

## Terms of Engagement

### *a community resource project about The Substation*

#### **Notes from The Substation walk-in sessions**

The following is a transcript of the discussion of 1 March 2016. Its purpose is to share the discussion as it transpired. As this contains material from a live discussion with recording (and transcription) limitations, clarification and permissions should be sought from the speakers should they be quoted or referenced.

#### **Session 1**

Theme: The Substation hasn't changed. Everything has.

Date: 1 March 2016, 7:30 - 9:00PM

Venue: The Substation Gallery

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#### Context and preamble:

On 4 February 2016, Alan Oei, artistic director of The Substation (appointed September 2015) announced to the Arts Engage group that he would share statements on developments for The Substation as well as hold walk-in discussions. These would occur over the month of March 2016.

The scheduling of these sessions came in the wake of a number of changes and their reception by the arts community.

#### Other articles:

FAQs – The Substation Walk-in Sessions 2016

<https://www.facebook.com/notes/the-substation/faqs-the-substation-walk-in-sessions-2016/1215580978472844>

The Substation director lines up a series of meetings to discuss new direction (TODAY, 18 February 2016)  
<http://m.todayonline.com/entertainment/arts/substation-director-lines-series-meetings-discuss-new-direction>

The Substation's new director Alan Oei announces big changes for the arts centre (TODAY, 11 December 2015)

<http://m.todayonline.com/entertainment/arts/substations-new-director-alan-oei-announces-big-changes-arts-centre>

Vincent Quek, Moving Images (27 January 2016)

<https://www.facebook.com/notes/vincent-quek/moving-images/10153738170565873>

Perspectives: The Substation (ATMOS, 2 February 2016)

<http://atmos.sg/perspectives-the-substation/>

The second session, Artists Have Real Stakes, will be held on 8 March 2016 (7:00 - 8:30 PM)

<https://www.facebook.com/thesubstation/posts/1213880811976194>

For access to original audio clips, please email [toe.resource@gmail.com](mailto:toe.resource@gmail.com)

## Signposting Transcript

**a.o**

Welcome to the circle of love. Thanks for coming down to Substation. I think the last time we actually did something quite ad-hoc on Friday, quite a few people turned up even though there was no scheduled meeting so that format was just kind of a no-holds barred and people just shot their way through with questions.

If you want, just ask away, Bani is recording. We would also take minutes and we will also send it to everyone else and as per, I think, the online stuff. Keep everything open and up there. So if you guys want to start by shooting questions, I don't have anything to present, just shoot questions and I will try to answer as best as I can.

**b:**

Because not all of us were here on Friday, maybe you would like to share the minutes you have taken down, some of the things that was covered?

**a.o:**

[to Selene] Do you have that with you?

**s.y:**

You want the... I have it on my phone.

**a.o:**

Oh you have it? Do you want to share with us?

**s.y:**

How do you want to share?

**a.o:**

Start of recap  
from prev week

Just kind of like... oh, ok I can, I can recap also. Ok. So the first question, I do remember is either from June or Cain, who asked how we derived this format, of how we derived the sequence of different sessions covering different topics until the lead up to the townhall session, that we have scheduled for the 31st of March. So my answer was, "I don't know".

My answer is really just that I am trying my best to figure things out along the way. I thought this would be a format that would be productive. One of the things that we had happen in the past, is that townhall meetings tend to sometimes fall into a state where you know people are waiting waiting waiting to ask their questions and everything that goes on before and prior to your question doesn't really matter and people just, by the time they get up there, they shoot their one question. It goes around and that after that it disappears.

Size of  
discussion  
groups

So we wanted to find a way where it was a bit more intimate, that people could actually share and voice their concerns. So I think one thing that June as well as Amir and a few people mentioned was that if you do sessions in groups of five, that's really so small that if everyone is kind of like-minded you don't have the

diversity of opinions... so this size.. the last time we had the talk... it was (someone said 15, someone said less than that and someone said 10) about ten? Yea, so that was a quite a comfortable size. Today's slightly bigger, but I see that we could probably continue the same format. So that's one question...what's the next question?

Venue rental:  
shift in position

The second bit that we talked about was venue rental, I think that's another thing that a lot of people talked about, and people asked why we have to remove venue rental. So I said that I have shifted my position on this because of conversations with a lot of different other people. One of them, the stakeholder groups I guess, you can think of them as the punks and all the people who also have no space to breathe in Singapore — for you know Singapore has a fair amount of injustice, and sometimes if we don't fit in easily, it is difficult to exist here — and I changed my position because, coming to think about what the Substation meant.

Punks

Original  
proposal;  
professional arts  
landscape,  
privilege

And in my proposal I was only thinking about the Substation in terms of what it means in a professional arts landscape and that was the privilege that I had working in this industry. For a lot of people, they don't even have that privilege. it's something that we forget about sometimes. That the very act of making music and making art was a kind of expression of their existence in Singapore. So what I am saying is that, I am very sympathetic to that. I think that there needs to be a way where we can co-exist with these people, but also what was important for me then was that we wouldn't fall into a kind of tribal sequestering of what the Substation is like, you know, of this is my section, I am just going to do this. this is me, and I am just going to do this, and just leave me alone. So I also have talked to the punks and I said, I hope that we can have a bigger dream if we think of Substation as a playground that can be opened up, and that the punks can also be the extended part of the family. Even when they are hanging out outside and people come by, they can say this is what the Substation stands for.

Punks &  
Substation

Venue rental vs.  
inclusivity

Yea so, in terms of venue rental, I did want to separate the issue of venue rental from the notion or the idea of inclusivity which is what a lot of people hold on to.

I think these are two separate things, one is a means to an end; it happens to be the best means for a long time in Singapore. Another is an end in itself, which is an ideal that's inclusivity, that's an ideal that we can cherish and hold on to. By what means do we arrive at inclusivity? I am not always sure that venue rental is the only way to do that but for the foreseeable future at least, I can promise for the next two years, we are not going to just cancel or stop venue rental like that. Where we have gone right now, is to think about it.

Substation  
identity,  
programming.

We have administrative resources, we have administrative restrictions as well, and that is sometimes very tiring and difficult for us. So it's two things: on the one hand, it's that the Substation identity isn't very clear to the public, as to what kind of programmes we do.

Streamlining  
operations

On the other hand, it's also quite tiring when we are always running around trying to address venue rental issues and all year round that seems like it kinds of consumes us, so we wanted to streamline things and, I think, one way that we can quite happily co-exist is to think about Substation season and an open season. In

Substation

Season,  
Open Season

Substation season there will be no venue rental for the period of 4 or 6 months, whatever, and open season means it's open to anyone who wants to rent the space. I personally don't even think that it is necessary to say, this works with what we are trying to do, or this is good enough quality. I think it is just open. If you want to rent, then I think come and use the space. So for the foreseeable future, next two years at least, venue rental will proceed this way. Can we promise that it will never be taken away? Venue rental? I can't say and I can't promise because we don't have enough data and we don't have enough experience in terms of how people use this space right now. Ok. So that's venue rental.

**I:**

I am here on behalf of my son.

**a.o:**

Maybe if you don't mind if I kind of finish, I mean we are just trying to do a recap of what happened last time around.

**I:**

ok, sure.

**a.o:**

Communication  
of future  
direction

and I presume that this recap list will grow longer and longer each time if we have new people, but I'll just run through that. I think venue rental is something that a lot of people want to talk about also. So... someone said, well, this I think is interesting but someone said, "might the recent incidents have been alleviated if there were better communications?" and I said "yes, yes, yes". Ok, communication is not my strong suit in life. But now, kind of, so many people (have) exerted pressure for us to keep talking. Ok, so that's one.

Ensuring  
diversity of  
representation  
in sessions,  
transparency;  
other articles

And also Cain asked how do we ensure that each session is going to be diverse enough that people feel represented? I guess this is the size that kind of works, (in) that, there are a lot of people from different spaces, right? And also I do think that we are not going to try to do any damage control. I think we are going to be completely open and transparent in terms of what goes online and sharing all the findings in each of these sessions. We have already collated a bunch of links that have been about Substation article. There's one by Godwin, and there's one by Vincent, and there's one by Shai. All of these things we are going to just collate and put them online. So same thing with this, I think after every session we do a wrap up and do it online as well. So that you don't have to physically come here to find out what is going on.

Changes to  
original  
proposal?

People asked also, are there changes to the original proposal that was submitted to the Board? Yes, there have been many, many changes along the way. Maybe we can talk about that later.

Shaiful asked, and I don't know if people want to know about this as well, if, along the course of the next few months, if anyone in the community has an idea that they want to contribute, how does that work? I said I think already the kinds of changes that we are trying to incorporate in Substation are about giving space to dissonance, giving space to difference and allowing people with different

expressions to come up and say something. That includes saying: No, I don't want the Substation to change, I want it to stay this way forever. So I think there is already this kind of structure set-up for that.

Future proposals from artists

In terms of people sending proposals in and stuff, I think I kind of fall back into my usual practice which is that: if it is a proposal that coheres with what we are trying to do; but more importantly, is this the proposal that coheres with your own practice that you have been consistently doing the same thing, than coming up with a proposal to fit with what you think the Substation wants from you, right? So that's kind of the basic philosophy here.

State of programming; What will open season be?

Then there is a whole bunch of things, like, basically what are the programming plans? That's a lot of things, let's talk about that later. somebody asked about Sept fest and Night fest and my answer is again quite simple, which is that, I think we are doing a lot of programming for the sake of programming. Sometimes I don't really know why we do it, except to fulfil our KPIs, and sometimes it's just like let's fill up the calendar every year and so I would like to be able to say let's cut back on the number of programmes that we do, and re-examine what these programmes are for. And if the programmes are good in and of themselves, even if it means that when you run the programmes you will lose money, then I think that if we say that these programmes are worthwhile, then we will stand by it. That's our programming philosophy. Not so much of a reactive and responsive one, which is what I think is happening to Singapore a lot — Singapore Biennale, Night Festival, Septfest, who say, "hey we need you to do something here can you just propose something"? So, often times, we are just doing it to satiate them. We just do stuff for them, not really for ourselves. That's kind of a larger philosophy.

Venue rental, open season

Cain asked why can't we promise and say venue rental won't stop, and I think I kind of answered some of that. Does everything have to fit within a particular narrative during open season? No, open season is open season.

Original nostalgia proposal; Timbre, Garden. Sound issues.

