this transpires during the

making of the film and even her having to include herself in the film, which is atypical to a documentary — it sort of removes that faux-objectivity that we maybe have come to expect from documentary films — when that wall is broken and the director now is a part of the film, but she then has to make this decision about whether or not she's going to put that in there, and even his response to being hosted by her (in her apartment during that time), and all of the things that then emerge from her relationship, friendship even with him. That's a constant battle that I have to negotiate within my own body. Because, again, I work mostly with people who are not necessarily thinking about the things that we're doing together as art practice in the conventional sense; in the sense that we're making a kind of currency that can then be circulated within a very specific market. And here, I'm not talking about photographs; I'm not talking about photographic documentation that you could then sell; I'm talking about any kind of documentation, even the telling of the story of the collaboration or the partnership that gets you or opens up opportunities for an artist like myself. Because if I work with a group of students, for example, or if I work in a community and we make a work together, and obviously, after it's over, they're not going on and building a CV or building a website off of these projects that we collaborated on together. Whereas, I am. I have a list of the projects that I've done, and whenever I'm invited to give a presentation or I have an exhibition or something like that, whenever I go into those more conventional modes of presenting the work that has been done in my primarily intangible practice, I then, perhaps, show one or two images and tell the story of that work. I equivocate it to a printing of one's own currency because then, you're cashing out those bits of documentation and circulating them. So, there really is a question of — and you bring those questions up in the introduction around this filmmaker's decisions — and particularly, around doing a cost-benefits analysis where you're actually saying, “Is it worth it for me to present this work even though I'm the one who's benefiting from it the most, and it wasn't necessarily me who created it all by myself.” I should say, and I guess I'm not saying this to totally shine a different light on the thing that I just said, but I have had experiences where you do the work and then, you don't talk about it or you don't show it. But it's a difficult thing to defend because usually, when you give an artist's talk, you show 10 to 12 things that you've done, and you're really just showing the highlights or the tip of the iceberg, and so, people react to the fact that you're showing these 12 things and they think that you're being exploitative, that you're taking these people's work or these people's lives and using them to build this kind of currency for yourself. But it's just not an easy thing to have an artist's talk where you present the invisible parts, where you present all of the things that are difficult to show; that wouldn't make for a good artist talk. So, I usually end up having to explain that in the question-and-answer part of any kind of discussion because it is very

difficult to bring those things to the light without, in some ways, doing damage to them.

IA: I must say that I learn a lot about this from artists like yourself and from practices of hospitality, pointing out that on the one hand, that is something that is always with us, those types of decisions. They are ongoing decisions in our everyday life; it's not something that we can predict in advance. You don't know what it would feel like at the end, and that's where — I know that we had these conversations also about what is documentation and what is the ongoing work of hospitality — I believe that the way in which what happened to Jimmy Mirikitani, for example, there is a film that we can experience that Linda Hattendorf did but at the same time, there was also life. There was Mirikitani's life, that he had exhibitions; he passed away surrounded by loved ones and friends. His life was changed, and I think that that's why for me, this point I'm making that I'm glad that she did that. I think the aesthetics of film are then feeding into discussing works like Lee Mingwei or Pippa Bacca discussing other works where I feel that the work is not so much durational work but rather what hospitality is as practice. Art teaches me what it is, I would say, in ways which theory cannot. It's very similar to what you just described. Would I push things that far? What kind of decisions do I make when in a crisis mode? We see it now with the pandemic or with what happened in Texas, that people take in people; people continue to risk the encounter during difficult times, and so much with refugee and immigration goings-on, being an immigrant myself in this country, I felt that the artists were teaching me something that I wanted to highlight without necessarily feeling that, indeed, as a scholar and that's why in the introduction, I'm also trying to ask that question, why write about this? And how do I write about these works. So, I hope that going deeper, of thinking with artists rather than thinking by saying particular aesthetic judgments only, it helps us to move the hospitality forward as practice itself — this practice which I feel has not yet lived up to its expectation.

JL: Yeah, I want to say something about that because I feel like, I wasn't reading the book to review it. I got the book way before you even contacted me about having this conversation together precisely because I think there's some overlapping interest and so, that's where I started. In anticipation of this conversation, I got into the book more and I was really struck by — this is kind of a meta thing — but I was really struck by how welcoming the book in and of itself is. I wonder actually who, when you were thinking about the audience for the book, who you were thinking about because for me, it functions on multiple levels. On one level, it functions as an artist because in some ways, the examples that you're walking us through and the way that you're talking about the artworks

