

An Element \in / \notin A Set

Jia Jia

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Washington

2021

Committee:

Michael Swaine

Stephanie Hanes, Adair Rounthwaite

Whitney Lynn, Nick Geankoplis

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

School of Art

© Copyright 2021

Jia Jia

University of Washington

Abstract

An Element \in / \notin A Set

Jia Jia

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Michael Swaine

Three Dimensional Four Forum

I automatically read the customer's minutest movements and gaze, and my body acts reflexively in response. My ears and eyes are important sensors to catch their every move and desire.

Taking the utmost care not to cause the customer any discomfort by observing him or her too closely, I swiftly move my hands according to whatever signals I pick up.

"Your receipt, sir. Thank you for your custom!"

"Thanks," he says, taking his receipt and leaving.¹

¹ From Convenience Store Woman by Sayaka Murata

Imagine a jellyfish waltzing in a library while thinking about quantum mechanics.²

Politicians in our times feed their cliches to television, where even those who wish to disagree repeat them. Television purports to challenge political language by conveying images, but the succession from one frame to another can hinder a sense of resolution. Everything happens fast, but nothing actually happens. Each story on televised news is “breaking” until it is displaced by the next one. So we are hit by wave upon wave but never see the ocean.³

Non-productive consumption” is just as important in human activity as productive consumption.⁴

² From cognitive scientist Lera Boroditsky’s TED Talk

³ From *On Tyranny* by Timothy Snyder

⁴ From Georges Bataille

KEY TO TYPEFACE USAGE

- Times New Roman No. 12 represents academic writing (full page width)
- *Times New Roman No. 12 italic or **bold** represents quotes⁵ (either left column or full page width)*
- Courier No.12 represents Jia Jia's writing style (right column)

METHODS

I am wondering if there should be a comment on language or logic or poetry or all three. Something about when English is your second language you make choices that are not always bound to normal grammar. This might be called broken English, but I want to show in this paper that the way I view art making is part informed by being a visitor to a new land and the struggle of being understood and understanding. I at times am offered the correct way of saying something but I see that the voice (my voice) loses some of its meaning. Parts of this thesis paper will remain in the poetic unfiltered broken English that I speak and think in when I discuss my work to people who don't speak Chinese. These sections will be structured like poems. The second part of my paper will be corrected / filtered / and looked over by English speakers for an English-speaking audience. It will...

6

⁶ Michael Swaine's conjecture

I am wondering if there should be a comment on language or logic or poetry or all three. Something about when English is your second language you make choices that are not always bound to normal grammar. You will express a "sentence" based on your direct instinct feelings about things through your sensors. This might be called perfect English for Jia Jia. I want to show in this paper that the way I view art making is part informed by being a visitor to a new land and the freedom of being misunderstood and misunderstanding. I at times am offered the correct way of saying something but I see that my voice loses some of its meaning. Parts of this thesis paper will remain in the poetic unfiltered perfect English that I speak and think in when I discuss my work to people who don't speak Chinese. These sections will be structured like poems. The second part of my paper will be filtered by English speakers for an English-speaking audience.⁷

⁷ Jia Jia's comment

PREFACE

No.26 Regular Fortune

Thousands of soldiers obey you without failure to the order and dignity of the General. All soldiers even to the far distant countries will be the same by your order. To get win or to loose [sic] are unknown while they attack the enemy's castle. Show why the great honor (indifferent) in defeating the enemy, it is not worthwhile so much to the people.

You request will be granted. The patient will get well. The lost, article will be found soon. The guest you wait for will come soon. Building a new house and removal are both fine. It is good to start a trip. Marriage and employment are all well.

I went to Japan in the summer of 2019 before I arrived in Seattle.
I asked a fortune when I visited Sensō-ji Temple in Tokyo.

PART I

When I was a child, I lived in a tube-shaped apartment. Each family had one bedroom, or a bigger bedroom which combined by two small ones.

The toilets are communal.

The kitchens of each family are in the common hallway.

