Breaking it Down (again): DAY 1

A broadcast by Surfatial, the collective of Satya Gummuluri, Malavika Rajnarayan and me, 15 February 2017. Watch on YouTube

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I made this transcript by machine from the recording and corrected it against the recording's description and my own records. I have not checked the words by ear. I checked a sample of the speaker names by ear, and corrected those I heard differently. [?] marks a word still in doubt and [unclear] a passage that could not be made out. A speaker is named only where the broadcast's screen or the recording's own words say who is speaking. Fillers such as "uh" and "um" are left out. Times are from the start of the recording.

A name followed by (?) was read from the screen at a moment when it changed from one speaker to the next, so the turn may belong partly or wholly to the speaker before or after.

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00:03 NANDITA (?) Yes.

00:03 NANDITA (?) Yes, we are live now. Yes.

00:05 MALAVIKA Hello. Can everyone hear me?

00:08 ROHINI (?) Yes.

00:11 MALAVIKA Yes.

00:13 ADITYA (?) Okay. Okay, welcome. sorry about the rescheduling. But so for some of you are already familiar with the structure. We will have three questions for sixty minutes. Each question we will discuss for twenty minutes each. And the questions today are going to be focusing on the idea of collective practice. And I know I have started the conversations something to do with form and content, but I wanted to have a particular emphasis in this relationship, so I actually

00:50 Thought it would be a good idea to think about what happens when you produce in a collective space.

00:58 So the first question that I want to discuss today is what does it mean to produce in the presence of others? Which what does it mean to inhabit co presences in terms of producing, whether it's producing creative work or actually producing anything?

01:25 What does it mean? I'm just typing it out so people with poor connectivity can hear.

01:37 REBECCA I'm wondering if it just has to do with the presence of others. Because if you work together in a let's say

01:45 REBECCA (?) Company where you share one room but everyone is working on his or her computer is that collaborative practice? I'm not sure. Just the presence of others, I think isn't it for collectivity?

02:02 ROHINI (?) Doesn't necessarily mean collaboration, right?

02:06 ADITYA You so go ahead, sorry.

02:10 ROHINI (?) No, that was I was just saying that the collective doesn't necessarily imply collaboration, right?

02:16 ADITYA Well, yeah, that is exactly what my point is. So if we were to think about presences and not necessarily qualifying them as collectives if you were to think about making something in the presence of others, like in terms of like co I would not call it co-producing again, we go back to the question of collaborating. because it is not definitively to produce what the structure of collective is and collaboration is, it is actually to think about as practitioners who

are also individuals and also have done collaborations and work in collectives. How do you then work with the idea of presence?

02:59 NANDITA (?) Well the idea.

02:59 NANDITA (?) Focus on the so you do want to focus on co production.

03:03 ADITYA Yeah, partly yes.

03:05 NANDITA (?) Yeah.

03:09 SATYA (?) 'Cause I feel like even if you are not collaborating, just being in the presence of others could still have an influence, right? So there is an element of co production even though there isn't the intent of co production.

03:25 MALAVIKA Yeah, I agree. Even collective learning spaces or colleges end up doing that you're you are set in a certain environment and you're in the presence of certain people and discourses that

03:41 That will touch your processes in some way, even though obliquely.

03:46 Yeah.

03:48 Even if you're pursuing something that's more individualistic.

03:54 ADITYA Well Rebecca had actually interesting point saying that, you know, you work in an office space and then we have other people working in it's also a presence, but you are actually either working towards something together or working independently on completely different things, which is a possibility. But it's also if you were to say about the I would not say the conscious, but in terms of thinking about that you're not the you're an individual person put in a context of a collaboration or collective and then you're trying to like make sense of that dynamic and go towards producing something new. So that's also one of the facets that I was thinking about when I said what does it mean to produce in the presence of others? It's also being yourself and being with others and then what happens then to the idea of co production or production itself.

05:00 ROHINI I think one of the things that does occur to me that irrespective of whether or not collaboration is part of the equation, I think what a collective does is immediately the idea of perception is expanded a little bit, right? So if you're only making I'm speaking, let's say from the point of view of if you are producing something, whether usually which is in isolation and suddenly in a in a sense in a collective, then I the idea of collective perception comes in a way, maybe which would as you already have said, you know, it would impact what you would make. so I suppose perception shifts. That's one of those things.