and the artists — so you talk about their practice, you talk about the actual few examples of some of the things that they've made — but even more interestingly, you situate it around these questions and this narrative about hospitality and how that's important for us on a larger scale, like as civilians, as maybe siblings to each other, or brothers and sisters to each other. That opens up a bunch of permissions for me; it makes me as an artist want to be more like that in my work even though there's already aspects of my work that have that, and I would say that they're driven by personal history and things that my parents taught me — things that I learned in church — all of these things, a sort of way of living or a way of thinking about other human beings. It affirms that kind of behavior, and it makes me want to do it in a way that's even more on purpose first of all. I think it brings up really good ethical questions that have to be contended with. And I don't know that there's a good answer, even the thing that I was bringing up earlier about when is it exploitative, when is it generative? I don't think there's a clean, blanket answer for all these types of projects. I think every single type of activity like this needs to be taken up within its own ethical constraints and its own considerations. But the other thing that it made me think about is what a great book it's going to be for my students — to be able to share it with my students and open this world up to them, too, because I think in some ways, it's not something that is necessarily taught; it might be skirted around in some ways, you might get a little bit of it in some of your art theory classes or your art history classes. But it might be a very difficult thing to curricularize in the sense that within the constraint of maybe a 10- to 15-week semester or quarter, it might be very difficult to be able to teach this, which what I think it is, is teaching individuals or human beings how to have a certain posture of hospitality, how to think through hospitality and generosity. I suppose I can envision a scenario where I can plant the seeds of it, and the book would be very useful for that. But it's just a difficult thing to pedagogize within the constraints of what the academy allows for us. But the book really opens up a platform for discussion and for imagination; for us to be like, “Oh, these are the possibilities and even the risks, not just dangerous things that some of these artists kind of meddle in. But as in the case of the last artist, the brides project, where somebody loses their life in the process of that. I was thinking about this idea of risking your life to do this kind of work. We do teach it even though it isn't the same kind of risk. It isn't potentially violent or potentially immediate or tragic in the way that it was for these artists. But there is a kind of exchange of life energy or time passing that gets made, and it is a risk that needs to be considered when you make this kind of work. Because I think that the critique that can be made of a lot of social practice and relational aesthetics and participatory art — which you also bring up in the introduction here — is about legitimacy. A lot of times, that's anchored with authenticity or genuineness. If I were to boil that down, frequently, it has to do

with commitment, it has to do with how much is a person willing to give of themselves for the thing to be the thing that they're saying they want it to be. That's a very difficult thing to ask people to do, but it's also a difficult thing to ask yourself to do. So, the examples in this book, in particular, where that line of life and art gets almost completely obliterated are maybe the most inspiring.

IA: So many great points, questions. Thank you also so much for being such a receptive reader. I spent a lot of time on, as you can imagine, for a nonnative speaker and writer — that's why in the end, in the acknowledgments, I talk about what it means to write in a foreign language and how potentially, I feel contemporary art could be such foreign language. And I considered my role as a writer also to, indeed, welcome the audience who might ask genuinely, “Why are people doing these things?” And feel alienated, indeed, from artworks which I'm referring to. I know that for many of my own family and friends, these artworks could be challenging, they could be something potentially controversial. Not to say, outright crazy. And not just simply feel good; we are talking about risking one's life for the sake of one's own art or for the sake of the principle that one is trying to transmit or present in one's own art practice. So, indeed, for me, the audience was very important. I think part of that answer is to open up the audience of contemporary art. To just enable this foreign language, and often considered elitist language, indeed, within our discussions between relational aesthetics, social practice, radical art, political art, contemporary multimedia, all kinds of art. To open it to more, so that you can give this book to family and friends who are not necessarily coming from our world and say, “This is why I do this. This is what it is about.” It's not very different from what we do in our communities. It's just that artists are redefining it, incubating it, pushing it somewhere else, and that's why they are doing it. So, that was one part of the audience. I wanted, indeed, to write in a way where that path is possible. Which means, of course, write totally different from the way I was taught as a theorist, especially as a feminist theorist. I started with hospitality studies, very much with [Derrida](#), with [Levinas](#), a lot of French and German theorizing, with [Dostoyevsky](#), with thinking about Sanskrit, key texts on hospitality like [The Laws of Manu](#). I looked at hospitality in other cultures, the Bible; so, hospitality is foundational to so many different societies. But often, it's coded; there are fables on the one hand, but then, on the other hand, we get contemporary theory where things might get pretty dense. This book I wanted to be much different, let's put it that way. But it was challenging because it's really challenging as you are saying to open the audience; that was I think for me, most challenging with writing, rewriting getting it to be read, then rewriting again in order to, on the one hand, open it up but on the other hand, not look like one is dumbing things down because issues are complex. Contemporary art is often opaque and consciously so, so it cannot

be necessarily reduced to some kind of good and bad, or: I prefer this and you prefer that. So, something else that you mentioned is about the audience; on the other hand, for me, the audience has been, indeed, and other feminist art scholars and potentially, those who are not so excited about hospitality as a kind of — even Derrida himself — it was seen as a promise. Hospitality is a kind of a promise that can overcome tolerance that we don't want or hostility that we see so much. I felt that it was very European, it was very male, it was very white. It was very inadequate to where we are today in this current moment, that those foundations of hospitality that are coming in our traditions, including in these foundational texts, they are pretty unwelcoming to vast groups of people. For me, as a feminist scholar, you can imagine how it felt when at conferences, people just felt very defensive about hospitality because women, especially — if you travel in other parts of the world — people say we are already supposed to be welcoming. If you go to other parts of the world with highly developed tourist sectors and industries, hospitality may sound pretty cynical or even something that is imposed on people, to be expected of them. Not anything to be praised but rather, you're supposed to be nice and that's so much of the book [is]. This layering that Faith Wilding is doing. You're supposed to be waiting. You're supposed to be hospitable by default, automatically so; that was I would say, another audience of the book, artists and scholars who are thinking through these issues but who are not willing to give up on hospitality, and something else we want to address is this question of authority. Whose authority it is that we are looking at, authority of the host, authority of the guest, are not willing to give up on it because I think that other alternatives which are presented, whether for art, to keep art outside of life, let's have art be in this Kantian sands — let somebody move towards a narrower notion of what aesthetic is on the one hand, and the role of the artist in society on the one hand. I'm not willing to give up on that, those kind of avant-garde and experimental questions that some artist have been working with, on the one hand, and also, as a feminist scholar, I'm not willing to give up on hospitality in favor of those who only advocate for legal and structural solutions, like rights, the discourse of law. I believe that this distinction between the structural and the personal is problematic. It's very clear. It's becoming clearer and clearer that the kind of leaders we get, it's a kind of patriarchy, or the kind of authority we often see in personal relations as well. And so, as a feminist scholar, for me, it's been really important to point out how hospitality is being challenged but challenged in ways which might take it elsewhere, as you say. We might start in one place, but we might end up in another place altogether, and so, opening it up, each chapter provides different kinds of takes on it, not solutions but rather, look, this is what these artists are doing, and it's out there and let's look at it. As I'm now thinking with you about it, I'm really curious about when you say that it gives you more permissions and I know that you work with this

concept of permissions. Maybe if you can say a little bit more about it, what it is. I find it really something that I did not think about before but am really curious about learning about more.