A family of three is crammed into this tiny thirteen square meters. I have lived in the thirteen square meters for twelve years. If I choose to live within one square meter every year, there is still an extra square meter of space.

This square meter is right in the middle of the room.

With no object or person occupying it, this square meter is free.

Bed, TV, wardrobe, refrigerator, mirror, clothes, vegetables...

They are also crammed into these 13 square meters. They had been lived together for 15 years in the 13 square meters.

Bed, TV, wardrobe, refrigerator, mirror, clothes, vegetables..... are an infinite number of objects.

$$\frac{\text{infinite number of objects}}{\text{13 square meters}} = \left(\frac{\text{the stationary trajectory of each object}}{\text{1 square meter}} \right)$$

Every day at 12 PM and 7 PM is the time when the food will be slaughtered. I found that "slaughtering" was a cheering thing when I was young. After adding seasonings and time into the food's "meat", "bone" and "blood", it can become so delicious under the torture of fire, I can't help thinking about the magic of "criminal law".

The air in the tube-shaped apartment is the messenger of information,

Lunch and dinner time are my happiest moment in the tube-shaped apartment.

After twelve years of training in my nose, I already know which family cooks best pork, which family cooks best beef, which family cooks best chicken, and which family cooks best lamb. When the hour hand reaches the numbers 12 and 7,

I become the aroma conductor of 12 PM and 7 PM.

Open the door,
Standing in the middle of the corridor,

Wave my arm,
Conducting this aroma symphony,
Let the food scent of each family
entangles my body and enters my
nasal cavity.

Whenever I go to a new city or a new country, the first thing I do is to go to the convenience store or a supermarket in that place. The supermarket gives me the same feeling no matter where I am. Although the food in different countries is different, they are all supermarkets, a place that can provide the human body with nutrients to support our lives and allow us to continue breathing. One that allows me to temporarily put aside the mentality of comparing cultures at any time and imagine how vitamins in the colorful food works in my body. Here I feel that I am a native of the earth, not a Chinese, nor a Chinese living in the United States.

The steps to go to the supermarket are the same: take a basket, pick your favorite food and daily necessities, put them into the basket one by one, go to the cashier, and say a simple greeting to the cashier, take out the wallet to pay, and finally lift shopping bags which are full of freshness, leaving this place called the supermarket with joy. (I prefer the name supermarket because this market is really super). I like this fresh breath. This breath can flow into the whole body through the nose, so that the body is full of positive energy. Rather than becoming a breath with cultural comparison and careful consideration when it flows into the head.

Fresh vegetables just left the supermarket like this, like they suddenly left the transport truck, like they suddenly left the farm, like they suddenly left the land.

But they will suddenly come to a stranger's house, they will suddenly get into the refrigerator, they will suddenly run into the pot, they will be suddenly swallowed into the stranger's body, they will be suddenly digested, and no more can we call them vegetables.

But the fate of some vegetables is different. They will be gradually forgotten in the refrigerator, they will be forgotten in the supermarket, they will be forgotten in the truck, they will be forgotten in the land. They will gradually be decomposed and they, too, can no longer be called vegetables.

But there are thousands of their substitutes in the world, and people have countless opportunities to say the word "vegetable." Their substitutes have the same vitamins. In the end, they found that for people, the vitamins contained in their bodies are more important than what they call "vegetables," so they are relieved. They allow their bodies to age and decay. They let their souls gradually return to the land, back to the air, to a world of vegetables that people don't know; they also allow their bodies to disappear suddenly, into the mouth of a stranger, and be chewed by their teeth, crushing the fibers in their bodies. Vegetables let the fragments of their body complete a journey: from the mouth to the throat, from the throat to the esophagus, from the esophagus to the stomach, from the stomach to the small intestine, from the small intestine to the large intestine, from the large intestine to the rectum, from the rectum into the anus, enter another fresh world from the anus. They also gained something on this trip, and they become good friends with saliva and enzymes. Saliva and enzymes have witnessed their life and death.