05:37 ADITYA Mm- This is particularly, Rohini, in terms of you know, we had this conversation about the amateur, like, you know, how amateur astronomers always have a more of like a collective yes, you have an indiv individual perception of what you want to achieve. At the same time, it's also the idea that you want to do this as a group activity or like in terms of shared as a shared perception, as exactly what you were saying. Which has

06:04 ROHINI Also thinking that it governs even a physical space or a site, depending on what it is and where it is, how you perceive things in it, around it, all of that will be led and colored by what the collective is in that moment and space, right?

06:24 SATYA The pressure of the collective.

06:27 SATYA (?) So

06:28 No, go ahead.

06:29 SHAUNAK (?) So, Rohini

06:30 I'm very interested in what you're saying about connecting the collective to the idea of perception. Because I was thinking, how do you approach ideas of collectives which are not formed around because usually whenever we say collective, the we invoke the idea of commonality, right? That there is a collective around particular idea, or it could be a politics, it could be it basically has to do with one perceived delineated object around which a collectivity is formed. But if we inverse them, for example, and we thought about I about ideas of collective formed

around things that we don't know, that we don't perceive. Yeah and this I think collectively if one thinks of the idea of the secret. Okay, this the concept of the secret, I think it's interesting that it's actually the secret above anything else always forges its own collective, you know, it forges its own alliances, its own. Affiliation because the secret always becomes kind of a hermetic addition [?] between people involved in it. as people who first see it revealed, you know, and it's like the notion of the collective seems to be central to the idea of the secret. Whereas otherwise we think of things that we don't know, we think of things in a in those things in a kind of highly individual way. Because come to think of it, a secret is not quite simply that which is not known. It's about the active restrictive distribution of what is not known from people between people, and inherently in that way, a lot of it's always interested in me that a lot of theorizing or a lot of philosophizing around the idea of the secret has to do with the fact that it is shared with somebody. You know, it is a secret is between people. So the secret could be a political secret, it could be a public secret, it could be me staying in the pool alone, it could be somebody doing something at night alone, or it could be a mass political corruption secret, but it always is shared with somebody. Even in the earliest traditional theorizations of secret you would see say that a secret is shared with God or shared with a confession box. So it the act of sharing or you know a formation of a pluralistic collective around it seems to inhere through all ideas of and I think it this sort of an inverse mirroring sort of thing becomes interesting and how do we using with collaboration because I think it always forms through these sort of conversations between the perceptual and the non perceptual

08:58 ADITYA But if you're saying that if it's a secret, that means it's also has the power of withholding, right? The power of withholding to something.

09:06 SHAUNAK Yeah, and it's that recording [?] only which makes defines the collective. That's what I'm saying. That it's a secrets always work through who are the people who actively know and who are the people who know who share the codes of restricting the distribution of the knowledge. And I think th I'm pro I'm talking about the secret only as a kind of interesting sort of a conceptual tool through which one can think of the collective. Because the secret is usually something which others think of the anti collectivity or anti distribution, right? But I think it's interesting sort of a conceptual note through which one can think of.

09:39 ADITYA Yeah, it's a it's a sharing of shared secrecy within a particular small amount number of groupies, what you're saying.

09:45 SHAUNAK (?) All kinds of secrecy have to do with some inherent act of sharing.

09:49 Okay.

09:50 SATYA But Shaunak, you said something which was about sharing with God or sharing with the confession space. in that case, could the other be a non human then?

10:00 SHAUNAK (?) Yeah, so yeah, exactly. Actually, that's and that's what I was also very interested in. So whenever one looks at theorizing of secrecy, I was saying that the idea of sharing inheres through all of it. Yeah. Now you can always say, but hang on, what if I have, for example, some say sexual fetish, which nobody else in the world knows and only I know, right? And I only I do it in the privacy of my room at whatever. Yet it's incredible how you read through Latin early Latin medieval writing on ideas of secrecy Augustine, etc. And there's constant invocation of talking to either your conscience or to a confession or to go God. As if there is a you know, there is a relational complex at play here, it seems like it's like you share it with a person. The person could be your own conscience, it could be a god, it could be there is the idea of the other that is definitely.