JL: I think if I had to go back to the core of where it comes from, it would be all the way back to my undergraduate experience. I did my undergraduate degree at the [School of the Art Institute of Chicago](#). I had a studio that was connected to the art museum through an easily accessible hallway, so I would spend at least an hour, if not more, every single day that I was in the studio in the art museum. I had this amazing relationship where I had an archive, a treasure trove of artifacts and art experiences just a few steps away from the place where I was trying to make work, and the relationship between what I was seeing and what I was making was so intimate that I don't think that I've ever lost that. Fast-forward to me becoming a teacher and the teacher occupation part of my life taking up the most amount of hours of my day, I had to figure out a way to continue to enact my practice as an artist. But through these new materials that I had been handed, and what I mean by that is the institution of teaching, the materiality of time, the complexity and dynamism of relationships. All of the things are situated within the job of being a teacher that could then be tested for their pliability in order to be able to make work out of them. But I needed examples in the same way that when I was making paintings, it was important for me to look at paintings or even to look at things that weren't paintings that would then sort of speak into the things that I was doing. They really informed the posture that I was taking. This is nothing special. I know that there's so many artists who work in this way. I don't know that I have ever heard an artist talk who doesn't talk about their influences and the way that they sort of have gathered permissions for their own work. The thing is, I needed to find permissions that had some resonance with the kinds of things that I was now working with, and those things ended up becoming conceptual artists. I use the "little c" — conceptual art. I don't just mean the things that happened during the '60s and '70s that maybe we would find categorized under conceptual art in a museum but conceptual art with a little c, conceptualisms on a global scale. I'm talking about behaviors and postures that artists take on, and for the most part, every artist in your book fits the bill of my umbrella term, which is practitioners who make work with the same types of materials that I'm making work with: relationships, time, ephemerality, this question of invisibility, ethics, there would be no denying of the spirit in some way or another, civics or civic engagement, the institution or the different kinds of institutions that rule us, whether they're schools or religions, families or whatever. So, every artist who kind of works under those paradigms or with those materials, they become — this is too simple to put it — permission givers. When I see the work of Lee Mingwei, for example, and I see that he is able to have an

audience of one, and then, second of all, have the kind of intimacy and trust of sharing a meal with somebody and that being the work, or having a sleepover with somebody and that being the work. These kinds of things open up, when I see them mapped over the kinds of activities that are part of my job as a teacher, it really helps me to transform my job into my practice. Whereas as a teacher, I might open up my classroom and allow students to, of course, pre-pandemic, allow students to be able to eat in the room and to hang out and stuff like that. Now, it becomes much more deliberate. I maybe even make a placard for the door of the classroom or the office to invite people in to use the space in that way. So that it's not just so much, this could happen naturally, but how do we actually present it that way so that it can be used in that way. So, that's just one example, but I think every single artist that's presented in the book could be used in that way or could be thought of in that way, and then, of course, there's hundreds of others.

IA: Since you mentioned Lee Mingwei, specifically, if you don't mind, let's talk a little bit about my fascination with this concept that I've been writing about and thinking about — with Lee Mingwei's work, specifically, of a welcoming man. And I think it goes back to this notion of authority that you brought in, it's also something about institutional hospitality. It's always been curious to me when in hospitality theories, which are traditions which I come from, that live in us and Derrida referred to so well, that there is an aspect of the family that is often left aside in domesticity in the private area, and then when we enter the community, that's where hospitality becomes associated with men. That's when men exchange things among themselves, when they open doors for others; it's necessarily, they are not doing it for women. They are often doing it for each other, for themselves. What I found in writing about this, if we are to redefine hospitality as many of the artists do in this book as not an essentially feminine notion, whether it's psychoanalytically, or in any other way, like feminine within one's own head, if we just decouple it from gender, then, we are posing this question of a welcoming man. Not as something as a contradiction in terms, not as some kind of new creature out of the cosmos and we've never encountered it before, but it's very interesting to me what happens to individuals, what happens to society as you said, when there is an opening discussion about this one-on-one. I'm particularly curious what you think about it because Lee Mingwei, if people do not know that, he's a self-identified man; it's a male name. They assume that this is a woman artist based on his works. Lee Mingwei, often as I'm writing and my chapter, says that people who are connecting to his works very often are women who are kind of replacing him as he's doing his projects as hosts for his exhibitions. Just kind of an anecdote about my own experience, I would say, with you and one of the reasons why I'm grateful and it's so wonderful to talk to you, because I remember

about our early encounters during one of which you brought a lavishly cooked meal into the classroom. And I remember that you didn't make any fuss about it. It was not part of an artwork. It was just something that you did, and I think that in this kind of a self-vulnerability moment and self-disclosure moment — I'm trying to acknowledge this because I think it's very important that masculinity is being more and more changed, the stereotypes of masculinity are being more and more changed, on the one hand — and on the other hand, I am also acknowledging the fact that potentially, we need to create some space and we need to continue continuously creating spaces for welcoming men which would not necessarily only be in that traditional biblical or koranical or more ecumenical sense of the word. But rather just, men welcoming women, children other men, refugees, and so forth.