Jennifer from post museum asked is the nostalgia theme that I proposed and put inside the proposal still on... no, it is now thinking about nostalgia and Substation. One other thing is that we brought up Timbre and the garden, and my answer was that, we are not in the position to talk about Timbre, it's the contractual arrangement that we have with them, and I also think that I know that people here who do bands, who do performances have trouble with some noise spillage, like today you can hear. My sense is that Substation is a really old building. this is kind of part and parcel of what Substation is about. It's a bit messy, it's not going to be the perfect space for you.

Change / degree of action from dialogue session

The last question was by Zu Boon, who said, what is the degree of change that could happen to the current vision of Substation after all these dialogue sessions? The vision for me remains the same, which is that the Substation can drive larger conversations in Singapore, can be a space that opens up, not just to the artist communities, but to a larger (section) of Singaporeans. I think that is really important. I shared that, I think, for instance MDA thinks that Substation is a troublemaker. I don't think we are troublemakers. I think we are just very lax and slow and inefficient which is why we fall behind licensing. But I think the true measure of whether Substation is successful again is when it's truly the

MDA

Licensing

Policy-making  
Trouble-making

Demographics

Vision for  
Substation

Change in  
approach

troublemaker and it is able to exert some pressures on policies and how people react here. For us to truly become a troublemaker that way, it also means that it cannot just be the arts community that supports the Substation, it really needs a larger (section) of Singaporeans, middle class Singaporeans, that means that the govt can't close us down anytime they want to. But it's not to say that we want to deliberately be troublemakers. But that we want to talk about difficult things but in serious ways. But we are going to do it in (a measured balance way). Sometimes people don't like that. But if we have a group who can say come together and talk about things, discuss things, then I think we are ok there.

The vision doesn't change for me. I hope the vision will have some kind of resonance for you. the question is how do we get there.

And I have shared that I completely changed our approach. Previously, I had thought of myself kind of more like an architect, importing certain kinds of design elements in, importing shiny new things from overseas to come in here. But maybe the thing to do is to try to build these programmes or these structures organically with other artists, and it doesn't always have to be so finished, doesn't always have to be so polished in the level of presentation. As long as we are doing something together organically, then I think that works. Yup, that's, I think, the biggest kind of development, I think, in learning what the Substation means for people. So you (referring to Li Li) you have a question just now?

**li li:**

Yah, maybe you answered it. But I just want to make sure, since everybody has different levels of understanding. This is my first time here for this kind of talk.

**a.o:**

Do you want to share your name ?

**li li:**

Yea, so my name is Li Li, my name is Li Li, do you want my IC number? [laughs] So, as you were talking I realised that I come not only out of curiosity, as my son is in one of the metal bands that has participated here in the groups of punk, whatever you called it, and he lives in Montreal. He was quite upset when he saw that last PR that you released some time ago after a long time after your appointment. There you said, well, this is what's going to happen.

And then of course the big thing that came up was that, there was going to be a rental for the venues now. Never mind what he understood and what I understand, I am just trying to understand today what we just said: that basically the venues are available for rental and there will still be opportunities for people to come in, like these punk bands and these metal bands, (to) come in to have an event here either at a very small fee or at no fee.

He seemed to think that the opportunity to bring that kind of non-mainstream music was gone, and that he is kind of stuck having to run little bars down in the dungeon somewhere. They were very excited to be playing here, that one metal punk thing which was here last year, last summer. So what do I tell him? (that) Alan says...

Venue rental

**a.o:**

Alan says that venue rental will continue for the next two years at least.

Venue  
(financial)  
support

**d.d:**

Adding on to that, maybe also, you know, in the past Substation has helped a lot of artists by providing partial venue support. I am just curious since you talked about the..

**li li:**

You mean at a subsidised cost? Not partial venue? Not like half the gallery?

Rental fee

**dd:**

[inaudible] in terms of (that) the Substation came in and provided the venue. The rest of the fees, the artist found themselves... it's really helpful to the artists who I know whom Substation could not afford to give full [inaudible] for the show. I am wondering, how this will go in the future. Or what you have planned for it?

Venue-financial  
support: Sub vs.  
Open season

**a.o:**

It's a very tricky territory to say who do we support and who do we not? I think a lot of times sometimes, the basis of supporting people is about human relations and human networks. Often times is depending on who you know and how close, and then you feel paiseh to say no or say yes. I would like to hope for a more ideal space, where it is just about the works and it's not about who you know. I don't know if that's feasible. I guess what I am saying is that for awhile we are in this process of understanding ourselves. Now my own tendency would be to say, let's try to look at what resources we have, and, probably, unless the artist is doing something that is coherent with our question of the year or that theme or that thing we want to look at, it is very unlikely that we will support someone.

**k.c:**

Does that mean, in relation to open season, if it doesn't fall under the theme... (or) if it falls under the theme but doesn't fall within Substation season, will there still be support?

**a.o:**

So I think we won't support anything that is not in sub-season. if it's outside of that, then it's kind of... my inclination right now is first come first serve. People just come and rent the space. Administratively it's very streamlined for us. I know it sounds like sometimes a bit harsh when we are constantly try to do other things along the way. It also dilutes the kind of resources we can put towards programming our own things and these are small little things which kind of add up, add up, add up, and if you look at Substation's staff, they all look very tired.

I think even if I talk to some of the programmers who have left on their own accord, they always say that there is a heavy air in Substation. It feels very tiring to be here. And I think part of that is that, they have been so generous to serve people, and other people and that's great. I don't know if in an ideal world that will be great if we can continue doing that but so I am just saying, for the next two years, we are going to regroup and really focus on what we can do well, and make sure we can do those things well again, before we can think about anything outside.

Substation staff

**d.d:**

You mention the staff as well, and I know that the staff is always [inaudible]. In fact the whole Substation only runs because people working here are professional, and they put (in their) the passion. When doing it, I always wonder about, I don't know if this is relevant even in this context, but I am wondering if the Board of Substation can be clarified to the public?

**a.o:**

The Substation what?

**d.d:**

The Board, the Board of the Substation.

Substation  
Board of  
directors

**a.o:**

What about the Substation Board?

**d.d:**

I am just curious, because, for me, I know that there is this Substation Board that makes decisions and also decides, let's say, the pay of the people who work at the Substation or the staff, as well and other top-order things. And I am just wondering, (as) for me, I don't know very much how the Board works. I would like, coming in as an artist —

**a.o:** ok, sure

**d.d:**

—to know. I would like to know more, (and) I wonder if it can be made more public? About how it works?

**a.o:**

ok

**d.d:**

—because, to me, I feel like it's a black box almost.

**a.o:**

It's a very strange thing there, right?

**d.d:**

They have a lot of... they are meant to be the guardians of the Substation —

**a.o:**

Ok

**d.d:**

— and I would like to see how they can be more [inaudible]...

**a.o:**

The Board of the Substation really just functions the way all Boards do, whether it's



for... I mean, but then they have different fiduciaries as well as institutional requirements depending whether it's private limited, a company that's there for making money, or it's a company that's like Substation — an institute of public character. And because we are an institute of public character, there are certainly more rules that govern this, and the Board's role is to look after all of those things. in between organization to organization the scope of the Board varies.

Fundraising,  
staffing

In terms of the Substation, specifically, what I think I can share is they... fundraising is one of the roles of the Board, setting out some of the larger frameworks and [inaudible] how do you look after staff, what kind of remuneration is given, how many (or) kind of headcount, I think a lot of those things are approved by the Board which means that...

[someone walks in, a.o: hi, want to just have a seat somewhere?]

Effendy

For instance, as the AD or the GM, we have some scope to go up to the Board and say we need more people. Like in Effendy's time, he wanted more programmers, he can go up to the Board and say, this is why. And it's up to them to say yes and no. And, yah, I think fundamentally the Board is there to, I don't know, I guess they are like superfans who are committed in a way that they are liable as well.

Delayed  
AD appointment

**d.d:**  
I would say this because I know that for a long time that Substation didn't announce the AD, you know, for your appointment. and it seems like a very long time to actually leave the Substation without an artistic director. I feel that... I think the artists and a lot of people were actually really concerned about what was happening, because it makes the artists feel that...there is no way.. that we don't... (have) that ownership... we can't really control what's happening and that's why I wanted to ask if there is a way that we can more transparent about what was happening... I mean you know this is really a way...

Ownership,  
community,  
transparency

**a.o:**  
Ok, I think it's again a pull and push situation where some people's network will allow them to get to know the Board better. The Board typically actually tries to be... the Board typically tries to be more invisible, but in an art organization, it should be the organization that takes the lead and not the Board, the Board is there to support them. In this case I mean...

**d.d:**  
In the absence of something to look at, that's why I wonder about them...

**a.o:**  
Yah..

**d.d:**  
That's what I...

**li li:**  
Um, maybe I can ask the question differently. What kind of performance measures are you being held to?

KPI?

**a.o:**

Me?

**li li:**

Yah, what do you measure ?

**a.o:**

I don't know... (laughs) I haven't look at my contract in a long time.

**li li:**

You don't have to make money, yah? You don't have to make a profit?

**a.o:**

I mean, we have to make sure that the space doesn't close down...

**li li:**

So, you have to make a profit?

**a.o:**

It's not in my contract that way, but (for) some of the GM's that we have (had) in the past, operational and physical well-being has been part of their... their... KPIs. But it's always kind of varied from person to person as well.

**li li:**

And what else? I mean, are you held to certain programmes? Do you have to do certain... I mean, when they say, "he has done a really good job," what does that mean?

**a.o:**

Sorry?

**li li:**

If somebody comes to you, and, say, "he has done a really good job", what does that mean?

**a.o:**

I have no idea. Ok so. Ok so... if you want to talk about... well, I guess what you are asking also is, what is the scope of the AD in Substation? The AD sets the direction and the vision of the space. In the past, what the Board said, was that their role is to protect the vision of the AD. And I think one of that... that, I think is sometimes changing.

Role of artistic  
director and  
Board

Kuo Pao Kun

One of the early reasons why they, as a Board, Substation was always overly inclined towards the director, was because of Kuo Pao Kun. And when our chairman currently came on Board last time as a Board member, there happened to be an incident where Kuo Pao Kun was not very happy, and he actually stepped down because of that. And so, KC our chairman felt that what the Board needed to do was to always ensure that the AD can be independent and (that) the Board can always stand up for the AD, even if, for instance, the government wants

External  
interference

to say, let's persecute this guy, let's not [inaudible] but if... if the Board knows what is going on, they will stand behind the AD. that's typically how the Board has looked at their role there. As for the scope of the AD, it's again to decide the artistic direction and how do we get there.