10:53 SATYA There has to be a converse a dialogue with something else.

10:56 SATYA (?) Good thing it's relational like that, yeah.

10:58 ADITYA But what for example, I'm just pushing it outside. So how do you think this kind of dynamic works in a something like comradery, like if you were to think about it?

11:09 SHAUNAK Can you explain to that?

11:11 ADITYA If you were to say that secrecy is one of the conceptual ways to understand the dynamics such as a collective, I'm just trying to understand in the question in the in the larger thing of comradery that happens with a lot of like you know, pe of course politically inclined individuals in the country and across the world. How does one then one expand think about something like comradery?

11:39 SHAUNAK Well okay, let me just zoom out for a bit and say that if you look at the journey of any kind of a secret, it always like it has set stages in the way in which the secret comes out. Okay, and then I'll directly answer what I think is the response to you what you're asking. any secret at this moment of revelation, like at the point in which it gets exposed, you know, secret is the first stage is always of this sort of affective burst, right? When the explosion first happens, and then the secret inevitably transitions into knowledge, confession, evidence, and finally becomes subject to different kinds of cognitive judgment in terms of questions of harassment. So be it any kind of a public secret, be it say Tehelka sting, which would first have a lot of sensational sort of the thing, then it would enter in the form of evidence and then enter into s sort of public knowledge. I think even if you look at political history, so even if it l you look at different kinds of political genealogies, the secret as like ideas that somebody initially thinks of. share it among a group of people and then it starts increasing almost as a meme through different concentric circles in yours even through that. So I do think that like the secret is a kind of a interesting bulwark for political comrades and how like how political.

12:54 ADITYA (?) Okay, let's ask okay, there are there's one part of the house that's completely silent. So what building on building on the idea of secret as a way of engaging with the collective space, any other responses?

13:13 MALAVIKA I feel like there's this thing about of identification over and above this idea of the secret. even if something is not secret, or the moment that the secret is revealed the sharing happens through some level of identification, I feel, because it's the knowledge the secret defines the collective, yes. It defines wha who is included or what is included and what is excluded.

13:46 ADITYA -huh.

13:46 MALAVIKA But if you look at it from the other direction, moving to a from an individualistic point of view towards a kind of an open sharing.

13:57 ADITYA Mm-

13:57 MALAVIKA So the criteria for getting people or things together has to be some sense of commonality or identification. With or without that point of secrecy. I mean that adds another dynamic, I agree, but

14:22 I'm just wondering how it plays out in a kind of more open way.

14:30 ADITYA (?) Well, we're also talking about that way collective we come back to the question of collective as a as a closed entity, right? And which is also something

14:41 MALAVIKA Is it? Is it? Is it closed?

14:43 ADITYA (?) No, that's why I'm saying if you're talking about secret in a collective space, I'm not limiting the potential of what it could be. Is it is it that I'm actually posing it as a question. Is it that we are thinking of collective as a closed entity? Because then it has to restrain the secrets, right?

15:00 SATYA Or the secret binds it. It may be an open secret, but there are people who adhere to it.

15:07 ADITYA It's the governing principle you're saying.

15:08 SATYA Yeah, something like that. The philosophy perhaps.

15:13 SPEAKER 2 I think the idea of a collective is more fluid.

15:17 ADITYA Sorry, somebody sorry, what is

15:21 NANDITA So that was me.

15:23 I was trying I was trying to intervene to say that I thought it might be interesting to go back to the original question and I can't remember who said it, but someone's someone was question-

ing the premise of assuming that we were talking about collectives to begin with, in the way that the question was framed, right? So what does it mean to produce in the presence of others? Doesn't really so I was wondering whether we could broaden the terms of engagement by moving beyond collectives when we're thinking about presences. and so I don't I mean I have to admit that I don't know anybody else other than you and Shaunak on the panel. So I'll just sort of briefly say that I'm a PhD student, an anthropology PhD student. And one of the like in terms of my practice, I'm not a practitioner in that sense, but in terms of my practice, I am constantly producing in the presence of others because anthropology is a kind of is knowledge production that validizes engagement with other people right it's not texts and it's not sort of sitting with books and ideas but it's going out there and talking to people so in that sense the really banal and obvious thing to say is that all knowledge production is a kind of collective knowledge production so if you want to then go back to the collective and explore what it means to talk about the collective the question then is what is not collective right everything is always already collective because all social practice is collective and then maybe one way of bringing like Shaunak's point back into this is to then try and figure out the different ways that we mark off the collective as a specific in fact not collective when you start defining boundaries around what is collective That might be a way of thinking about it.