Gabriel Orozco explains why the supermarket is a perfect universe

Gabriel's work often evolves with perception and reality. He uses familiar daily objects to create a poetic and absurd situation. "Supermarket is a perfect universe." Gabriel said, "Everything is in order, divided, subdivided and in display. And it generates chaos inside this archive of local food when people interact with supermarket." In his work, you can feel that capital and logistics help thousands of products find their own places in the supermarket. His work "Cats and

Watermelons” indicates that *we as consumers have the true “buying power” in a capitalist consumer-driven society. The power is on our hands to break down this beautiful yet flawed illusion.*⁸



Fig.1 Cats and Watermelons, 1992



Fig.2 OROXXO, 2017

⁸ From: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/identifying-supermarkets-perfect-complexities-from-eyes-jasmine-guest>

universities, so what we know about the human mind is actually incredibly narrow and biased. In conclusion, she mentioned the most important thing is how the language that you speak shapes the way that you think. Why do I think the way that I do? How could I think differently? What thoughts do I wish to create?

As a foreign artist living in an English-speaking country, sometimes I feel like it is advantageous for me to be creative by using broken English. English “invades” in my life, I want to leave my “invasion” in English.

I broke English.

How, What, Receive, Accept (2021)

- what is factuality?
- hope
- conjecture
- truth?
- Unrealism

- how to know factuality?
 - escape
 - don't dream
 - be a journalist
 - reading news

- when you want to know factuality?
 - dreaming
 - hungry
 - angry
 - poor?

- why you want to know factuality?
 - for entertainment
 - for desire
 - for living
 - _____

- can tears substitute salt when you cooking? If can, how?
 - yes (please write "how" in the blank)

- no

- _____

- can a smile substitute sugar when you baking? If can, how?

- yes (please write "how" in the blank)

- no

- _____

- how blood can substitute ketchup when you eating burgers?

- what occupation do you think the person designing this questionnaire is?



Fig.4 *How, What, Receive, Accept*, 2021

I published a survey with these eight questions above through Amazon Mechanical Turk. This service is a medium that connects the strangers and myself virtually. Its slogan is: *Access A Global, On-Demand, 24 x 7 Workforce*. As this said, I sent out 100 copies and got all the results in 11 hours. And each response is awarded \$0.15. In order to improve the response quality of the survey, I can set some parameters, such as I can set the worker's approval rate greater than 98%, number of worker's task approved greater than 50%, etc. I see these 100 MTurk workers as my collaborators. When you are contained in a measurable space and the information is easy to be received by the electronic devices, you are supposed to be contented because everything seems firmly within our grasp, but this makes me unsettle and start to question the reality. I got the analyzed result of this survey with the colorful pie charts from Google Form. People can only choose one answer from four options for each question; the analyzing process is accurate and

systematic; the circle, sector and font are devoid of feelings. These rules make the dividing line ruthless, like borders.

How to digest this ruthlessness? Instead of showing the digital pie charts, I use charcoal to replicate the data results on the soft and immaculate paper. The smudgy, dusting charcoal blurs the accuracy of data when drawing it without measuring instrument. My eyes and hands are the precise measurements. The charcoal powder spreads around the paper, it obscures the boundaries between each portion(answer), each charcoal particle represents the worker who filled out the survey, they do not belong to any section. Paper has a confirmed size, and it limits the size of pie chart. But charcoal is free, its powder can cross the boundary of the paper. This also reminds me of “Cats and Watermelons” by Gabriel Orozco.

I hope my survey can help people find the answer of “what is factuality” without the restrictions.