**j.y:**

I want to kind of follow-up on what Debbie was mentioning. I suppose I am trying to figure out what we are intending to discuss today. It is quite broad, and it was interesting that you sent out this paper that you produced in May last year.

From what you are saying on Friday and more so today, it would appear that some of the details you have articulated in the paper has changed —

**a.o:**

a lot of it

**j.y:**

—I think quite drastically. I think the point of what you are saying today is that the Substation is meant to be an edgy sort of space. That seems to be where you are headed at the end of your introduction just now. So just to clarify, I mean (regarding) that paper, I imagine it was a paper for the Board. It's not really a paper for —

**d.d:**

It's not for the artists —

**j.y:**

[inaudible] it's a bit awkward, us reading it, and we are not really sure what we are supposed to be reading into it. But like you said, things have changed so that's fair enough. I do appreciate that in the paper you gave a brief survey of the landscape, I mean there were a few parts which are a bit confusing though. I don't quite really understand the "Substation being one of many." Not too sure what you meant. Was that is it meant to be different from the many, or is it meant to be the same as the many? Or, some other aspects of it, like "art being everywhere," but that's not really the case, as, you know. In fact there are very few spaces for art, and I think you are answering some of these issues right now.

Emphasis on  
making vs.  
showing  
Moving Images  
programme

What I kind of wanted to get into was the part where you talked about Substation being a place for making as opposed to showing. I don't really understand it and would appreciate if you could clarify. I mean, you mention processes, practices, thought, experimentation, and I guess that's where the disjuncture happens. Like when you say you are into the making, yet Moving Images gets axed; when say, the music bands don't get to produce... well, in some cases this is where experimentation happens —

**a.o:**

Sure

**j.y:**

... an experimentation with interaction with the public as well. So, I guess, it's trying to understand what that means when you say it's moving towards 'making'. Because, at the same time, Substation does not have a lot of space. When it comes to arts, when you talk about production, how do you think this is going to help?

**a.o:**  
Ok

**j.y:**  
I mean... is there space for workshops, is there space for production, are there [inaudible]... are there all these elements that make production happen in the arts? So just to understand a bit more of what you mean by supporting production and processes, is it just talk or is it an actuality?

Production in  
the arts

**a.o:**  
Ok

**j.y:**  
That's one part... it might also be offices, studio spaces and other equipment as well...

I think what I wanted to ask about really was the part when you talk about cultural leadership, about asking the deep questions. The question in return would be: what sort of questions are these? Are these questions that someone is not asking? Or who are these others who may not be asking these questions? But in relation to that then... very long comment

**a.o:**  
I lost you already

**j.y:**  
...i will reiterate... but, in relation to that, two words that did not appear: one being 'alternative', which is what you are talking about right now. When you are talking about edginess, you talk about being the space for production, you talk about asking the difficult questions. And the second word is 'community' which does not appear at all —

Alternative  
spaces

Community

**a.o:**  
— it does not appear.

**j.y:**  
Can you talk about these two, because these are, I think, intrinsic characteristics of what I understand, and perhaps what a few other people understand, of what the Substation is?

**a.o:**  
Ok. So I think the two questions that you are asking, if I were to repeat again.. Can you guys hear us at the back? Cannot hear? Come bit closer lah..

[Chairs shuffling]

Can we try to rephrase the question... June asked the question, what do you mean by “making”, what do you mean by “making at the Substation”, that’s number one. And number two...

**j.y:**

Make that three questions—

**a.o:**

Making lah, making and lots of sub questions

**j.y:**

Related to the missing two aspects—

**a.o:**

The other thing you talked about was community and space for the alternative. so let’s tackle the making one first.

**j.y:**

I know you mentioned residencies the last time but maybe you would like to reiterate that part

**a.o:**

Ok. How about this... I am going to put it out there: we have ideals that we try to arrive at and what is the best way to get there. I am now saying to you guys, I don’t know the answers for sure. I think we have a certain ways of getting there, which is... one of it is the residencies. Is it the best way? I don’t know.

Artist residency

Here is my sense of Singapore right now — I think I would like Substation to be a space where we can take away the pressure valve to be an artist. There is so much projects and so much content production by artists these days that I think a lot of, some of my artist friends who use to blow my mind away kind of devolve into this constant, constant production. Today it is the biennale, and the next day it is this, and the next day it is this, and they are always going from one project to another project, and there is no real sense of a practice.

Projects vs  
practice

And I think that if you want to talk about the Substation in terms of making, if you think about the institutionalised art world you can think of something like Kunstlerhaus Bethanien with lots of resources and lots of facilities, and you can stay there for a year and network with other people. But I also think, if Substation truly can find a way where even our artist in residence can almost be an extension of the space, then the ‘making’ itself doesn’t have to happen on such a professional level, but (that) the level itself can be more speculative and try to engage people socially as well. In some ways, this is just the kind of space you do your wild wacky thing; if you want to do your finished presentation, you can find your resources somewhere else. We don't have that. But I am thinking, if you are here for an artist-in-residence, the only request that we have, is that actually you have four to eight hours of social hours every week. There is nothing else. you don’t

have to come here to produce anything, you just have to come here, do research, talk to people, do something very ad-hoc and on the fly. It could be talk to... just tell me you know... tomorrow I want to do something at SMU, I want to do some kind of public intervention, find me like three or four people, or can we do some random thing and see how that goes? We document that, and we regroup, and we think about 'was that worthwhile'? If not, let's think about something else.

So I think of making more as a practice of the daily, and it does not have to be something that needs to be so finished, but can provide really speculative possibilities. I think that artist in residences are one way to do that because (of) the artist for me, I think (it) shouldn't just be here making something big but also in process, that they are constantly talking to people and meeting other people as well. I don't know if that answers... [inaudible]

**j.y:**

If you can kind of take that example a little further... let's say if it's a filmmaker or visual artist, then what does that mean? Can you break it down.. [inaudible]

**a.o:**

So, typically in the last way I have presented it to the Board, so let's say there would be a topic for that year, if I were to invite an artist, it is based on their practice that already deals with some aspects of that. Hopefully, when you come here, let's say a filmmaker, and you know that nostalgia is the language of a lot of film imagery right now, then you can come in here, and next to you is a historian or photographer and you guys could talk and just being there as a hive where different minds can meet and talk about different aspects, maybe it helps to open up your own practice as well.

**kq:**

So how are all these things generated, do we have a say after nostalgia? Can we have a say of what's next?

3-year thematic  
programming

**a.o:**

I think so. Previously, last time, when I talked about it... I think of it as a sort of three-year thing. These are my artistic interests or intellectual interests pursued — talk about urban planning, talk about kampong, blah blah blah... but I think that it can be a lot more organic, which is, if we have something that's pressing, we do it, and I think it might morph into something else that is related to that.

One thing, that for me I think is quite important for the Substation at least, is that it might be able to talk to the man on the street in a way that impacts them. It's not about dumbing down something, but I think there are some ways where you can open up these conversations, and I think the aesthetics offers us the possibilities of shifting people's positions, because it's a different kind of encounter. It's not the rhetorical decision — where I believe in A, and you believe in B, and we can talk forever but never meet — but I think if we have an aesthetic encounter, it could open up our minds to think about different things. I feel like a lot of artists in Singapore right now feel that there is no point, that the audience is not ready, and that the audience doesn't want that. I think if we dream, then let's build this audience together.

Negotiating  
“edgy”,  
censorship, the  
“ordinary man  
on the street”

**k.c:**

On that note, if you don't mind, then, in relation to the other institutes within the context of Singapore and the history of the Substation and how it has always been an advocate [inaudible] of artists with regards to certain matters, specifically censorship, and we look at what's happening with the rest of the space or other spaces, then — in trying to reach out to the publics and in wanting to be edgy. I mean, how are you going to negotiate that at the same time?

**j.y:**

I think that I have another objection to this definition of the public as the 'ordinary'. That's something you mentioned in the paper as well... though you might have changed your mind on... about who are this 'ordinary' people that we are suppose to interact with, because ordinary is a political term that used to exclude or include depending on the political use

**a.o:**

Indeed, yea

**j.y:**

... because, I am ordinary, and you are ordinary. It's like the word heartlander, which is something... I wouldn't want to go there, but it's still related to Cain's question...

Politics of  
the term  
'heartlander'

**a.o:**

I mean, there are notions of different kinds of publics as well...

Publics

**j.y:**

But without excluding the arts circle as that public as well...

**a.o:**

so your concern is that it becomes exclusionary to the art publics

**j.y:**

that was the clarification... [inaudible]

**k.c:**

But I mean... how are you going to deal with —

**j.y:**

it has to do with censorship

**k.c:**

yes with regards to certain artists that might want to push certain topics that might not be, perhaps, that which some institutions... that might be

Censorship

**j.y:**

that might be niche

**k.c:**

Niche topics that might be 'niche'?

**a.o:**

I think this is where we diverge, and we feel like this is the position that we can't share. Which is, Substation in the Substation season will look at one thing, and that's the thing that they are interested in. So if your work falls within that period of time, that space and under that structure and your work is potentially explosive, then it means that the Substation needs to find some way to stand behind you.

Substation  
season

**j.y:**

Which kind of answers the question I was asking you about on the 'alternative' as well...could you go on on that?

**a.o:**

What about that?

**j.y:**

The Substation as this place for the alternative... it links with idea of the nation, of Authority...

**d.d:**

...on the really small details about lived reality, and why not allow these?... the kind of ideas that occur to you... I don't know... it's something you can grasp... how do you actually program it? But I just think that, I just wondered, how this space will be able to incorporate the kind of the events that happen in the time, like right now, things that respond to our time as well... like whatever that is happening in Singapore.

**a.o:**

The question is?

**d.d:**

I'm just thinking about how, when we talk about big questions, is there still room to kind of, work into responses to events that happen on a daily basis.

**a.o:**

Yah, okay, so...

Fitting  
topical current  
issues into  
long-term  
framing

**d.d:**

because, I guess, there are all these things that are happening.

**a.o:**

If there are things that are very topical... we should obviously, move away from the...things that, maybe, take more years to unpack —

**d.d:**

— then there are the kind of things of the time, and I guess there's a certain kind of timing...

**a.o:**



— then there are things very topical. For instance, I don't even whether... well, let's just put it out there and see what you guys feel... for instance, one of the things that is 'burning' in Singapore right now, or thinking about it, is McRitchie Reservoir, right? And do we want to tunnel under or around it? And actually we were just talking today... to just really quickly get together a show there... to talk about nature, look at some artists who have very very different relationships to thinking about nature...whether, for instance, some people look at nature as horror, some like (the) sublime, some in terms of its artificiality.