JL: The story that you're recalling, I remember it very well, while at the same time, recalling the impulse and the follow-through of having done it many times in different scenarios, different situations. I think in many ways, it had to do with my own upbringing, and just these experiences that I've had of building community around meals and breaking down — maybe this is the wrong way to put it — but relaxing the room in a way. If it's ever allowed. I know for a fact that that's not a thing that some teachers would welcome because it also feels chaotic at the same time; it feels like you're welcoming a certain degree of chaos into the room. And maybe, it feels like time-wasting. But it's been my experience, my most significant pedagogical moments both as a teacher and as a learner, have probably been around some kind of shared meal. I even remember, for what it is, all of the years of schooling that I've undertaken for my own degrees, there was a lot of classes that I had to go to, a lot of coursework that I had to do, and a lot of assignments that I had to take care of, but some of the richest learning that I've had, it has been with my cohorts — so, whoever it was that was in those classes with me. When afterwards, you would go out for either a drink or a meal, or when you were working, if you would stop to have a meal together, or just inviting each other to each other's homes. And I think maybe in some ways, it makes me a little sentimental because I think we didn't have much more to give and so, we felt like the only thing we had to give was that. And it was sort of disarming to do it through food because any other thing might feel, well — and I can't imagine what it would be — but maybe any other form of intimacy might have been too unwelcoming. It would have been hit-or-miss in terms of whether or not people would have been wanting to spend time with us, and when I say us it's because my wife — my partner — and our four kids were a tremendous component of those gestures; it was never me doing it all by myself; there was always this sort of collaborative backstory that I would be remiss to not mention.

IA: And you did, even at the time when you brought that meal, you mentioned them, you mentioned your wife, you talked about it and I think even that was something not stereotypically expected, and I wonder whether the world is ready for welcoming men. I think that's something the country lived through, and how different kinds of masculinity are being asserted and what is considered to be a man, and very often I find, if you think about contemporary art, it's still kind of works that are privileged as more radical, progressive; they are often works which align with that old-fashioned notion of the avant-garde, of breaking things; certainly, not this invisible, very quiet, one-on-one type of works that Lee Mingwei does. I know that we also plan to discuss a little bit [of] this question of institutional hospitality, which you already referred to, and how artists often find themselves in this precarious position. On the one hand, they are kind of welcoming audiences in this type of work. I'm thinking now about Mithu Sen and how she used, in the chapter where I write about her work, how she uses her artist-in-residence project as a kind of a pushback against this idea that she would be a perfect guest. She's trying to think through her project as questioning or extending institutional hospitality to others, to throw it back at an institution or the person who is hosting her as an artist-in-residence. This whole relationship to institutional hospitality is also pretty fraught. It's not an easy type of relationship, and I also know that within our discussions about the art world, social practice art, there's been this ongoing questioning of this type of art because it happens always in the galleries. And I often heard it as I was presenting this work and giving early chapters to read to people, that it's kind of seen as lose-lose. If Lee Mingwei is doing it in the gallery, it's seen as something circumscribed and prescribed in the safe space of the gallery, not art in the world enough. But when Pippa Bacca or Mithu Sen take it out of the gallery into the real world, into LA, and question this anticipation that artists would be perfect guests of institutions and well-behaved and giving them what they want, then somehow, some artists are praised for it and other artists continue to be invisible when they do that. You and I talked about how this type of work might also feed that invisibility, which many minority artists and women artists have already been encountering, so what do we do about an institutional relationship with artists. How do you approach that in your own work or what do you think about it.

JL: I know that there's a lot of artists. Well I don't know that there's a lot. But I have a lot of artists examples I should say, I have a handful of artist examples, real-life contemporary current artist examples mostly in Chicago because I'm close to Chicago; that's the scene that I'm most familiar with and also because I think that Chicago has a very generous and hospitable art scene, where you see a lot of artists who, when they're allowed through the door, they hold the door open for a bunch of other people to get through the door. For example, I believe it was

[Occupy Museums in one of the Whitney biennials](#) where they invited a bunch of other artists to show within their space of their show, and for me, that is a tricky move but when you can do it, and when the institution that is hosting you allows you to then host others, it can be a very fruitful time for everybody. It's like that saying of "a rising tide lifts all boats." I see this even more in the bureaucratic aspects of being in the institution because, this is in large part where the battle for representation and equity and justice is happening, because when you're on a decision-making panel and you have to make decisions about who gets in, who gets funding, and I know the resources are limited but, to always keep that internal eye open and stay vigilant about where I'm standing, and how whether or not that allows me to help somebody else fabricate a key or to get through the door, or if I can pass my key along to somebody else — if that metaphor fits — so that they can then get through the door, I want to do as much of that as possible and it has become one of the most essential aspects of my teaching practice. To try to let as many people through the door who wouldn't conventionally fit, perhaps within what the academy expects both in terms of identity representation but also modes of working. So, I'm interested in people who want to or have been thinking through other ways to create scholarship or other ways to present that scholarship. Other ways to present themselves as scholars. Whenever I'm in the room and I'm the only nonwhite person at the table, I feel like it's my responsibility to — and I know that there's other people at the table who have taken on this challenge themselves, also — so, I think it's a joint effort but I'm constantly looking and thinking, who are we forcing to be on the margins of this simply because we can't figure out a way to think about this in a way that is not along the status quo or along the way that we've always thought about it. Anything where I could boomerang my position of privilege for other people who are doing great work and could use that little bit of leverage, then, I want to do it. A gallery, an exhibition, the publication of a book, the writing of an article. I have to say that, it doesn't come out of nowhere. It comes out of people having done it for me. I'm not trying to be too sappy about it but there's a lot of grace that has been pointed in my direction. And it has allowed me to not only continue to practice the way that I practice but also to figure out some new things that I wouldn't have taken the risks if the people were not supporting me, elevating what I was doing.