17:21 ADITYA That's the reason why I actually brought in presence as an idea as opposed to like starting off with collective practice. Is that to understand the question of the collective seems to be so much b about boundary making some kind of boundaries that way presence is more open as you're saying. and the question for me is then the idea of framing these presences, which is what is in interesting.

17:48 Like it's also it's also yes, I agree that all knowledge production is actually happening in the presence of many other people or yourself and many other people, or you're also part of this many other presences. But my interest is actually about even if it's anthropology, art history, curatorial studies, all these kind of disciplines that we diversely engage with, how it's actually at the end framed as a knowledge production when it's out into certain kind of form.

18:21 ROHINI I do like

18:23 ADITYA Sorry? Yeah, Rohini.

18:24 ROHINI I was just saying I really liked what Nandita was saying and it really helped. I think, yeah, so the other end of the spectrum is so I'm an artist and I work, I agree actually. I don't think there's any sort of solitary practice that is completely removed from a larger collective, if you like. But I was just thinking it's interesting when I think of collective in that sense, then questions that it's so specific to the art world, I suppose what ends up happening a lot is I read a really interesting article today which said that some people do not like to buy work that is created by a collective because the question of authorship becomes a problem. And I think that's you know, that's really interesting because the question of authorship and the collective within the sense of you know, the artist as being this kind of solitary character who sort of is the sole author of a work of art or something like that, you know, which is I mean it's a different sorry, this is tangential, but it's interesting how for me when I think of collective and working in the presence of other What was the question which you started with Aditya? The idea of yeah In the presence.

19:27 ADITYA Process.

19:28 ADITYA (?) It was in the present moment. [?]

19:29 ROHINI (?) The thing yeah, it becomes a very different sort of question of actually where you do maybe have a solitary practice if you're then making work or working together and where it's a very different sort of

19:42 ADITYA That's a good lead actually. I'm just shuffling the questions a little and actually taking lead from what Rohini just said. So if we were to think about that exactly taking cue from what you just said, then what happens to individual intellectual journeys in a collective space if this is what we are actually saying that everything is produced in a kind of collective space? And

also on the other spectrum there are people who are saying they don't want to buy art because they're made by collectives because they want individual artists.

20:12 Sorry.

20:13 ROHINI Just one random article. I was just like putting it in there but it's like not to just take and do two series. [?]

20:18 ADITYA (?) No, we can take it as the next question, saying that what happens to individual intellectual journeys in a collective space then even if you were to think about the fiction of the collective space exists.

20:31 ROHINI Or even in fact the fictional book.

20:34 NANDITA (?) I think it's the fiction of the individual space actually. Yeah. Yeah.

20:42 SHAUNAK Okay, but I was just thinking had a question.

20:46 NANDITA (?) Sorry. Yeah.

20:48 SHAUNAK (?) I was saying Nathan [?], I had a question. This is very interesting. Also in conjunction with what Rudanya [?] was saying, very often the idea of the individual is pegged onto the plane of perspective, especially visual perspective. You know, because there's this course that different textual produce could be collaborative, could be in the partnership, in partnership with other people. But when you have what are otherwise known as allographic arts, right? So for example, photography, which I know you rebel in [?] or different kinds of visual factors there the question of authorship or the individual becomes interesting because I thought of as a hyperindictor. [?]

21:33 SHAUNAK (?) Yet of course in I mean this is one of the central questions in cinema studies wherein couched by the way of say around ideas of the author or different kinds of things in which one tries to attribute authorship, that it's impossible, especially within the visual, it's i it's very difficult to attribute any kind of authorial or individuated presence to one in the end because it's not a it's not an autographic art, it's a completely allographic sort of art. So it's interesting when Rohini says that people don't want to purchase something which is a sort of a collective or a pluralistic this thing. But yeah, how does visual anthropology negotiate with this?