If we can put together something like that very quickly, and we don't even need to commission brand new works... does this artist already have very deep invested practices that deal with that, and we can bring that together, talk to the nature society, bring up some of their documents and then do some sort of symposium or some forum where then people can just talk — that's something that we are trying to put together in the next one month. It is very topical. I don't whether that's the right way, are we going always be swerving from space to space. But where there are some things where I think are worthwhile, where artists can open up that conversation, we should do it.

**j.y:**

Perhaps just continue with my extremely long question about the second part, about community...

Community

**a.o:**

I mean, I'm not very good at community, to be honest. And it's also thinking about what is community...

**j.y:**

it's not so much about good or bad, but a kind of transition in some sense... that was not mentioned in your paper... so I'm asking you what your views might be on that subject.

**a.o:**

Right now the way I think we are going to proceed, is to in build dissonance into our programming. That means that, if people are doing something very alternative, then they can come in and do something. That's pretty much where it is.

**a.c:**

What is your definition of alternative?

**a.o:**

You know, if you truly want to ask me, alternative...? I find it quite difficult, because I almost feel like today is a space where the alternative is very very quickly reclaimed by the mainstream also.

Alternative

**j.y:**

Mostly when it's profitable

**a.o:**

Huh, yeah, yeah well a lot of that. And actually the art world is clever at pushing

certain things that then can be very quickly commodified after that. I think if you really want to press me for an answer, I think alternatives are for people who don't have any other alternative in Singapore except perhaps like a space like this, (where) there are no other natural homes or places for them, they don't fit in easily, and for them Substation that is that bastion of resistance or a space that can accommodate them, that's my definition of alternative. Not necessarily alternative in terms of — is this the most edgy art? But alternative in terms of who are we and our self identities and how does it relate to Singapore.

**a.c:**

So for example, like, the punk scene would you classify (them) as (alternative)?

**a.o:**

Yah, I think I would right now.

Punks

**li li:**

Could you say that again?

**a.c:**

The punk scene, whether it is classified within the alternative scene as well.

**li li:**

The what?

**a.c:**

the punks and the metal...

**a.o:**

The punks, the hardcore... as I said just now, I think I am very sympathetic to that, that they need that space where it affirms their existence in Singapore as well.

**a.c:**

So one more question, about the residencies, artist-in-residency, is it going to be open to everybody, as in like even our local people, or it's just going to be like artist from overseas.

**a.o:**

I don't really seem to... sorry

Artist residency,  
open to who?

**d.d:**

So, I always think that residences are always kind of where you make these points of contact with the other parts of the world. Is there any thought about zones and contact you want to make?

**a.o:**

I think Bani brought up a good point last time, so I will keep bugging him to remind me, which is that, it shouldn't just become all academic [inaudible] but also have the possibility for outsiders to come in and change (things) up .

**a.c:**

So, is it open to all like both overseas and local artists?

**a.o:**

Right now, to be honest, I'm thinking of just focusing on Singapore and our condition is almost to say, hey there's eight weeks here, before you come in please try to free up your time, don't have so many projects just come and soak in this space, and see where this thing goes here.

**kq:**

I'm just curious, I guess, there were reports or articles that were saying that alternative spaces can take over, be kind of substitutes, take on... there were articles saying that Latent Spaces, Grey Projects... these spaces can take on the programs that Substation doesn't want to take on anymore. So I'm just wondering, because it sounds a little bit... I'm just wondering what is your stance towards all these independent spaces? are you intending to work with them? because it does sound a little bit alienating, like this is what we don't want to do, and then you have all these alternative spaces and this is for them to handle, so I am kind of wondering...

Other  
independent  
art spaces in  
Singapore

**a.o:**

I think if you want to talk about venues, you can also talk about it in terms of infrastructure and, if that's the case, I think Singapore has a lot of venues right now. People do look at the Substation as more than a venue; there's kind of a spiritual home there, so that's slightly different. where Kai Qun now is asking me... I think (what) you're asking me is, what of independent spaces...

Latent Spaces,  
Grey Projects

**kq:**

No, I was just thinking, because, like Latent Spaces, if we don't want to have a physical space, there's no way we can substitute for whatever has been taken away in Substation, you see, there's no way we are adequate. Even now, I am trying to talk to Grey Projects about having a show, but then the programming starts... it's only available in 2017. So I am just wondering, it is kind of like leaving a lot of people in the open.

Alternative  
venues

**a.o:**

It is, I think there is that, it's true

Grey Projects

**k.q:**

—and that is kind harsh kind of stance, just makes us feel very...

**a.o:**

Why do you feel it's so harsh?

**k.q:**

Why? because you know for that one year, you need to find a new venue, and I already stated an example, that of Grey Projects. If you want to open a show, it's not going to be until 2017. Where are all these people (to go?) What are your considerations, about where would they go?

**j.y:**

Impact on other  
aspects of art  
ecosystem

I think I will follow up on what Kai Qun is saying, that besides that particular project that you are trying to do somewhere, but also affecting, say, curators, affecting visual artists, affecting filmmakers who want to screen works — we have talked about residencies so far — but what about the gallery space? How does programming... programming is still happening somewhere, right... it still happens in these spaces? how does that all fit in with your vision.

**a.o:**

So there is open season, and there is a Substation season where we will take over the entire building.

**kq:**

So let's say, we think of a scenario, like, during the off season, I present a particular work, quite challenging and then censorship issues (occur), what is Substation going to do about it? Will you shield us from it or will we take it on ourselves? What happens in that kind of scenario, because it seems like, off-season, your problem.

**a.o:**

But you know that traditionally Substation is only responsible when they rent a venue out to people to make sure that you have followed some of the licensing and legal requirements. Substation hasn't really come out and then say, 'okay no, let's do this'. I would say it is very much a case-by-case basis, and say that, every artist who shows here means we have to stand by them. But I think it moves from case-to-case. I would say that the best measure of that, in terms of 'if Substation would stand behind you', to also to ask, 'would the art community stand behind you', because then there is some reason and something to talk about and stand behind in the way that we feel that we need to. So, do I think that, does Substation take a special lead in that? My answer probably right now, is to say no.

Support from  
Substation as in  
institution  
during open  
season;  
censorship

**li li:**

Can I go back to your question about community? I don't know if you talked about that earlier... when you talk about community, which community are we referring to? is it the community as in the audience? Or the community as in the community of artists?

**a.o:**

What is your impression?

**li li:**

My impression of the Substation, it is very much a place where people experiment, it is a place where you — okay, so these are all very business words — you incubate things.

**a.o:**

So who do you see as community?

**li li:**

I think there are almost two parts to the community: one is the artist, the people using things and you sponsor this incubation, and the other one is the circle you bringing out, the new incubation, out to the larger community, and the Singapore

Community

community is very large. There is civil society — I always call it the housewife from Ang Mo Kio — if I could get the housewife from Ang Mo Kio into the show, then it's successful. Then somebody told me, then you'd better have a lucky draw. So it's a very different group. You can decide who you want to pitch it at, but I thought Substation to me first was very much a place for the artist: the incubation and support of the artist. I thought your residency idea was very good, the one thing that I find quite missing in Singapore, but I probably know the photography site a little better, there are no reviews. You know, when a curator comes to Asia, they come to Singapore, Substation should be the destination site, they should absolutely come here to see all the new stuff that is going on in Singapore. So...is there an opportunity here where you can have regular reviews of art.

**a.o:**

I thank you that you think so well of the Substation

**li li:**

No, could it be?

**a.o:**

So this is one of the things that I was thinking about the Substation today. What is this, and this is where I was coming from before I talked about the alternative and the people who just need to make art and music, if we talk about the professionalized art and history, artists don't want to show at the Substation. If I could, I would rather show at a gallery, I'd rather show at a museum... You've got so many other opportunities right now. There are some artists of course who care about the Substation that way, but it's more of a token space kind of thing — you know, "I started doing something here, I don't mind doing something here". But this space isn't now the place where artists actually push their ambitions all the fucking way, it isn't.

Value of  
Substation to  
artists

**j.y:**

But it's not entirely out of lack of desire to do so. I mean, part of it is, at least for the visual arts, is financial as well. And hiring this space, paying the technicians, being able to fund it, the reception, the things you want to do... so it's not just lack of desire...

**a.o:**

I agree with that, and that's the thing that the Substation can never compete with: resources and finances. So the question is, what can we do that is actually worthwhile, that an artist would want to say: I can be ambitious with this space.

**shai:**

Maybe the [inaudible]

**a.o:**

That's your position lah, that's totally not my position, lah.

**shai:**

The thing is, my question is, I'm making a comparative with Singapore which went from third world to first world very very fast; and, I'm saying this again, some of you have heard this before [incomprehensible], second, world is process.

So I think we should celebrate the fact that it is still, I wouldn't say it's static, (but that) people have to go through phases in life. There will be a young artist who would champion the Substation as a stepping stone to somewhere else.

Unfortunately, that is also the truth, a lot of people have forgotten the Substation. But I think, I might be wrong in this assertion, but, if we keep it the way it was for the past 25 years, 26 years... we fucking had half of SG50, come on... So that's my theory lah ... Just my thoughts.

Phases of artist  
development

**a.o:**

oh yah, I guess it's a valid thing... I think for a lot of people they come and say, 'don't change the Substation, I like how it is and I like what it represents now. don't change.'

**yj:**

I think, when it comes to resources, I mean, overseas you've got underground venues and 'live' houses, I guess. I mean, the point I am trying to make is that, I think we can be very bare bones, very skeleton... basic necessity, but at the same time (it is about) how far we push that (environment) because I have seen 'live' houses overseas, their equipment is as old as my grandmother, some [inaudible]... maybe it's definitely very tight, because the venue rental cost is so low, to have Din and Ishraf, that you pay for when you do a show here and if you are not fighting the cost of the venue, you are limited by the number of days (in which) you do your set-up

Space and  
resource  
logistics

**a.o:**

Sure

**yj:**

and the reason why I think (that) just now you brought up (the fact) that they are so tired, I guess, it's because the people who are bumping in or setting up have this expectation, that they are trying to implement everything... which is ok, because, when push comes to shove, we bite the bullet. When it's 'go time', we set up.