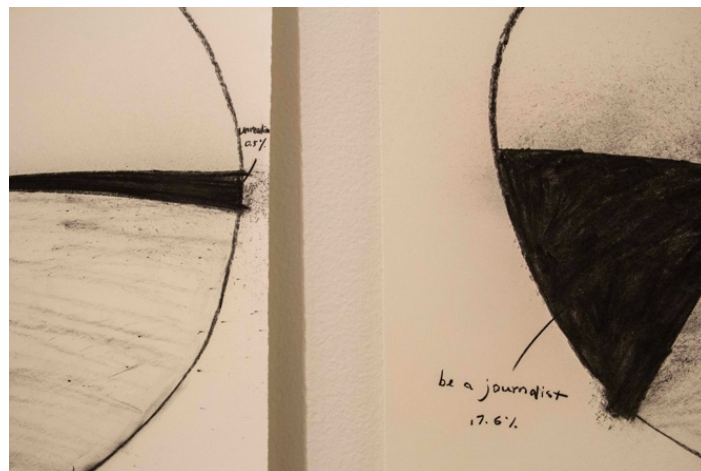


Fig.5 How, What, Receive, Accept, 2021

Because of the color?
Cook the burger rare
When I am hungry
Cut yourself and put your blood on the
I guess if you are a vampire blood can
a substitute
If salt and tomatoes are added, and the
it is not aware that it is blood
to provide by imagination

Fig.6 How, What, Receive, Accept, 2021

tech 1%	doctor 1%
lor 1%	robot 1%
t 1%	therapist 1%
st 1%	detective 1%
st 1%	good 1%
airdo 1%	
ainment 1%	
ian 1%	normal person 1%
ry 1%	

Fig.7 How, What, Receive, Accept, 2021

ground pork \in dictionary



Fig.8 How, What, Receive, Accept, 2021

In the set theory, the elements (or members) are collected on the basis of one or more common properties to form a set. So, each element is a member of that set. Hence, it is simply expressed as the element belongs to the set.

An Italian mathematician, Giuseppe Peano used a Greek letter lunate epsilon (\in) for expressing the phrase “belongs to” symbolically in set theory. It helps us to express the relationship between an element and its set-in mathematical form.¹⁰

***the free world** the noncommunist countries of the world.¹¹*

What are my own answers for these questions?

I realize that fact is not what you read in books or what you see in social medias when I found the definition of “the free world” on the Oxford America Dictionary. In order to know facts, you need to trust your senses and bodies. Seeing is believing. The word definitions in dictionaries feel like the data results on the Google Form. Dictionary includes the definition of countless

¹⁰ From: <https://www.mathdoubts.com/belongs-to/>

¹¹ From Pocket Oxford America Dictionary & Thesaurus Third Edition 2010

words which help us to understand the meaning of that vocabulary before we feel it, but it does not belong to the real meaning of that word under different eras. Pork is considered as dirty meat in Chinese since it eats everything to feed itself. Stuffing it inside the dictionary is a way to question its authority and push people to challenge the immutable definition of up to date vocabularies in the world.



Fig.9 *How, What, Receive, Accept, 2021*

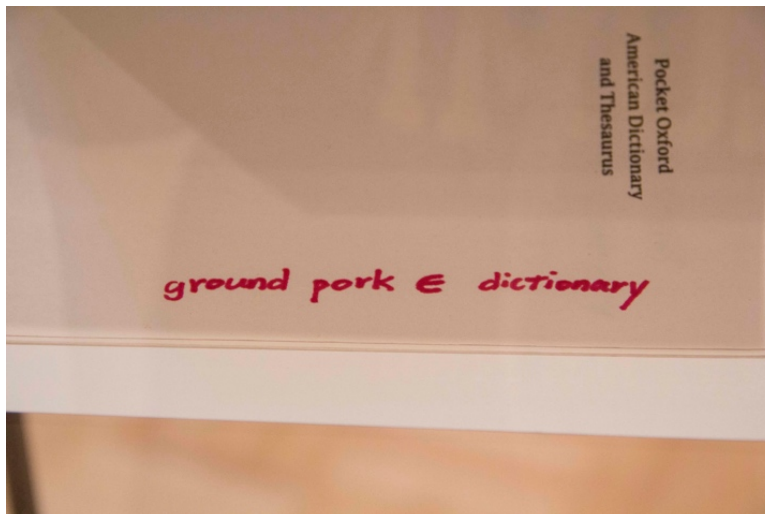


Fig.10 *How, What, Receive, Accept, 2021*

Chopping the pork,
Tearing the pages from the
dictionary,
Shredding them,
Mixing the ground pork and the
scraps,
Chopping them,
Stuffing it inside the Oxford
Dictionary,
Taking it to the supermarket,
Learning each product's
definition on the dictionary,
Microwaving it for 5 minutes,
Opening the microwave,
Smell.
See.
Touch.