IA: If you don't mind to tell that wonderful story about the wrestling team?

JL: So, that's a very early example when I was in high school. We used to live in an area where my parents didn't want me to go to high school and so, when I was about to get to high school, they moved into a suburb of Chicago; the students were predominantly white at the school. I joined the wrestling team. Most of the

students, actually all of the students were white, with the exception of myself and another young man who was Filipino. We were not the best wrestlers. We were OK, we were on the starting team but we were not the best wrestlers on the team. We had this coach and he was also a white man, coach Tom Klatt. He made myself and the other young man, the Filipino young man, into the captains of the team. It was a really life-altering experience because I had never thought of myself in a position of leadership whatsoever and mostly, it was through cultural conditioning where you sort of sit back and let the kids who have been taught how to be that way take over. You always kind of sat back and let other kids take over. From that time on, I saw that it could be a possibility and not only that, but the other kids saw that, too. All of our teammates, and it was nothing — the coach didn't do anything, didn't make any announcements or anything like that. He just said, “These are your two captains,” and we were the two captains for two years. Nobody asked about it, nobody said, “Why them?” or whatever, but it felt really deliberate, like something that he was doing on purpose. After I got my ph.D, I went back and I found him probably at the end of his teaching career. I went back to the high school, and I hadn't been back in years and he came up and he saw me; he still remembered me, of course, and I told him the story of what he had done and he was in tears, he couldn't believe it. We were both in tears because it was just such an important gesture that he made. In many ways, it didn't cost him anything to do it but I think he knew who needed it the most.

IA: Thank you so much for sharing it. I really, really appreciate it. I think that those are the moments where I feel that we need to continue, that we should try to continue. To bring it back to something in the book, immediately, for me, it was this story of the towel in the conclusion that Ken Aptekar [said], that it can only be done through a relationship. It can only be done if someone stays with the community; just to tell our listeners the story, it's about a difficult moment when Ken Aptekar was working on an exhibition in Lübeck, Germany, and someone told him about the story of a towel. This towel belonged to the Carlebach family; the Carlebach family was restricted during Nazi Germany in the late '30s from getting food, and there was an anonymous family that was leaving food at their doorstep. At some point, the Carlebach family was taken, most of them perished in the concentration camp after they were taken to the concentration camp. But they left the towel before they were taken that night; they left a kitchen towel on their gate. After many years passed, one of the survivors from the Carlebach family came to Lübeck in the '80s, if I remember correctly, and was given, as an owner, one of the survivors of the Holocaust period, and a woman came up to him and just passed that towel and told him the story. She did not introduce herself and she left. And that towel was kept by the descendant's daughter who still had that towel in Manchester; they lived in Manchester at the time. And

because the artist Ken Aptekar was spending time with the community as he was preparing to make his exhibition, as he was painting his paintings, he wanted the towel to be a part of the exhibition and he included the story into the painting; one of the paintings had that particular story, what happened around this towel because he felt that this towel represented hope, this towel represented hope and humanity, this towel represented gratitude of the Carlebach family for people who were providing them food, risking their own lives in Nazi Germany. A German family risking lives for a Jewish family in a time when it was very real for them, talking about risking lives for hospitality. How I came about to learn about this story besides visiting Ken Aptekar in his studio — he asked me to translate this story that he was putting on the painting into Russian. Because the only survivor, the only current Jewish community that Lübeck has — new Jewish community, coming predominantly from the former Soviet Union, so he asked me to translate it into Russian, and of course, it prompted me to think through other issues of my own positionality as a Russian but also going back to your story about how those types of stories they passed from one place to another, from one generation to another, what one is arresting. How community can arrest its own welcome and destroy hospitality and punish its own people for [the] kind of hospitality they want to provide to others. Or at the same time, it can try to revive it. It can try to bring it back. So for me, it was interesting how the towel at the exhibition, we talk about art objects and we talk about what they represent. I know you're also interested in those subjects, which are looking mundane. It's not something that is made but it has that investment, it has that history, that way of passing from generation to generation with a certain kind of hope. We are having our conversation today and you would see that in that conclusion I was cautious. I'm still believing, certainly, in hope. But I'm not sure what we can learn even from that from that story. I think that we can learn as much about the capacity for risk in the name of our neighbors as much as we can learn about [the] capacity for evil among neighbors. And we never know, when we talk about these grand gestures, another point which I think I learned from Ken Aptekar's work is that we never know which gesture would become this important gesture. Maybe this German family did not figure out what it even means to us today when they were just simply giving food. Maybe they did not think it's that risky. When we share food, when we we do these small things we know every day people are doing right now in this country and around the world, that's a promise which I start with, kind of some ideals of hospitality. But on other hand, I don't know how you feel building up on your own experience, how you feel about, more coming back to the US context, and I write about this American Southern kind of idea of hospitality or inhospitality. What would you say: Where are we in this moment? Like transporting ourselves from my own positionality in Ken Aptekar's work in Lübeck. Do you have hope as you are

thinking about your own trajectory and bringing in these stories and trying to pass it on. We [have] just been in a pretty difficult four years where a lot of what I've been writing about, thinking about, I didn't know when a book would come out completely. When I started, it was a lot of discussion about Syrian refugees in Europe, but it came out during the pandemic in the year of an administration that really destroyed many of this — even a facade of this idea: “Give me your tired masses and the poor, and so on and so forth,” and so much [has] been questioned and challenged. What's your own take on this.