But I guess, at the same time, I think in a sense (we need to) maximise the right resources, yah I feel even power... quite grateful that some of the shows that we've done here had a huge rig, but it hasn't failed yet... but I think certain bare minimum (of support) that in a sense can make the whole process a little bit more painless. Maybe my point to you is that, maybe we can develop certain resources that can make everything a little easier, explore how we can make the space more modular in a sense, so whether dance is coming in, or visual arts is coming in — the set-up of the space has to be just as diverse as the people who use it. That's my comment.

**a.o:**

— and I am saying that, (for) the next two years, that is the process we are trying to figure out as well

**y.j:**

yah yah yah

**a.o:**

What's the best way, with the limited resources that we have, to maximise our abilities and the outreach.

**y.j:**

One more thing I like to add— I know you brought up that for the next one year, we cannot do the show because of the availability of the space, whether it's in Substation programming season or whenever. I think, wah, like nowadays, every weekend has four shows happening, be it music, whatever, so I find it very tough like to say "let's do a show" cause I know someone else is already doing.

Scheduling of  
(music) shows

I even know people who can organise a show during a festival and do the same thing at a small venue. So I don't know if we are doing, as what you said just now, programming for the sake of programming, but for me I think, in my background as a technician, I feel that we should support the artist fully. But at the same time, it's demoralising when... haiya shit, how come we plan the show on this day when 8 different things are happening outside...?! So I think, having less shows is not a problem.

I know it's painful when you try to organise something. I've been in a phase where, within the span of one week, we change venue three or four times. from Substation, where do we go? Go Aliwal? I think even as venue users we will have to bite the bullet sometimes. You know Singapore is only so small, there is only one space like this... ok lah, there's Aliwal, but Aliwal may have its own...

Aliwal as  
alternative

So I guess, as venue users, we do need to think about that. because I would say every show should go on, but at the same time, realistically, like if all of us do a show within one year, four weekends every month, that is 200 shows... so how many... there are only 200 slots in a year, so you have to bear in mind that this is the reality.

**a.o:**

So I think what you talking about are physical constraints in terms of time and space —

**y.j:**

—also expectations

**a.o:**

Ya, there's one thing I do want to, and I think this is what June has mentioned before, and it differs significantly for me, is that people just want to come in to do their own thing. The punks just want to come in to do their own things, the visual artists also want to come in do their own thing. Same thing with gigs.

That, for me and Substation, I don't feel is good enough. I would like that, if the punks come for the gigs, they would also come to the visual arts exhibition. They go

Disciplines as  
tribes or  
community?

and see some performance thing and vice versa and people who go and see the gigs would also come here, people who do stuff here will look at the stuff there. I think that's that's the hope — that Substation could be more of an open space. I really really feel it's been 25 years and you know to be honest we've regressed to certain kinds of tribes and they are holding on protectively to some of the privileges we have carved out, but I think there's a space where we can come together again and hold on to that space. And in many ways also because the artists have been holding on to Substation so much, that we have also alienated a lot of the people outside who use to come in here.

**kq:**

I think you kind of under appreciated this idea of people coming here, because you were saying that they come here and do their own thing... I think you sort of undervalue this kind of self-organized activities, where you just give the artist a free rein... like, whoever dares to claim himself an artist will do just whatever they need to [inaudible].

DIY  
self-organised  
activity

Just to highlight this kind of idea of DIY... I had my first show, second show, actually, at post-museum. Paid the rent, Jennifer and Tien allowed me to do anything I want. With me and my brother, it was a duo show. So our first show we did everything together: posters, everything.

Back then, there was no Facebook so we were sending everything in envelopes to people... but you will never know the value of these things... like let(ing) people have their space and do whatever they want. You will never know (what can happen)...because years later, we take on the same spirit and then we actually set-up Latent Spaces.

**a.o:**

Yah, I agree

Post-museum

**kq:**

You might be kind of... oh, ok, judging by quantity that you know a lot of people who might be taking advantage (of the space), but there might be just one or two who actually value this DIY kind of spirit.

DIY spirit,  
carrying it  
forward

I think in Singapore, we don't actually lack artists. But what we actually lack are people who at your kind of level, like artistic director — (so) that you find when you call for nominations, that there are very few people like that because they lack the experience in organizing shows on their own. So I think, in a way, you are kind of under appreciating people who just come here and do their own thing and use the space... I don't think everyone is like that.

**a.o:**

Ok, there's the open season, but let's put that aside and let's talk about the DIY thing. I think that, if you want something bad enough, you will fight for it and, it will happen... and sometimes, even if an artist isn't selected, it's not because his work is not good enough

**k.q:**



I wasn't... [inaudible] it just takes time to fight for it. I wasn't saying that... I just said that your tone was kind of under appreciating these people

**a.o:**  
ok, yah

**d.d:**  
Maybe I can add, because I know you've mentioned that you were sympathetic to the fact that a lot of organic communities are around Substation... But, what I want to ask is whether you help to push this idea of inclusivity...

**a.o:**  
We have to find a way, lah

Organic  
communities,  
inclusivity

**d.d:**  
Instead of just being sympathetic...

**a.o:**  
We just have to find a way, lah

**a.o:**  
We just have to find a way, lah. I don't know, but can we do a show, like 'who is afraid of the punks'? It's just things like that, I don't know, but it will be that organic process. What Substation, this is the part that we haven't talked about, but what we shared with the previous group. That's where we have shifted drastically, in terms of the Substation — that the first year is entirely devoted to figuring out what the hell is this space for, who is going to use it, and how do we use and activate this space. So the first year is just really about Substation and the people around it as well, and this means that all these people have to come in from different points and then see where we go together.

What is  
Substation for?

**d.d:**  
I don't think.. [inaudible]

**i:**  
Can I bring back the subject of open season, because you are saying, like you want everyone, like you've been saying that the usage of this space is 'everybody come and do their own thing.' But how would you approach open season? The whole open season as open season...how do you then see communities coming together from —

**a.o:**  
for open season or for Substation season

Open season and  
how it will be  
handled;  
engagement  
with art  
community

**i:**  
...open season — would you be as involved as you are during Substation season, because that is the time when people are using the space as you mentioned to do their 'own thing'?

**a.o:**

do you think that the previous ADs were very involved in the other open sections...?

**b:**

i don't think that this is about the other ADs.

**a.o:**

No, no, I'm just asking... so, if you want to ask me... no... if you talk about open season, it is that period. It's the interim period (that is) for us to figure out exactly how we move forward there. So one thing I want to say is, let's separate rental from the idea of inclusivity.

Maybe in the end, next time we program the punks directly. Maybe we program other people who do want rather than venue rentals, so that's is something that we can figure out together.

Rental and  
inclusivity

**i:**

But don't you see the open season as an opportunity to engage people who want to use the space?

**a.o:**

I think so ya... I mean...I mean, I encourage Selene and our programmers to all come and talk, and the AIRs also should be coming..

**amir:**

then again...

**a.o:**

and be involved in that

Involvement of  
programmers  
and AIRs with  
open season

**amir:**

This is the thing that I have always been thinking about. Like you said, it's open season, it's open for everyone, so it is going to give opportunities for people that never do something before... which is ok. But then again, there will be people who use it for when it's open season, so it's like, 'go in and do for the sake of coming in', do you get what I mean?

**a.o:**

Sure

**amir:**

... this is what happens to us, me and Shai ,you know, someone did a show here and it ended with us doing all the cleaning up for the other party, which is to me is unfair. I think what Ila is trying to say is, for open season, you know in a way that you have a lot of people... so, basically, for open season, it's free for all. To me, if you going to get all these groups of people coming in, what's the benefit at the end? Because all this people are only going to do only once for the sake of doing it and then that's it.

Practical logistics of open season	<p><b>a.o:</b> I can't say that... it's like, how much do you want to exert control and how much do you want to not get involved in choosing who gets to rent and who doesn't? So my decision, I think, it's easier for us to try not do that kind of curation, or that kind of content management, and to just open it up... I mean, that's a very valid point to take I mean, what are we going to show and what are we not going to show?</p>
Degree of curation / control for open season	<p>But it's beyond us right now, with the amount of resources that we have, to try to do that... so I rather just say it's open season and that there is this other thing. Does this mean this is going to be the format that's going to stay for the next five or six years? No... it just means that in the next two years this is going to be the format until we figure out how we can use the space.</p>
Substation as facilitator?	<p><b>j.y:</b> But perhaps the approach is not so much control or lack of control, but about facilitation... whether facilitating can become a structural aspect of the Substation itself, such that, that kind of mixing around, which is something you are looking to as well, can come about. It's kind of like, you know, here, even us meeting here, having a chance to sit down at the same place with all of us coming from different backgrounds... this is very rare. The only time this kind of thing happens (these days) is in the passage-way or in the front or the sidewalk.</p>
Organic conversations, center for cross pollination	<p>That's the only place we have for that right now, there's nowhere else and, perhaps, as a suggestion, if there is a space, or something that can facilitate this — us crossing each other's paths and having these interactions — perhaps that might be one way of allowing for engagement with each other in addition to whatever you are thinking about already for the artist-in-residencies... I suppose those are a bit more curated and constructed, but in another more open sort of way, to have a space where this sort of thing might happen...</p>
Conversations and space	<p><b>a.o:</b> So the question is whether Substation wants to take on that role, to make these kinds of conversations very natural to the space. I don't think so, I mean — if this was 10 years ago, I think we would be very happy to take on that space.</p>
Context of urban space	<p>I really feel like thinking about where we are right now in the middle of town and look at what's around us — there's no coffee shop, there's nothing distinctively easy for you to hang out with, this is not a place for people to come and hang out anymore. I mean there are occasions, there are events and everything but it doesn't provide the same kind of space where there was S-11 and there's food and people will naturally congregate here. We are this little sore thumb right now in the middle of a very nice bourgeois gentrified area, and so, if the Substation can be that kind of a conversation place, and I am hoping it can, is to think what is the reason for people to come here because, right now, people don't have a reason to come here, say for their shows. If it's my show then my friends would come; if it's your show then your friends would come... where is the point of intersection ... it is not going to happen.</p>
	<p>So that's why, and maybe I am wrong, I thought, can we take on one question each</p>

**Gentrification** year? At least there would be a specific focus so at least people will come here. They don't necessarily have to talk about that, but at least it's there in the background, and maybe it's a reason for people to come.

**Intersecting communities**

**shaiful:**

Sorry, I also think it's the challenge of the vocabulary. I have this analogy where Substation is a school and we have express, normal (laughs)

**a.o:**

You see, every time people laugh... only maybe your analogy not very good lah, not good lah your analogy.