22:14 NANDITA I'm so sorry. Just a second.

22:36 I'm sorry, has the conversation moved on? I got interrupted. No.

22:40 MALAVIKA No me doy mate. [?]

22:41 ADITYA (?) Okay.

22:44 NANDITA Shaunak you'll have to like encapsulate that into a slightly more streamlined f form of thought for me to respond. I got how does visual anthropology engage with and then I'm sorry.

22:59 NANDITA (?) No.

23:01 SHAUNAK Yeah, no, I was just see because it was interesting how you invoked anthropological practice in how one thinks of you know and the collective. And I was seeing very important philosophy like individual [?], you know, like the idea being that eyes are yours, you know, that sort of a thing, that the photographer's eye is unique or this person's eye is unique. That it's autographic form and not an allographic form, which of course gets debunked completely in cinema because there's there is no one single author, etcetera. But when one is doing things like visual

23:39 NANDITA (?) Okay, I think we have some distributions [?] on.

23:41 I just want

23:45 SATYA This occurred to me

23:49 SATYA (?) It's an individual.

23:50 SATYA (?) Still an individual eye. I mean there's still the presence of other presences in the head, right? Even if a person there's all these other influences.

24:00 SHAUNAK Do you mean it in the sense of you mean when you say in the heads, do you mean like multiple presences that we are ourselves inhabiting at one point of time or do you mean it in the sense of the machining also and other factors that mitigate the idea of

24:17 SATYA See, I mean everything is a multitude really, isn't it? I mean, we are several individuals at the same time. Our thoughts are influenced by several individuals and influencers. the apparatus we use are also constructed because of several whatever. So I mean, this n you know, I'm not able to see individual anywhere now.

24:41 NANDITA Shaunak were you asking how the how individual perspectives are negotiated within anthropological practice, is that it? Like so I'm so sorry because I got called away again. I keep getting interrupted. Hello?

24:57 ADITYA (?) Oh yeah?

25:00 SHAUNAK Yeah.

25:01 ADITYA (?) A dit. [?]

25:03 NANDITA I can like give you the like anthro one oh one which is that

25:08 SHAUNAK No, I meant it look s okay, very quickly I meant it in terms of the visual because the visual and perspective is you very often thought of as the specs of individualistic projection.

25:19 NANDITA (?) Right. Okay.

25:22 Yeah, so actually this is true. I mean I'm going to say that this is true for all social science and humanities. knowledge production at the graduate student level, like anyone doing a PhD basically falls into this mode of individual perspective, regardless of whether it's visual or otherwise when they're producing knowledge, because there is this kind of enlightenment understanding of the single creative genius who has come up with their own research project and is going out into the world doing it and coming back, right? So actually, in a sense it i this is not true for science. Science does interesting has other ways of and in fact one can talk about form and content because the social sciences And the humanities of different kinds of content that then lead to different kinds of forms, right? So the like in the sciences, I know this is not exactly answering your question, but this is the only way that I can think of responding to it. In the in like in the big sciences you have collaboration as both means and method, right? Like you have to have a bunch of people that agree on an object and part of the agreement is validation of the object itself. so there is a way that content, which is the object, dictates form, which is collaboration, which dictates content, which is so it's a close, like it's a but what happens in the social sciences and the humanities, I think, is that content as individualistic is validized, which then like so like everyone is coming up with their own thing. There's no one big project that you are, you know, just a part of. and I think this I think this goes for visual as well as regular forms in the sciences and social sciences and humanities, yeah.

27:21 ADITYA Well, that's the most that's the interesting part also, because for example, if we were to think then there is a particular kind of individualistic approach that is being valorized within the humanities or social sciences in any of the so in visual arts I have to say that the individualistic artistic genius is the thing. but it's interesting for example, in the collective spaces, and which is what just go back to the question that we started, is that somewhere the individual intellectual journey exists, but it doesn't exist in an extremely definitive way. And there is a certain kind of shared ambiguity that it entails, which seems to be going back to the secret that Son Shaunak was talking about.