JL: I think maybe the thing that I would think about — first, I want to say, I'm hopeful. I remain hopeful, and the reason I remain hopeful is because I have come to understand that particularly in these kinds of works, and again, I'll use the term “conceptualism” or small c “conceptual” art, but almost everything that fits under this kind of mode of working. Each work exists in two modes; it exists in the actual and it exists in the symbolic. And I think that on some level, the reverberations of the work within the actual are far and wide and unseen but very real and have the power to transform and to bring people together and to change people's minds and to teach. I believe that the symbolic realm of these works also does that but it's different. It sometimes needs conversation, it needs a teacher maybe, it needs a facilitator. In the case of this book, this book does that. This book represents all of these artworks in the symbolic form in a way but tells stories and unpacks the works and the questions around the work as a way to get us closer to that first, I think it was [Claire Bishop](#), who called it “the first ontology,” so the the first way of sensing it which is the way that we would have sensed it if we were actually with Lee Mingwei or if we were actually in the room with Faith Wilding. I guess my hope lies in the fact that in all of those in-between, unseen spaces, something is happening. I have no doubt something is happening because in the tumult of the last four years, we got to see a lot of the symbol, in terms of whenever we would turn on the news channels, or whenever we would go through our newsfeed or something, we would see red or blue, and depending on what the algorithm of your particular newsfeed was, you might get more blue or more red, but we were just getting, here's the symbol that you respond to the most, this is the thing that you align with the most. But anytime you heard a story, and it was mostly in long-form journalism, so podcasting or radio programs like [This American Life](#) or this kind of thing where you would get a story perhaps about two disparate, maybe polarized, or opposite sides of the pole, of the spectrum, persons who somehow found a middle ground or a space where they could have a reconciliation. I noticed that whenever those people would talk about the fact that they were red but they got along with somebody who was blue or they were blue and they got along with somebody who was red, they always identified something that mostly lies invisible or mostly lies under the realm of

the unseen. So, they would talk about how they got to know them as people, how they got to know their families, how they got to serve them, how they got to listen to them. All of these things, which again, maybe are very difficult to turn into examinable objects. Maybe it's difficult to take them out of the realm of the first ontology into the second ontology, from the realm of experience into the realm of symbolism where we could then show it and say, "See how it worked here." And those radio programs do a pretty good job of taking us there, it just is a matter of whether or not we're willing to let those things affect us in the way that we then get taught something and we're transformed internally. Most of the time, I think we're not. We're not ready to do that. We're not ready to see something that is symbolic and let it affect us to the point where we say, "I'm going to have to change who I am because I want to be a different person, like I want to be closer to that." I don't know if I did a good job right now of explaining what I was meaning by the two different ontologies, but in the symbolic ontology where you're just looking at the representation of the thing, it sometimes can get difficult without an aid, without some kind of facilitation, even if it means — I don't even mean that you have to have a hierarchy where there's a teacher who's telling you what it means — sometimes, it's just somebody who's willing to have a conversation with you about it so that you can have an actual critical conversation as we are having here to try to come to a better understanding of the thing that we're looking at. In the first ontology, the one that's filled with affect, the one that is in situ, the one that has to do with the actual experience and maybe, some of the intangible, or I should say the nonconcrete aspects of whatever happened — the event — I think a lot of transformation can happen there if we're willing, if we're open to it. That's what keeps me hopeful because I have seen it in my 20-plus years of teaching; I see it on a daily basis, maybe on a minute-to-minute basis, that within the realm of that face-to-face exchange between myself and another person, another human being, even if I'm not officially teaching, or even if I'm not checking in to see if they have their work done or whatever, when I'm just maybe saying, how was your weekend, it's making me think about the first chapter, about the good manners, or the behaviors. But that kind of chitchat, which sometimes opens up that middle space for there to be a kind of space for things to happen, space for things to unfold. You set up a welcoming environment as a means to allow these things to emerge and maybe, now that I'm thinking about it, for me, welcoming has a lot to do with forgiveness. I know that I come to almost every situation, every event in my life with expectations and sometimes, when my expectations are not met, I have to figure out a way to immediately forgive. I'm not talking about redemption. I'm talking about just letting something go or not carrying it so heavily, or understanding that it's just very different than me, and I have so much to learn still; that this person might actually be the person who's going to teach me all of that. I've seen other people

do it so well, and I'm inspired by that. That's why I have hope.