**Social dynamic of Substation**

**shaiful:**

No...no... it's the kind of analogy everyone can connect to, because we've been to secondary school, unless someone who didn't go to school lah... but, generally, I think —

**a.o:**

So you are excluding those people who didn't go to school

**shaiful:**

—they will be somewhere else if they didn't go to school. But, ya, tapping on that analogy, I think but Substation has, when I first came, I saw that mix of three streams... but not that it matters, of course... I am just using that as a pinpoint to, you know, the academics who would be the express kids, the punks would be the lower tech, and there are people in between that are normal... of course (laughs) usually I don't give a shit.

But to make it very clear to the layman, I think this is what is happening. I mean, this is the first time I see all three streams together again! Why? Maybe it is crucial... maybe it comes with a critical conjecture.... and there is one critical space that people have spoken of — it is the smoking corner outside.

[unknown voice: YES]

**Communal intersecting space, Smoking corner**

**shaiful:**

Really! because that's where I have conversations with artists and academics and curators —

**a.o:**

Sure, yes.

**Substation bench**

**shaiful:**

— and just over a cigarette, we are talking oh what do you? "I do this... what do you do... I do this... and we're talking da da da da... I have a show next week, come..." ten ten ten! So, similar spaces have been replicated with post museum, I.A. but they all not really quite accessible like Substation. It is not to push my dreams on you or anything

Post-museum,  
Independent  
Archive,  
Accessibility

**a.o:**

Sure

**shaiful:**

but I think that's something to be considered, because I think what Alan just mentioned is a bit utopic, some kinds of space where all walks of life can gather... I mean, I like to see that happen, definitely, but it's a very taxing process...

**a.o:**

I mean, just go for it if you fail, then you fail, if you fail... I mean that's Singapore. I mean maybe people are not ready for this... maybe people don't want it, but is it something that's worthwhile fighting for? I think it's worthwhile and you can call me an idealist, you can call me a utopist, utopianist, whatever, but I think it's worth fighting for, I think that Singapore right now, there is so much change going on, there is so much civil society, and I think artists should be part of all of those things...

**k.t:**

I got a very simple clarification. Basically you are trying to programme Substation into two different rhythms, one is the open season, one is the sub season. I don't know how that will work, but I think, well of the top of my head cause you can only speculate, there is a potential for it to really sort of divide [inaudible] up (people), in the sense that, the first half of the year is my year, second half of the year is your year. there is a chance it divides people up that way, I am the first half of Substation, you are the second half of Substation. I guess these things we will only know when it plays out... but my important question is, my more important point is: when do you plan to review it? This system that you are constructing, and how will you review it? will it be a similar situation such as this? will it be up for debate from all different streams like Shaiful said?

Assessing  
results of open /  
substation  
season dynamic

**a.o:**

it will be fantastic if we can continue doing this)

**k.t:**

—and when will you decide the point where this two-rhythm system is not working?

**a.o:**

when will we review it?

**k.t:**

yah

**a.o:**

I don't know. for me I think it's more important right now that Substation can in-build very very different voices in this programme right now, and part of it is that dissonance right now, and so if you say that this is a rare kind of situation where you take on — let's say three streams are here whatever — it's a lovely time to be all here, I would like that these three streams are here to continue to work towards the programming right now.

So, one of the things I can share here right now is that, you know that every year Substation has a Sept Fest, this year Sept Fest's, I am thinking — though I haven't told the Board yet, if you asked it's where [inaudible] the Board — this year's Sept Fest is less of a presentation but more of an open source or open space kind of format where maybe the AIRs will take on different topics and people will come together and break out into groups and pull something together.

Sept Fest

So as a very concrete example. you guys know post museum and they have food03 there... I have already invited post-museum to be one of our residencies, for our artist in residence, and, for instance, if they decide in doing this open source open call, open space format thing and they decide 'let's do food03' in random room, then it means that everyone here, who is in this conversation, needs to also make a commitment to them, so, really, the community can say whether or not these things are worth fighting for. maybe it means to say, ok, Jennifer and Tien, I am going to support you by buying 'x' no. of meals; I am going to support you by volunteering one hour a day or something like that. But the community then, working with the AIRs, can figure out where you going together. And it means that it's not, you don't just come here and talk, but you have to stand by what you say. and that's what I am thinking in terms of open source and open call where as a group we can almost find out where we want to go together.

Post-museum  
Artist residency

Community

**a.c:**

Sorry, I like to clarify this, you were saying that there is going to be an open season and a curated season right —

**a.o:**

Yes, ok

**a.c:**

— so it's going to be like a half and half kind of thing.

**a.o:**

don't know I think now we don't have resources so I think we are going to do four months of Substation season

**a.c:**

so it's going to be a block-off straight off four months back-to-back kind of thing (a.o: yah yah yah)

**a.o:**

I think it makes it a lot easier for us administratively and also for people to not always have to call in to check whether we are doing things. so you know, there is a period that it is quite open, and there is a period where it is closed so you don't have to worry about...

**amir:**

I think, more or less it's kind of similar, cause me and Shai we are constantly doing shows here, so it's like we know cause we will check with miss and we know when

it's blocked-out

**a.o:**

Yah lah

**amir:**

so right now, all consolidated into a couple of months...?

**a.o:**

and I would love to find a way where it is just there online, so easy and make it easy for everyone.

**a.c:**

So, it is there an idea or a possibility whereby, its not a full out four months, but that four months is staggered throughout the year...?

**a.o:**

Online admin  
scheduling  
system?

I mean, that was how Substation used to run, and I feel, administratively resources-wise, it is quite tiring on us to try and stagger everything through the year, it actually makes more sense for us so you can just do one block. It's a lot easier lah. Does it mean like it's the right one? I don't know. but I mean in terms of manpower it works for us.

**a.c:**

Sustainable  
schedule for  
Substation

Because, in that sense, it becomes a bit tricky for us when we want to get spaces... so we're like 'ok... the first four months of the year we can't do at Substation and find somewhere else to do it probably'...?

**a.o:**

But maybe it makes it easier for you. Like you know the first four months 'cannot', so the next 8 months you better chope first. You don't have to keep calling us already, it's almost like if you can plan ahead you can go.

**a.c:**

but I mean, if it's blocked-out, maybe four months, like maybe february and another one maybe in the second quarter, and another one third quarter, and then fourth quarter all the time, everybody can see that and we will not have to call you guys and tell you eh come on... I mean, we will just book the rest of the months, so I mean is this staggering possible?

**a.o:**

Very honestly, we will not stagger, we can't stagger right now. I mean with the amount of manpower we have now, it's a kind of regroup, four months and five months, so it's one block and it's just very easy for us, lah. In the future if that gets revised, we will see.

**yj:**

So for the Substation season, is it one long work for the four months, what is it are you looking to do?

Scheduling  
open season

**a.o:**

I don't know, I am thinking it is a show that kind of evolves, how it happen...

**y.j:**

so, in a sense, it's the same thing drawn out over time. because, if you are saying one month in between, ya (andy: yah of course that will work) yah, the timeline also.. [inaudible]

**a.c:**

i mean the timeline... I mean if it's going to be a work in progress/performance, then that makes sense, what I am trying to understand is [inaudible]

[TIMBRE MUSIC GETTING LOUDER]

**a.o:**

Welcome to the Substation [claps hand once]

**k:**

Sorry, Alan — you talk about the kind of constraints in terms of the manpower that you have, maybe you can tell us a bit more on how you are structuring your operations, or the kind of the staff that you have and the role they are taking on?

**a.o:**

Ok, so Substation has traditionally had 14 people; now it's come down to about 8, and of the 8 not all are staying as well.

Substation  
staffing,  
structuring  
operations

But I would see it as: one programmer who deals with visual arts and research; one programmer who deals with performing arts and music and stuff. hopefully, later on will add on one programmer who talks about visual culture popular culture, film. I mean these are programmers. I would really like somebody who is dedicated also to outreach and education. I mean, that is the programming team that is not fully complete right now. On the administrative side you have your GM with the usual role.

Substation  
programmers

**a.c:**

what about the technical team (a.o: sorry) the technical team.

Outreach &  
education

**a.o:**

The technical team is something we are reviewing right now and certainly talking to them. Right now we have two technicians they are on contract with us.

**a.c:**

Their contracts are ending right?

Substation  
technical staff

**a.o:**

Their contracts are ending but we are extending it as well. I mean that was an early scenario where we couldn't tell them what's going to happen. Right now, I have been constantly talking to them and you can talk to them as well. We are trying to push it to where the technicians become more like PCs (permanent



contractors/project coordinators?) rather than just technicians so that they can grow as well because the thing with Substation is that, sometimes you come here and then you are stuck here for ten years doing the same old shit, that's why you are so tired, and that applies for technicians, that applies for programmers, and it even apply a little bit for the artistic directors... it's just that you hit the roof very quickly.

Sustaining staff

Some people when they just came in, they come to Substation and they love it, and they go all out, and then you do the same thing for two years... anyone is going to tune out after awhile. So it is to find a structure where we actively encourage them to kind of grow and move on. in that way, Substation can always get the best of young talents who knows that the when they come in here, they can learn something and then move on.

**c:**

I have a question... why did you take away the bench?

**a.o:**

Do you see the bench there?

**c:**

Yah

Substation  
bench

**a.o:**

Then why you ask me about it?

**c:**

No, no... it was taken away, right, and it was put back or something?

**k:**

Yah it was taken away

**a.o:**

yah, ok... I love how the bench is so symbolic of the Substation. So let's —

**j.y:**

— it's because there is nowhere else to hang out

**a.o:**

—ok let's

**amir:**

[inaudible] you can't be changing it

**a.o:**

Let's talk about the bench. When we first came in here — I'm a smoker. I did not feel that Substation staff should be smoking in front of our own building so we took away the bench, other people wanted to smoke, that's fine. One of the things that's a problem is that we are always cleaning up ash and cigarette butts in the morning and auntie will always have to mop the place and clean up. I've done it a few times

before as well. So we took it away. After that, we talked to the technicians, Din and everything, and we talked about it, and he said it doesn't feel good because when they are in the alley and the police drive by, and Singapore is racist, they stopped and they looked at them and it doesn't feel good. So we brought it back here.

But that's the process of conversation, lah. I didn't understand all of that so

**a.c:**

So just now you were saying there is no space for people to chill out together and have these conversations happening but like shai was sharing you know, yah

**a.o:**

So, let that be an end to the bench question from now on...

**c:**

No... but the bench was not about the bench, right?