28:10 ADITYA (?) Is that the thing? Like in terms of it's good because on the one hand you're trying to take collective knowledge and trying to put an individualistic streamline into it, as Nandita just said. On the other hand, there are a bunch of people who have their indu individual intellectual journeys trying to produce an ambiguous relationship between a definitive idea of what their individualistic self is. If that makes sense.

28:40 REBECCA (?) I just wanted to go back to the knowledge production in the social sciences and just mention that even there of course you have to have an individual approach to something

or a new thought, but that won't be accepted if you don't quote the right sources. So even there you rely on the whole network that has been there before and you know

29:01 NANDITA Oh yeah, that's true. I mean I agree with that.

29:06 But the but the process of knowledge production, like sort of engaging with it, is a fairly isolating isolated thing, I think, in the sciences and the social sciences. I'm sorry, in the humanities and the social sciences as opposed to the sciences where you're in a collective. Right. I just meant it in that sense.

29:26 REBECCA But maybe you can even see books as the others that you're surrounded by and then part of the

29:33 NANDITA (?) Yeah, I agree with that. I don't think there's any such thing as the individual. Like you're not no man is an island.

29:39 ADITYA (?) Okay, there's no such thing as an individual. Would you like to elaborate?

29:44 SATYA Which is what had occurred to me earlier as well, which is like you are constantly in the presence of influences.

29:51 ADITYA -huh.

29:54 No, the I just want to go back to what Rohini was talking about. I'm not very fan of Spock [?] speaking about authorship, but for the s for the moment let's just go back to the idea of individual and authorship. any

30:08 ROHINI I was just thinking, even on telling you like okay, production within a collective. There has to be, I think I think the question before this when you're talking about the secret also, I think there has to be some sort of a negotiation which happens, which is either tacit or it happens as part of the process of induction, if you like, where there is some level of trust and understanding that your individuality is given space. I do think that is part of this thing that we're talking about. You know what I mean? Like maybe authorship is the wrong word, but there's certainly some space given to identities and the right not the right word either. And I don't know.

30:48 ADITYA (?) The you mean to say there is a certain space d given to not dissolve themselves individually, at the same time coexist? Is that what you're saying?

30:56 ROHINI (?) Exactly. I mean, yeah.

31:01 Because I mean I as Nandita mentioned when it comes to the big sciences, if you're talking about the nature of collaboration, whether it's towards method or content, there are there are clear there are strategies, there are methodologies already in place. So if you co author a paper, there is already certain whose name you know what I mean, like whose name comes first. There are all of these codes which are already inbuilt. So I think that is part of the nature of this sort of a collective thing, right? I would imagine.

31:27 SHAUNAK (?) Yeah.

31:29 ADITYA But then that g takes me back. We have actually covered fair bit of understanding about co-presences, especially in completely not completely, but different disciplines. I would not of course from presence, I would like to actually go to think about if we were to think about that the collective practice as an idea today is very expansive and it has a way more bigger canvas that than we imagine. I would like to think about what are the

32:01 How do we read the different forms of collective practices today? In terms of what are the yes, one is the idea of authorship and co-authorship, presence and co-presence, but what are the other ways? Secret like one of the tech that came into being of different ways of reading these collective practices, which seem to be reinventing themselves every day. And for me it's personally interesting because I think about collective space especially online and how it changes the whole dynamic of how we interact with each other or how we co produce with each other. So maybe something to delve on to as the fourth sorry, the third thing, how do we read the different forms of collective practice today?

32:47 SANDIP (?) When we are discussing about collectives, actually we are thinking about the possibility of forming some sort of comradery.

32:53 ADITYA Mm-

32:53 SANDIP (?) I think this element of comradery is important in understanding any form of collective practice. And when we are going back to the notion of secrecy, I think secrecy is something that we share between friends, not between comrades. Right. In that sense comradery demands some sort of transparency between the members of the collective, not secrecy. And secrecy as if we understand it as a form of attributive friendship, it seems that even in a political organization, some sort of friendship is possible, although you are being comrades each other. So in that we have to differentiate these different forms of collective practice. And I think when we are discussing about collective, we are actually talking about, you know, certain form of comradery, not friendship. In that I think secrecy is an idea which largely misdirects the discussion. Right. in fact we should go away from the notion of secrecy and go back to the element of transparency between members. If that is the case, then I think it's also wrong to start from the assumption that everyone is already a collective or there are no individuals. I think this is also a wrong starting point. It reminds me of the criticism of Freudian psychology. this criticism was put forward by Voloshinov. His problem was this that no f in provident society [?], an individual is considered to be a product of society, or individual is not considered to be, you know, as individual. I mean, he is considered to be a collection of different

34:31 NANDITA How desire? [?]