AI: Thank you, what a great answer because this idea of openness is so much part of what I also learned from the artists whom I wrote about; I think one of the people who really surprised me, [the] way it took me, myself, was Kathy High's work. Her openness to work with something so strange like transgenic rats and indeed, again, this idea that we are doing something invisible. She first started this work at home. She kind of challenged me in my own relationship to the question of animals; it brought me all the way to genusism, which I was always interested in but just until her work I did not think of what are the implications. Animal studies was a very big part of what Derrida talked about in hospitality and [it's] a big part of academic discussion and artistic discussion about environmentalism. But somehow, I realized that there are two separate groups of people that I think Kathy High breached or brought together because she remained open for me. One is animal rights people, and the second is animal studies people; animal studies people can write beautifully about, including of course Donna Haraway, companion species, but it's not clear to me often what does it mean for the animal? Where are we going with it. But animal rights people, on other hand, have very little theory that they often go to genes and this ahimsa and this nonviolence principle and say, "Look, just let them be." Be open to potentially let[ting] them go and. For me, it was a learning curve. It was an uneasy work, and when I was writing about it, this question was coming back again and again; people were commenting that when she did it in her home, just for those who are unfamiliar, just listening, what happened was Kathy High purchased from a transgenic genetic engineering company three transgenically engineered rats and she took care of them — until they passed away — for a few months. She changed her life for them. Her travel schedule, she created an environment for them, [a] welcoming, open environment and then, someone came — [Nada Thompson](#) was doing something, [an] embracing animal[s] show at the [Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art](#). And he invited her to show new rats because those other ones were already passed away, and so, when I write about this work, very often people who are coming from a community writing about animals, including in contemporary art, they feel unease that she showed them in a gallery. We're going back to this question of authenticity in relation to gallery versus home versus real world. Once I figured out why for me, it was not a problem, and I'm a pretty critical person often, and I realized from the rat point of view, they don't know. So, if they feel great, if they are comfortable in a gallery, in a museum, we are the ones who feel that galleries are contaminated space. It's the wrong space. But maybe, they were even feeling better because Kathy High had dogs and cats in her house. She had pets. That's why I wrote those two dialogues from the rat point of view, and I don't know whether it works or not. I

know that it's a kind of a solution that might be counterproductive in the academic sense of the word. I thank [the] University of Minnesota Press for publishing it because [a] few people said, "Oh, we couldn't believe that it went through." I think that we are becoming more open on so many different levels in terms of what kind of writing [is] considered academic and how we experiment. The reason I kept those dialogues [was] because a student who was helping me with images said that she got it immediately, and she said, "Keep those dialogues. I got your point, it didn't look too cheesy," or kind of taking over the voice of the rat because my point also was that neither animal studies scholars know what rats are thinking nor Kathy High knew nor I know. We're all, as you said so clearly and beautifully, that there is this symbolic level at which we're operating here, and in the symbolic level, we just need to find a form that would do what we want it to do and that one doesn't always need to be full of special terms.

JL: Yeah, and I think that's the point. That's what I was saying, and I think that it's done really effectively in that chapter where if you can be taken, if the symbolic form in some way can transport you, if the second ontology in some way can transport you into the first ontology, then, you really have something because you get into the affectual realm through that symbol, and I mean that's just going back to the point I made at the beginning of our conversation about the book being welcoming. I think it's part of what writing theory should be. We have this conversation a lot with our graduate students because they see the form of theory and they think that they need to mimic the form of theory and usually, it's so wrongheaded because what they're thinking about is the complexity of the language or maybe the density of the citations. They're almost voiding their their own voice from that writing that they're doing. Instead, what we do is, at least the way that I teach it is, I am constantly reminding them that the word "theory" and the word "theater" come from the same etymology, which actually means "to be beheld" and the way that we experience theater is usually through an affectual experience that we more often than not have to return to in some way. So that there has to be this constant coming back to it, and every time you come back, you're a different person and that different person is able to then interact with the thing that you're beholding in a grown way; you're constantly growing alongside the thing. Because most of the time what happens is the confusion is the book. The book is coded as something that needs to be read from one part to the other part and that by the end of it, you should not only have completed it but you should have gotten it. I always talk to my students about this idea of getting something because they read Derrida or they read Levinas and they say, "I don't get this," and I'm like, you're not supposed to get it. You're supposed to behold it. And then, you're supposed to come back to it and you're supposed to come back to it and you're supposed to come back to it — over and over again. It brings

down the level of intimidation almost immediately because I'm not presenting it as some material as maybe they had been trained in all their other schooling that they should get it. Instead, I'm saying encounter it and come back to it, encounter it where you're at now and and we'll have a discussion as a group as we tend to do in school in seminars and then, you'll go back another day and you'll encounter it again. And you'll have a different discussion at that point either through your own writing or through the conversations you have with other people. To be honest, this is part of the reason why I love teaching art students; that resonates with them almost immediately because this is the way that they treat their experiences with art. They're not coming to art hoping to get it. They're coming to art wanting to behold it. When we only have to think about our relationship to music, for example, or movies that we really like and things that essentially have in the theoretical affected our very core, who we are — people have based their entire life philosophies on films that they consider their favorite films or quotes from songs that have been really inspirational or whatever. And I look at the way that that stuff can affect the way that we learn, the way that we think, and then, I see my graduate students for example, looking at, and my colleagues actually looking at theory and having to make this weird decision about whether or not they're going to pantomime the academy for the sake of saying, "I can play with the big kids," or really say, this was my encounter with it at this point and then I'll have to come back to it because it's really something that was pretty dense. So, in some ways, what I love about that chapter and this book, in particular, is that it gives a lot of things to behold. I would never identify this book as undertheorized or less theory, when making that kind of comparison about the form of it to other books that maybe have the appearance of more theoretical. For me, this is a heavily theoretical book because it's something that I can continue to come back to partially because it welcomes me. And second of all, because it presents the symbols of that second ontology so robustly, including giving language, giving words to these rats. So, that to me is so powerful, so useful as theory.