Fig.11 How, What, Receive, Accept, 2021

A hundred cans on the floor, which represent the hundred MTurk workers who filled out my survey. I do not know their names and faces. The worker ID is the only way for me to recognize them. Each of them feels like an unopened can. I wonder what is inside these black, unlabeled identical cans with different numbers. They are my collaborators and my work's contributors. It brings me a strong bodily feeling with its hard appearance and soft flesh inside.

Someone has taken off --- and lost --- the label on the can. There are two glassy lines of glue with just a trace of stripped paper where the label was attached. The can's batch number --- RG2JD 19547 --- is embossed on one of the ends. Top or bottom end? No one can tell what's up or down. The metal isn't very old.⁸

They shake the can up against their ears. They sniff at it. They compare it with the other cans inside the larder to find a match in size and shape. But still they cannot tell if it is beans or fruit or fish. They are like children with unopened birthday gifts. Will they be disappointed when they open up the can? Will it be what they want? Sometimes their humor is macabre: the contents are beyond description --- baby flesh, sliced fingers, dog waste, worms, the venom of a hundred mambas --- and that is why there is no label.¹²



Fig.12 *How, What, Receive, Accept*, 2021

The peephole on the entrance of the gallery actually provides a different perspective for the audience to see the exhibition. You can have a wider insight through this tiny and narrow “window.” Does it magnify or confine your view and understanding for the visual medias in the space?

¹² From *The Devil’s larder*, Jim Crace, 2001

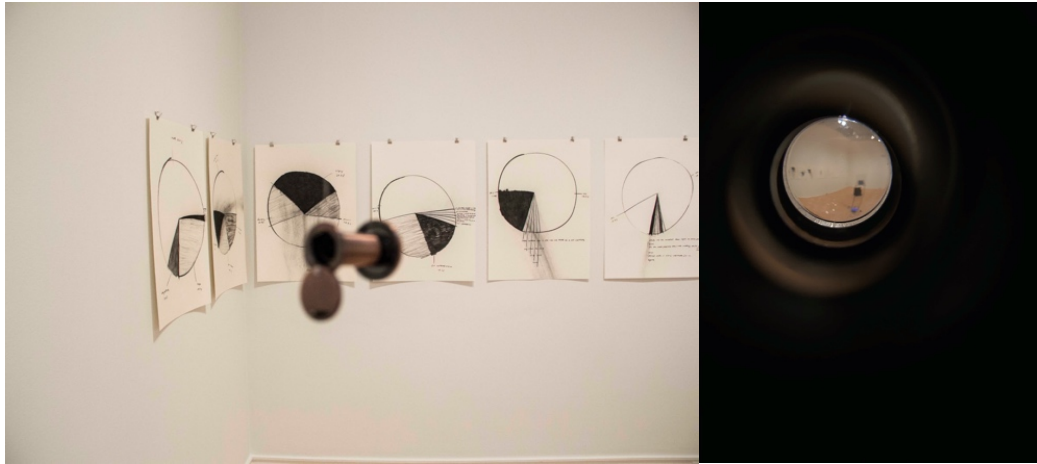


Fig.13 *How, What, Receive, Accept*, 2021

PART III

Francis Alÿs

I visited Francis Alÿs 's exhibition in Shanghai, China in 2018. *In a China transformed by the fast-paced transition to capitalism and the efficiencies of technology, this exhibition, *La dépense*, in many ways posits values antithetical to such development. The title, which translates literally as “consumption,” is taken from Georges Bataille’s more nuanced notion that excessive “non-productive consumption” (*dépense improductive*) is just as important in human activity as productive consumption.” Some of his work’s content and meaning emerge from inconsequential, ineffective, and unproductive actions and details. His work conveys*

courageously grappling with the status quo; casting doubts on our visual sense; rethinking the meaning of the labor of manual work and the consumption of time.