34:33 -huh.

34:35 You're breaking in between Sandip.

34:38 SANDIP Yeah, can you hear me now?

34:40 ADITYA No better.

34:42 SANDIP (?) Yeah. No, the problem is that if we start from this argument that there are no individuals, I think then there is no need to discuss collectives, the idea of collective.

34:52 MALAVIKA Mm-

34:53 Right.

34:54 ROHINI (?) See, you know just to say that I was just thinking in terms of even the secret. you know, I think it can also be the basis of a comradery sort of experience because it doesn't have to be necessarily exclusionary in its in its entire definition. Because if you think of it like we share a secret, we all know it's tacit, it's what binds us together. So for someone on the outside looking in, we know something they don't know, but it's not like it's you know what I mean? Like any collective who is or but let's not use the word collective, any people who have a shared sense of anything, sense of commonality for want of a different word a sense of love for anything will have that sense that we share a secret. But I don't you know the secret here doesn't become

35:40 SHAUNAK (?) Absolutely. I that's exactly how I also meant it. I meant it in the kind of like the secret being that which ignites the broadest kind of affiliations between people.

35:50 Yeah. Yeah.

35:51 Both are a particular form of knowledge or it could be a particular relation to the world, it could be a particular as well as the as the affiliation which is shared at the moment in which a secret comes out, you know, the moment of revelation, even that forms of

36:05 SHAUNAK (?) Which could be yeah, exactly, which could be completely experiential. It doesn't even have to be yeah, exactly. It doesn't have to be a thing that is provided by someone.

36:12 SHAUNAK (?) In the sense of like you know, an examined affair [?] happening again people like that. I mean it in the broadest possible way of forms of distribution of knowledge and people staking particular claims in it. And in that sense I mean secret.

36:35 REBECCA Gaun sabhi gaun [?]

36:37 SANDIP Yeah, no, like you're talking about the knowledge sharing and all it's not secret. And it's what I'm thinking.

36:46 ADITYA Sorry, you have to be louder, Sandip.

36:48 SANDIP (?) No, like no, the moment we share knowledge, I don't know like whether it can be called secret anymore. So actually it is the end of secrecy, the moment we share it. So it's not for someone else.

37:00 SANDIP (?) That's right.

37:01 ROHINI (?) Exactly. Exactly.

37:03 SANDIP (?) But not for somebody else.

37:05 SHAUNAK (?) I think the secret actually is becomes a secret when you decide who doesn't hear rather than who you're sharing it with. It's who's being excluded.

37:19 Yeah.

37:20 That defines the you know, that makes it a secret.

37:23 ADITYA It has an exclusive.

37:26 MALAVIKA Yeah, the very conscious exclusion of a group or a set of people or specific people is what ends up making things.

37:35 ROHINI My question my question though is that what if it's not in that sense of exclusivity? Suppose a few people have found an ex have found something for want of anything, I don't know, deep sea divers and their love of the reef, whatever it is, right? For whatever reason they have found that experience, they have found people who share that. Now would you say that is their secret? But I would not say that they are excluding people from that experience.

37:59 SHAUNAK (?) That and also I mean, for example, if you take so Michael Taussig has this idea called the public secret, which is that when you know what not to know, it is a secret where never you can lose [?], but there's certain forms of publicity that the thing can't go. So, for example, in India, say bribes. We know that for example, or corruption in different forms, right? We know that at a certain point of time to get say anything, a driver's license or any kind of a permit, you have to pay so and so. And this is a common form of distributed knowledge, right? It's a thing that you see day in and day out, yet it is only when say it's captured on camera and travels to say prime time television, is when the crisis happens because then the public secret moves into a different kind of a space and there a kind of desacralization of the authority of say if it's the police which is caught if whatever institution has been caught, then there's a kind of desacralization happen and therefore it has to be addressed. But other than that public secrets also work in exactly the sort of a way. It's a it's common knowledge. It's a secret that perpetuates itself through knowledge. But it's not necessarily exclusive

39:02 MALAVIKA The public secret is still part of a collective property in that sense.