**a.o:**

yah

**c:**

It's about organising... maybe about your role as relationship builder or community organizer. And, you know, like Shai said, that's the only place where people can have these discussions and you said, "no, no, no, now we are sore thumb in this, amongst all this buildings, and therefore we are not conducive to hold these conversations"... But honestly, any space can be conducive. It doesn't have to be, but, obviously, if it has a leader then it would be the best but it does not... I mean the leader is one whom others gravitate towards and the leader is in the midst of community, and in the midst of building communities, which means that the leader has to be there on the ground, and be the one gelling everybody together. So I guess, my question really, when I asked you, is whether you recognized that, and realized that could be the role that you play —

Role of  
AD in  
relationship  
building

**a.o:**

This is the part where we are talking what communities constitute, lah —

**c:**

I know that.

**a.o:**

— and I have laid out some positions I think differ in some ways from you guys.

**c:**

Like?

**a.o:**

That community —

[MUSIC: Now or never, those are the best days of my life]

The Substation  
community

**c:**  
How do you build a community?

**a.o:**  
— so Substation's community right now is the artist, and I am just going back to this again and again and again, that I feel that we need to make that community much bigger than just the artist...

**j.y:**  
But the artist forms that core of the community —

**a.o:**  
Yes

**j.y:**  
— and even those ordinary people may come...

**a.o:**  
I know I know! they do they do

For the arts and that's why, when we talk about things like open source and things like that — let's rediscover what the Substation is for, and I am thankful that everyone is here now, which actually shows the possibility of doing something together.

I have changed those positions, I've told you guys before, it's not just come up with these programmes. I am saying there are opportunities and, if you guys want to have a stake in Substation, then come and be part of this, so we can go somewhere together. If you choose to be just on the outside, then it shows that there will be less pressures for us to move in those kinds of directions.

**j.y:**  
I think you might need to communicate some of this to the wider community because I know people who feel somewhat disillusioned about where things are going and where it looks like it might be, and you are presenting quite a different position today.

Change in  
position

**a.o:**  
I don't think we can put up a big press release that can clear anything up. When people read the thing, they kind of read the thing they worry about, and I think it's more just like lots of this things and again and again.

[TIMBRE: Summer of 69!]

**a.o:**  
...That means that's what Substation is, we build people one by one, and talk to people one on one again, and it looks like we can do that big release and clarify some positions, but I think a lot of the bulk of the work is going to happen in this kind of conversations.

**c:**

But do you have these conversations starting now or when did it actually start?

**a.o:**

It started last Friday.

**c:**

...So it started last Friday but all the plans were rolled out before that?

**a.o:**

Yah

**kq:**

With regards to the different rhythm and this off season

**a.o:**

Hang on, Charmaine has a [inaudible] and I never had a chance to answer her

**yj:**

I think that whether the plans roll out or what, I think we have to work with, "I was just aware that, I didn't even know there was a meeting, but ok, lah, just interact, lor"...but at the end of the day, I don't know what Alan is doing is right or wrong, but at the same time I think if he is in this position, try loh... You know that kind of thing, because for me, I don't know how to run Substation. So, for me, I understand that everyone here has an idea on how they are going to use this space.

But at the same time there is a lot of expectations. But maybe we learn that, maybe, in the next four months let's say open thing, let's say, what if something happens there, I mean of course rental is a bitch, lah, because, 'wah, have to change venue already, need to go somewhere else,' but sometimes, I feel like the bench, even if someone takes away the bench and we don't choose to meet, then it is our problem already because we choose to kill our own community. The bench may not be there, but, I mean, the space still there, what, we can still stand there. So, even though the space is gone, I think it's stupid to think: the bench is gone and, "sorry ar guys, I not going to meet". It's stupid, what. Yah lah, so I think, where Alan put the bench I mean it's up to him. I mean, under his [inaudible] whatever lah. But at the same time, we as, whatever, express, normal or what, if we really meet each other, we should... I mean I don't know all of you all, but I know that kind of thing...

**a.c:**

Jin, but by saying with or without Substation, right, let's say if this building itself if it doesn't exist —

**yj:**

So that means if Substation close down, all of us pangkang go where? Go back home meh? no what?

**a.c:**

So that's why we are trying to keep this place [inaudible] as well right —

Physical space  
as anchor  
(or not?)

**amir:**

But you see, that's why —

**yj:**

That mean is, we are a slave, no? We are chained to it, no?

**amir:**

Guys, guys, guys, wait, wait.

This comes in today's Straits Times — you saw the Strait Times, what it says, it's like the future of Substation... You know, I have all these locked inside my head until last Friday... it's not really a planned meeting, but we met up with Alan, and I feel the future of Substation is there, but it is all up to us. Because, basically, he gives us the open season, and then there is the closed season so we have to respect it in a way, yes it's/he's new, and I am not saying I am on his side or whatever, but this is all trial basis.

But for me, and Shai, or you know us or the punks or whatever, we always been doing shows here... we roughly know how Substation functions. Like, last time, everything is all staggered. Now is four months or two months and four months, and then the rest of it is open season. And it's the same as where it's first come first serve basis, like what Alan says if it's there (open season schedule), you just plan it out.

And then when you say Substation is gone... no, Substation is still here for us... it's still going to be trial and error together with us —

**yj:**

Yah lor, yah lor, correct

**amir:**

So to make this place happen, like what alan plan out, I mean, without our support, without us doing something at Substation itself, Substation won't happen... and to say also, add on censorship — and for us when we do show also we need to do our own MDA licensing and things like that, and for censorship and things like that you should know what your content is — so to say our venue has to support us on our censorship, I mean it's wrong... If you go to like Aliwal or like other venue as well, basically censorship is your own self control and whether it's approved or not it's up to MDA which is a bitch.

**shai:**

Sorry, I think, sorry —

**a.o:**

— Wait, wait

MDA licensing  
Censorship  
Venue backing  
Aliwal

**shai:**

ok ok

**a.o:**

Wait — I think your voices are a little bit dominant right now can I just wrap up that part right now... I think there is some space where we have to think about our own responsibilities

[TIMBRE: thank you!]

**a.o:**

But the institution handling space also has some responsibility. But it's not one way, right? But I do know Kai Chun and Charmaine have something to say also...

[inaudible]

[Voices all over the place cannot make out anything]

**g:**

I just want to go back to when you talked about different sectors — of others, or communicating with others with different genres, for instance, punks going to check out an exhibition or visual artist going to a metal gig... I've known some of these guys since the 90s. I've performed here in the 90s as well, and prior to that, if you ask me to go to an art exhibition, I would say, 'are you out of your mind?' Because all I want to go to are punk shows, metal shows or hardcore shows [inaudible because of coughing and timbre]...performance. And, right now, I am an educator and I teach students the whole gamut of performing arts.

Cross-section  
audience,  
90s art scene

Substation has been a place where it has been [inaudible], but like Shaiful said, 10 years ago this will never happen — this is a dream, this is the dream where regardless of whatever art form that we represent or practice, we musicians or visual artists, photographers or what, have a right, we are in the same boat talking about the same thing to see where we are with the Substation... and I appreciate the position where you want to see that kind of community, where we kind of communicate across genres but how do we know we've succeeded, is there like a bench mark we can look towards —

[Unidentified: There's a bench...]

[LAUGHTER]

**g:**

This is a question that I asked [inaudible]... because, in order to find out that we have succeeded we need to have some specific benchmarks.

**a.o:**

Do you mind if I give you a fluffy answer?

**g:**

Please, please

**a.o:**

because I think when it happens and when we know it, we will know it.

**g:**  
It happens to be an artistic answer [inaudible]

[LAUGHTER]

**a.o:**  
Otherwise, we will sink into let's make sure we have 10 collaborations a year. So I guess, I feel that it's going to be something... if we do it right, it's just going to feel very real and you will know it straight away...

**g:**  
I mean, the only reason why I ask, is that this is the impression I get, so I may be wrong, do you feel that communication across genres and across practitioners hasn't reach a certain point yet?

**a.o:**  
I think we have diverged from that; that Substation you've talked about where people come here all the time and meet and there are punks playing and there's obs is there and then they go throw eggs at obs...

Social dynamic  
of Substation

I don't think that's Substation right now... I think Substation is more atomised right now, where I do my thing, and you do your thing and we are not really going to meet

**g:**  
Really? Really, but we are meeting what? I don't really agree with you.

**a.o:**  
I know, I know, I know, it's fair for some people to say that as well...

**amir:**  
Like what Gordon said, I know previously we did an exhibition here. I mean the punks themselves, and then, at the same time, we have a show, so there's one time we have a show inside and an exhibition —

**a.o:**  
FANTASTIC!

**amir:**  
So, basically. the punks come in for the exhibition and the people for the exhibition came in so there is a direction. I mean however you want to portray it, that was really happening by itself.

Cross-genre  
activity  
happening  
already

**a.c:**  
And with the film that went on last year, *18 levels of hell*, it wasn't just a film show. We got engaged to play, and that in itself is a collaboration that happened and all we needed to do was to have this space available to create the conditions for things to happen naturally, rather than for us to force feed it, to make it a particular type of shape, and I think that's how the Substation that I know of, that's how it's always been.

Space to  
facilitate  
collaboration

**a.o:**

So that is the space I diverge quite a lot from some of you guys, and I will hold that position. And if we are going to do Sept Fest as an open source or open space kind of format, where people can come in and say something, that also means that there is an opportunity or a possibility for change towards a different kind of programming that we, including if Substation need to say “ok maybe we don’t do programmes anymore, all we do is that we make sure we are available here for people”.

[Badly sung ‘Mr Bright Side’ in the background]

**kq:**

Going back to Kenneth’s point about this different rhythm — open season, curated season — I mean, for musicians maybe it’s staggered and then they just need a venue I guess it’s [inaudible] kind of not obvious, the contrast between off season and on season. But for visual artist like me, if I were to have a show here, I mean I pay for the rental and I also realise it’s not going to be funded, so what’s the catch for me to have a show here. I’ll be coming here and I will be feeling like I am this illegitimate son or child of this... I mean it’s made very obvious because we have this curated season... I mean so what’s the catch... it’s nothing more than a car park...

**a.o:**

then we should just make it free for everyone, I would love that, might as well we try to say the goal is for us to make it free for every single person.

**kq:**

No, I mean, is there some way... if after I pay for the rent or everything, is there a review of the show or somehow but not this [inaudible]...