In the exhibition, you will find direct encounters and physical involvement of the sort that is gradually being threatened and forgotten by our digitized world, and suggestions that make us aware of manual work, or recognize it anew. Each individual becomes the narrator of what they have seen with their own eyes when they encounter Francis Alÿs' work.¹³



Fig.14 *Sometimes Making Something Leads To Nothing*, 1997, video

¹³ From Rockbund Art Museum, 2018



Fig.15 Tornado, 2000-2010, video

Unlivable Lives (2021)

Sod from home depot.

At the apartment I grew up in, we had no backyard, just a balcony. We raised a variety of flowers and plants, but never grass. As a child, my notion of grass was a wild and loyal friend — it lives outside and protects my city land. My eyes tell me: “grass and concrete are good friends.” Grass looks fragile and tiny, but it brings softness to the industry city which is armed with reinforced concrete. In my culture, grass represents masses, and grass root, ordinary people. There is a Chinese poem that describes it as:

*“lush grass on the plains,
in one year,
withers and thrives once each.*

*wildfire does not burn it completely,
when spring winds blow,
it lives again.”*

This indicates the resilience and the hope of grass, the masses.

When I was a kid, I was told that I could not trample on grass since it is fragile and it is part of the government’s property. There are many signs on the grass to prevent people from “hurting” it. The function of grass in the city is to separate different neighborhoods. It becomes a ruler or a border line. That’s why I felt strange when I first saw sod was sold in Home Depot. Sod piles feel silent and solemn. Rather than seeing the green side, sod is curled as a column, its “face,” grass side, hides inside; but its most vulnerable part, roots, are exposed outside. This scene reminds me the metaphor of grass. During the pandemic, I read a book called *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* by Judith Butler. One chapter talks about how mourning as a feeling we share around the world can bring us together as a group; how to define “we”; what "we" are; how to become "us"; how "we" depend on each other to exist— ironed one patch of grass on the ground: it grew back after a few days: the rest of the grass helped that piece of grass grow back as long as the roots were not destroyed — community helps individuals.

In South Korea, there are two sayings about grass. The first one is grass can be more resilient when people trample it; secondly, trampling on the grass is bad for their growth.

In my exhibition *Unlivable Lives*, people will see an instructional video on the entrance of the South Gallery. For this video, I brought the humidifier, hand dyer, iron, stethoscope and blood

pressure monitor outside. The video demonstrates to the audience how to properly use them in the gallery.



Fig.16 Unlivable Lives, 2021

These appliances can generate the heat which can nourish the grass in the gallery, but at the same time, they can slowly destroy it. It is soft violence. This is also a participatory project, which means people will be part of the “crime scene”.

As time goes by, the audience can smell the scent of deteriorating grass. Towards the end of the exhibition, this room will become a lackluster space with dead grass bodies under the spotlights. Therefore, the grass is easy to be manipulated in the space.



Fig.17 Unlivable Lives, 2021



Fig.18 Unlivable Lives, 2021



Fig.19 Unlivable Lives, 2021



Fig.20 *Unlivable Lives*, 2021

Below is the work of Martha Rosler, *Semiotics of the Kitchen* 1975. *In this performance Rosler takes on the role of an apron-clad housewife and parodies the television cooking demonstrations popularized by Julia Child in the 1960s. In the video, her gestures sharply punctuate the rage and frustration of oppressive women's roles. Rosler has said of this work, "I was concerned with something like the notion of 'language speaking the subject.'"*¹⁴ Inspired by her work, I am interested in how to reveal the softness, weakness versus destructive, dangerous characters of appliances in a domestic space. In this work, Rosler moves through the alphabet from A to Z and speaks the name of various kitchen tools with rage, demonstrating the utensils with firm and strengthened gestures. As a foreigner, this instructional performance not only makes me ponder the social relationships between human and objects, but also pushes me to think about how to study a language within a social context by imbuing subjective emotion into each word.