IA: Thank you. It's incredible to hear you say that. It's a labor of many hours. For for me, it was much more about the works themselves, giving due to what I felt they taught me and translating it in whatever formal the way, whatever way I could, which was very hard to do. I call myself sometimes a recovering theorist — or recovering academic in terms of writing. You said it so well about pantomime, I feel that very often when graduate students encounter theory, they treat it as something that they have to put on top of everything else. There would be some kind of term or theory that they would find that would be good enough as a sauce. You have all the ingredients of your meal in your dissertation, and then, you have to present it. You have to sell it to your adviser and this is the sauce, we found some theory, and it could be much more powerful. It could be encountered. It

could be something like what Bell Hooks talks about in her [*Theory as Liberatory Practice*](#); that's why I believe that the canon in many ways is challenged today. It's not so much that the canon, whether it's art history or critical theory in contemporary art studies, because you can't do much with the canon if you do not use it as a sauce. You can't do much with that canon simply because it did not mean you at all as one of the audience members or as one of [the] people whom it was referring to. Not only did it not mean you, it actively excluded you. That you-exclusion is a meat of that very work, that work of an exclusion. Your theorizing of teaching and art pedagogy is something that is very close to this book and if you don't mind we have I think few minutes left. I would love to hear more about, since I mentioned Mithu Sen, and what she does with this idea of artist-in-residence and how she challenges that in your own book, [*Teacher as Artist-in-Residence: The Most Radical Form of Expression to Ever Exist*](#). I love the title. Can you say a little bit more about that because I feel that there is a certain affinity in the stance there.

JL: So, the thing that I take up in that book is invisibility, and it has to do with a certain exercise in restraint. Which I think is a thing that I have to do frequently when I'm hosting or welcoming. When I have people into my house or into my space, and even as a teacher when I'm advising students and I'm hosting them in some way, my instinct is to be in the limelight, to put myself forward, but the discipline that I try to undertake is to have the restraint to pull back and yield the limelight, so that everybody could feel like they had a space to say what they had to say and this idea of teacher as artist-in-residence has to do with paying attention to that kind of yielding as a kind of material. The reason I say it's the the most radical form of expression to ever exist is because I really think it pushes up against that edge where nothing is produced. Nothing is talked about. Nothing is shown. It's not this kind of activity where the artist just does it for themselves. It's that everybody knows that it happened but maybe they don't really know that what happened was creative practice — but that what happened was just like their lives, our lives happened and the way that they happened was, there was some deliberate gestures that were made in order for the gate to be open, in order for the food to be prepared, in order for the forgiveness to be given, in order for the moment of reconciliation to be had. But really going out of my way to not make a big deal out of it because my instinct is to make a big deal out of it. My instinct as an artist is to pin the thing I did up on the wall and invite everybody over to look at it. I'm sort of trying to push against that. A verse in the Bible that you quote is the one about welcoming the stranger into your home right or welcoming the foreigner and the stranger. The one that I like, also from the [*Sermon on the Mount*](#), is the one where Jesus says when you do your charitable work, don't let your right hand see what your left hand is doing. That's a practice that I really try

to get into. It's not easy, and I fail at it a lot. Because I am an artist, too, and I like to show what I did. But when it comes down to the core of the thing, there's a lot of stuff that doesn't get shown. We may show a picture of something that represents the event or maybe there's a paper that gets written or an exhibition that gets had, but the real work — I mean, it's going to be perceived, it's going to be felt by everybody, hopefully, who was involved including myself. But I don't know that it will ever be fully represented.

IA: Can you say a little bit more about that quote, what we started with [in] our conversation today, like in Linda Hattendorf's case, that you are not supposed to show off what you've done. Is it what the meaning of that biblical verse is?

JL: I think so. Now, I may be swimming into waters that are too deep for me here. But personally for me, what it has to do with is trusting in the reward of my labor and that it doesn't have to come immediately. My instinct and the way that I was trained as an artist was to complete the feedback loop as fast as possible. So, if I made something, I needed to either get something back for it immediately either from myself or from my cohort or from my teachers or from the market. I needed to find out what the validation of this was, how it affected others. These are things that I was trained to do as an artist and at every level both from my studiomate — I needed to find out what that person had to say about it, and all the way to the market. I needed to know how it affected the market and that was constantly in my head. This is sort of, I don't want to say “anti” that, but it pushes against that because it doesn't push against it under the assumption that nothing will happen or that there will be no fruit from the labor. It's just trusting that, that might happen in a moment, perhaps, when I'm not expecting it and, perhaps, even when I'm not even around to see it anymore. The piece that is my guiding light for this kind of work — and I'm sure there are other works like this — but I don't know if you're familiar with [John Cage's ASLSP](#), which translates into “As Slow As Possible” and it's that piece that you can play at whatever duration you want and currently it's being played in a chapel in Germany over a period of some 650 years or something like that. They started playing it in 1991, I think, and it's still playing and it will continue to be played after I'm dead, after everybody on the planet right now is dead. Nobody will have seen the beginning and the end of that work. I'm probably never going to go see it in person but you can watch videos of it being played on YouTube, and all you're witnessing is a little sliver. All you're witnessing is a moment in time. I'm happy with that. I'm happy with my work being just a moment in time, recognizing that, perhaps, there's something that will occur after I'm gone or in other places where I don't get to see it. That's why I really think that teaching is in many ways the most radical form of expression to ever exist; it completes the feedback loop without you.

IA: Thank you so much, Jorge. What a great ending to our conversation today. I learned so much. It's been a gift talking to you today. I thank you for your generosity and for your time.

JL: Well, I want to say thank you to you first of all for writing the book. I know that it was labor to do it. The fact that it exists is going to do exactly the thing that I was just saying a moment ago, which is it's going to teach many people and it's going to be a feedback loop that you probably won't see completed but it will have had a really deep impact. It certainly has in my life already, and I'm really grateful for it and my plan is to to recommend it to others very soon.

IA: Thank you.

JL: Thank you, take care.

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