**a.o:**

I would say, yah, are you saying that when you come and do this, are you on your own and nobody gives a damn about it (kq: [almost inaudible] yah) it’s a carpark, right? The Substation programmer should be here, the Substation AD, the Substation team, not just the artistic side but the admin side actually needs to be here as well, the shows that are happening here. They need to come and see it and they need to have these conversations with you guys. I felt that a long time that the Substation programmers were only interested in the show or the artist they curate but they were not going out to see what other shows so the philosophy has to be it’s not just about what’s going on at Substation; it’s about art in general in Singapore and that’s how Substation staff and the admin and the artistic side has to work.

Fuller  
engagement  
with art scene  
outside  
Substation

**k.c:**

I think we really need to manage that kind of balance, that kind of care, that kind of attention between the two different rhythms.

**a.c:**

Sorry, but I have to say something about funding though. I mean we are artists and



there should be an upgrading on our own instead of relying so much on the funding

—

**amir:**

You see all this, while me and shai and the bands and most of the punks we don't never use funding. I mean, like why you want to based something of your art —

**kq:**

— I don't even mean funding, I mean like if a [inaudible] came and they are not interested in what I am showing and they come down and review it, that sort of thing lah, it's not purely funding.

Funding  
assistance

**a.o:**

i think that one is more like a separate thing, I think it's more of a philosophy that the staff need to invite... not because you are here at the Substation you pay attention to it. It's actually everything in Singapore we should be looking at, especially things that are here, so can we change that kind of programming where we think about larger things in Singapore rather than the artists that we work with or that we programme, so that we can look after these artists

**n:**

Sorry I have a question, you were trying to separate out what inclusivity is, what open rental is and open season or curated? so imagine if, we as artists we want to rent a space, what sort of programmes that you do and if you want to rent it — you said something about first come first serve basis — so, may I ask you whether in the future will the rental rates be the same across the board? And whether we will get the space or not will depend on availability and not based on curation? meaning you won't be looking at the merits.

Focus / lens  
of attention

**?:**

So literally if you feel like the proposal sucks and a better one comes along, will you say like no to the first one?

Rental fee

**a.o:**

If we make a promise to the first one it would be terrible to kick that person out just because we think a better one came along, right? I think we would like to be across the board fair and maybe there are small adjustments along the way you know.

Criteria for open  
season

I mean these are the things that Substation staff do, sometimes they will loan you a monitor for free, sometimes they will do this and that but there should be some ballpark for fairness in the first place and then maybe some adjustments along the way.

**n:**

Then in terms of talking about alternative, inclusivity and community, these are rather conflicting ideas at times, trying to make it alternate, trying to support a subculture and then trying to make it inclusive in terms of maybe the man on the street can also understand, how are we going to balance this?

Alternative  
Inclusivity  
Community  
Subculture

...You also mentioned yourself, that in the art world right now something can be commodified and it goes out there and people can buy the product and it becomes mainstream again, and then we will have new form of subculture and alternative culture emerging. So there will always be this kind of cycle going on and I don't think it's actually possible. Like, we want to make Substation a space for everyone and that it will really be...I don't know. What it will become, pasar malam? I don't know, I can't imagine that kind of a thing happening.

**a.o:**  
How do you want me to respond to that?

Commodified art  
world

**n:**  
I don't know, it's just a thought [inaudible]

[talk crossing, inaudible]

**a.o:**  
So, number one is the challenge of looking after these different things. I would just say that I like to dream and Substation should dream that way. And if we fail, we fail. But at least we gave it shot, and I would go back again and say Singapore right now is in the midst of change and we as cultural producers should be part of that.

I think a lot of it right now is that we are focused on our own careers and our own things that we do. I think that if you show artists that the things that we do here will matter to an uncle on the street or a doctor or a lawyer, these things actually matter in how we shape certain things like Macritchie Reservoir or whatever, then I think that our artists will also be given a dream to dream bigger, to make more ambitious works, I want to hold on to that. If we fail then we fail, but I want to hold on to that.

Relatability

**n:**  
I guess part of my concern is also this alternative thing, I mean, like how he mentioned earlier, there is a community of global or international kind of scene where you know if you go to a particular underground live house, it is where everybody from that scene goes to and of course we can try expanding the audience pull from that scene itself. But from my own thought, I think it needs to be more streamlined, than to think that it can happen to any uncle or auntie on the street.

**a.o:**  
I am hopeful that way, that's why the streamlining is not about artists, but about conversations and themes that we approach. But ultimately my hope is that Substation is not the only space that tolerates and encourages difference. I hope that Substation is one of many that, there are many Substations in Singapore, and ultimately there is the dream that we have to remake Singapore a space where difference can be encouraged and it's not just Substation is the only one doing that.

[long pause]

Ok so I don't know I have quite a lot of...

	<p><b>k.t:</b> How transparent will you be with the open season list so that people will know... and, let's say, I am one of the few to apply for open season and, shit, I missed it... will I be roped on to the next open season? How does the priority queue go?</p>
	<p><b>a.o:</b> I think that's how it goes, you will be roped in and I think on the interest of being fair, then first dibs, lah.</p>
	<p><b>i:</b> This is regarding open season... how about the artist in residence, is it selected? Do you choose who you want to have as artist-in-residence or can we apply for it?</p>
<p>Open season process</p>	<p><b>a.o:</b> So the artist-in-residence now is a work-in-process. I am not sure if the 8-week format, four hours of social hours is the best way, I am really not sure. so the first few artists that we have selected are actually interested in the process itself, and I think they will constantly give us feedback. So I think once we roll out with a few versions of that, I think there will be space for open calls as well, there must be.</p>
<p>Artist residency</p>	<p>It's just now we are just in the process of learning what's the best structure for artist in residence and people actually benefit from it and if you can do that. We need artists right now who are more invested in how things are run, like post-museum, Zihan is also very interested in that, doing very small things instead of big things and, actually, my hope is that the first point of contact is to talk to the previous associate artist research programme (AARP) that we've talked to and see what sort of support [inaudible] and I think there must be some kind of component where it is also open and up for grabs.</p>
<p>Feedback</p>	
	<p><b>b:</b> Are you still demolishing the box office?</p>
	<p><b>a.o:</b> Ok I would like to, I don't know, whether NAC or URA will allow me to.</p>
<p>Post-museum Loo Zihan AARP</p>	<p><b>b:</b> but is it a matter of...</p>
	<p><b>d.d:</b> I heard only second hand, could you tell me more [inaudible] maybe for [inaudible]</p>
<p>Box Office</p>	<p><b>a.o:</b> So along the lines of discovering what's this space should be, we look at and try to get artists to do different things to it. The box office is one space right now that we do not use for any kinds of official or office functions, so I invited an architect to come in to kind of tear down the box office, but in parts. And each month, when those parts come down, we hope that there can be artists from different different spaces which can come and show us how they are going to work with either the</p>

positive space, which means the rubble that comes down, or the leftover holes or the negative spaces there.

I think there is a whole range of possibilities that can happen, like whether there can be one to one performances, you go inside, and maybe there is one punk and you and you are just stuck for one hour...

**a.c:**

...Cafe or coffeeshop?

**a.o:**

I mean, yah, yah, so that I will say the first six months we are just trying to do things that are more material and less conceptual, things that are more about shape shifting the building literally moving the weight around.

And then after that, there will be a space for that and I would love to see those kinds of very very weird things and I talk to Obs actually and we talked about that and maybe you want to come in and say, 'no, Substation doesn't change,' but you have to do that, not rhetorically, but through a project for instance, and then I think that helps us.

**d.d:**

What about the cabinet of curiosities? (a.o: yes, sorry) the cabinet of curiosities, can you tell us more about it?

**a.o:**

It's again along those lines where I really hope that we can reach out to more people so it's just trying to find workshops for artists where they can deal with the public that I am not necessarily [inaudible]

The Observatory

[Laughter]

[Light turns on at random]

?:

Cabinet of  
Curiosities

Let there be light.. [laughter]

**a.o:**

I know this is getting very long-drawn, so for the people who want to take a break, I am fine, I won't take offence, just go lah but I will answer your questions till she gets tired or I get tired lah

[LAUGHS]

?:

Wahh

**a.o:**

So I am trying to figure out a way where one school group of children, at least secondary school or JC, come every single day, and will that be able to pull revenue

for us or, more importantly, will we be able to see what is like, what's happening culturally in Singapore. I think we have to find a way where the programmes that we do are not straight up or are not similar to the school programmes.

I did one at sculpture square where we presented Cheo Chai-hiang's 'five by five'...you guys know cheo chai-hiang, he basically did this drawing on the wall and he called it the Singapore river, and we call in Singapore's first conceptual art work. The way we devised the programme was that when the students came in, and these are 16-year olds, they would write a rejection letter to Cheo Chai-hiang at first, and it was very interesting, the kinds of responses.

**Educational outreach Programme**  
**Sculpture Square Cheo Chai-hiang**

We didn't even explain what's the history or the concept... it started with that rejection letter, then after that, we had a timeline of his entire life, from the day he was born to when he went to london to when he came back to Singapore to make 'five by five'. We asked the students to find which is their moment, which is 'five by five' for you (them), so then, the students would lie down, next to different things and they would talk about it. And then they would go out there and do their own 'five by five'... so this is sort of weird programmes that are a bit more participative, maybe will not give you all the facts, but they would definitely go away remembering who is Cheo Chai-hiang.

**d.d:**

Is that your [inaudible] for the cabinet of curiosities [inaudible]

**a.o:**

That's my hope for the cabinet of curiosities... when the AIRs... when all the artist-in-residence come in, we bring them in on the basis of their practice and they can install their work straightaway. It doesn't have to be precious, it's something that people can poke and touch and play with, and students can come in and use that space.

**d.d:**

Would look forward to [inaudible]

**a.o:**

Ok, bye guys, (to Selene) Hey do you want to get their email address? I guess we send the minutes for you guys.

**d.d:** Yah good

**a.o:** So

**g:** (inaudible)

**a.o:**

Are you a teacher?

**g:** An educator

**a.o:**

Come and help us and make our program work

?: If we say what we want to say, we will be here for a very very long time

**a.o:**

We can come back next week also. I don't know if this group is going to grow every time...or yah.

?:

I think it might grow.

**d.d:**

Good

**a.o:**

I mean that's actually the point, right? Whether we can do it in a productive way...  
so shall we have a consensus that we are all quite tired today... [scattered 'yah's']...  
that's why I plan on Tuesdays...

**a.o:**

Ok thank you guys, thank you everyone. [clapping]

Documented, transcribed and prepared by members of the arts community. 6 March 2016.

**End of document.**