¹⁴ From: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/88937>



Fig.21 Semiotics Kitchen, 1975

Unlivable Lives (2021)



Fig.22 Unlivable Lives, 2021



Fig.23 Unlivable Lives, 2021

transla tion
a c tion
what is "c" ?

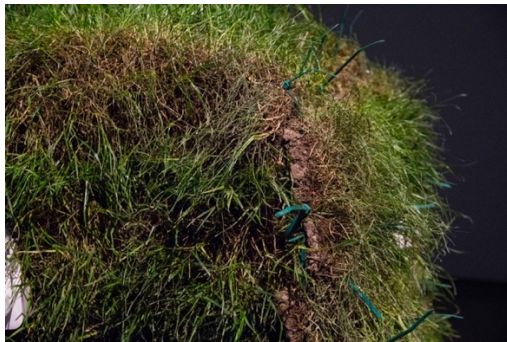


Fig.24 Unlivable Lives, 2021



Fig.25 Unlivable Lives, 2021

below is the content from the obscure text:

I had a “touch/no touch” assignment in my dance class during the pandemic. We needed to create a piece based on this topic with a collaborator in any form. For this project, I used drilling machine to slightly touch the steel plate surface to leave the “scars” on it. It was my first time to communicate through a drilling machine. Our “conversation,” the “scars,” are permanently recorded as the abstract patterns on that steel plate. This “conversation” between the drilling machine, the steel plate and me, makes me feel cold and confused due to the materiality and lack of specific purpose. What is the meaning behind these abstract patterns? In order to find it, I transferred those patterns from the steel sheet to the paper, and made a book with them.

I collaborated with a dancer by asking him to touch the patterns by hand, and then improvise a short dance based on what he felt. Translation is brewing from this process.

For the sculpture, I used green zip ties to combine the sod. A zip tie is a plastic product. It is also a violent way to tie things together, because zip ties must be torn apart when you want to untie them. They are hiding in the grass sculpture. It is hard to notice their existence when looking from a distance. Like how the restrictions in societies hide and are invisible to us. You will see it when you get closer; you will feel it when you become the part of the grass sculpture.

There are outlets and plug adapters on the grass sculpture. I am intrigued by an action: plug in --- plug out. I feel like we easily get the electricity through this action without thinking about the origin of it and how conveniently we get this electric power. It is actually a form of power. What does this “power” bring to us? What does this convenient feeling mean? Is it a warning or a relief for our life?

100V~130V and 220V~240V are the main voltage standards around the world. As a Chinese living in the United States, the first thing I thought to bring with me is the plug adapter when I go to travel. It teaches me different rules in various countries.

Adapter, adapts in _____.

Adapter can be easily plugged
into the foreign outlet,

Can adapter be easily plugged
into the foreign environment?

What does the world look like
inside the outlet?

The thing inside has a universal
name, called electricity.

This piece helps us think about how an adapter can assist people in understanding different social rules accepted by the masses in different places and cultures and the power that these masses produce.

I have always been amazed by how the product can rapidly adapt to the changing environment, like how powerline 3 in 1 cable can support iPhone, Android smartphones and other devices in one cable. When can humans be like this product? Who will design us to be like that? Are we subjected to accept this?

Bibliography

1. Sayaka Murata, *Convenience Store Woman*, Grove Press, 2018
2. Lera Boroditsky, *How Language Shapes the Way We Think*, TED Talk, 2018
3. Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny*, Tim Duggan Books, 2017
4. *Francis Alÿs --- La depense*, Rockbund Art Museum, 2018
5. Jasmine Guest, *Identifying supermarkets perfect complexities from the eyes of an artist: Gabriel Orozco*, LinkedIn, 2018
6. Pocket Oxford America Dictionary & Thesaurus, Oxford University Press, 2010
7. Jim Crace, *The Devil's larder*, Thorndike Pr, 2002
8. Martha Rosler, *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, MoMA, 1975