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Animistic Apparatus: A Gathering

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Insects have compound eyes. They see multiple copies of what the humans perceive as single. In my culture, there are hearsays that the deceased will return home on the 7th day upon death in the form of an insect or animal. And the past December, I've embarked as a research participant on the bull trance ritual in Indonesia. A slight moment in the ritual recalls my experience of sporadically strolling. Everywhere you go is full of faces, yet hollowness persists deep within.

Once, an Indonesian shaman held the ritual in Malaysia, where the ancestor's spirits were summoned and traveled, within a duration, to the place. If it took 30 minutes to complete the ritual, summoning the ancestor's spirits who are 2365 kilometers away (according to Google Maps), will it be equivalent to the traveling speed of 4730 kilometers per hour, I wonder? A step further: converting time distance into digital bytes, the ancestor's spirits would be tentatively equivalent to 5.4Gb of data transferred per hour, assuming it is an average 1.5Mb/s bandwidth environment from my workstation in Kuala Lumpur.

Inspired by Charles Koroneho's artist lecture where he talked about body images getting transmitted via satellite and reconstructed back in people's screens during live streaming, I was thinking would technology bring us an inch closer towards some manifestation of 'summoning' in the media space?

Shaman Mas Agus mentioned that spirits often take trees or rocks as their sanctuary. Along the path where the leaf sheds I ponder, do leaves contain fragments of spirits? Where do spirits go in this urbanized city? Simmering leaves across places, they slowly disintegrate in the boiling pot. In the piece of leaf blanket, I weave conversations with the ritual players into ruins entangled by weeds.

Data being fragmented, signal prone to interference, phantoms not always visible by the eye. Phantoms alike signal interference in the physical realm. When the ancestors descend through the ritual, a presence inhabits the psyche. We might not be alone anymore, yet for every step taken, it takes our own skin to greet the wind.

How is animism part of your practice?

What is your relationship to non-humans?

As a Malaysian Hoklo-Chinese, I grew up with beliefs surrounding the idea that the deceased will return home on the 7th day upon death in the form of an insect or animal. Every year during the lunar month of July, the Ghost Festival is celebrated where replicas of bungalows, cars and money among others were offered to the ancestors and fellow spirits through burning.

In the submitted response, I gathered my numerous encounters with rituals, from the Malacca Arts & Performance Festival, interviews with Indonesian shaman Agus Riyanto, a video made to narrate experiences in the bull-trance ritual, as well as online zoom lectures where spirits and ancestors were addressed in a digital context into an explorable media page.

These encounters with spirits and rituals were then reconstructed and broken down into short paragraphs, from a personalized narrative linking one to another within the virtual space.