39:09 SHAUNAK Yeah, absolutely.

39:10 MALAVIKA It's still something that a collective is sharing.

39:16 SHAUNAK Absolutely.

39:16 MALAVIKA Binding entity.

39:18 SHAUNAK Yeah. It's a form of relation. I mean it's a it's a form of affiliation. Anyway, it's look I invoke the secrecy idea only as a kind of inverse or obverse way to think about the collective or the idea of perception. But I mean like I mean of course there is much more to the collective than just the secret.

39:38 ADITYA Okay. Any other thoughts other than the secret? Sorry. Go ahead, Sandip.

39:43 SANDIP Instead of secret.

39:43 SHAUNAK Yeah, we can

39:44 SANDIP (?) Think about faith, right? or faith in the possible future that we can build together. And it also has a certain religious dimensions to have faith or to have a fidelity towards certain

causes and all. So it's also an affective notion that would bind people together. So I think the faith is not something that we always share between people, also something that we present in front of a public. In actually, there is no secrecy in having a faith. But no, it's a complicated you know practice, like I know really. But my point is that in a coming collective, we always address certain public. Right. We always try to convince people. So actually, the notion of collective in art history. If we are talking from and talking about the beginning from modernism on where just basically a kind of confrontation of a public sphere, right? convincing people and also asking the people to join the group or the collective and so on. But this kind of collective practice does not exist today. I mean it's not a similar position that I'm making, but still think about all the Indian art collectives today. they are in terms of author function, their artist function, they work just like any other individual, right? So there is no manifesto, there is no kind of declaration of people coming together for so and so of course for some kinds of reasons. So that is not made public, or that is not. made into the form of an invitation, public invitation and all. So I think when we are talking about collective, actually we are talking about certain kind of open openings, right? Like coming together of people and also expecting more people to join. Maybe because of you know sharing certain faith or certain you know commitment to a certain cause and all. So I think that is what we are actually that is what we are actually you know trying to formulate me when we are talking about our collective today.

41:54 MALAVIKA But if you're looking if we look at the idea of a collective outside of the space of the arts and if you think of how programmers work and how the community of coders and open source developers exist today, it's quite different and that entire field is in some ways far more open with sharing and putting things out there for the commons to use.

42:25 We so I my comment is only coming from this idea of you know, how are we looking at collectives? I are we only understanding collectives from this kind of a cultural arts practice kind of space, or are we also looking at collective in a slightly more abstracted and a real world space of or philosophical space of sharing and

42:54 ROHINI (?) Transparency.

42:56 ADITYA Yeah, which is also the point. Like, you know, how do you actually especially after the digital and this is my argument that I make that, you know, after the digital what constitutes a collective practice is expanded, which is what just Malavika has said about coding and open source and all of these practices that do venture upon co presence is let's not call collectives, but co presence is involved in a particular process of production. But then for me that is why the presence comes as opposed to the collective and that's why it's interesting whether to think about collective as a limiting category as opposed to presence which is much more expansive, open ended, and has a kind of a ring that talks about a larger pub larger element within the public sphere as opposed to something that has a very definitive historical and political function or has had which will bring its baggage with itself.

43:54 REBECCA Do you also mean networks if you say co presences? I think that's the new and interesting part of artist collectives that formed after nineteen ninety, which were not artist groups that were very local and not producing under one name but doing exhibitions together, for example. Then after the internet they became sort of networks that were not fixed to one locality but global networks in a sort.

44:27 ADITYA I think that's what actually I'm trying to head towards because yes there is a history within history of collectives within that history that have a particular authority and also political function. But I think w over the past two decades we have gone to a completely different which is what just Rebecca has pointed out, that these are more of a network based collectives that not collectives I would say I would not call co workers, but however we would like to like term the coming together.

45:00 And it's important to th think about whether we call that a collective practice or we would like to go back to another expansive logic of referring to exactly even what we are doing today or

we are trying to produce today or Surfatial as a group of three people located in three different parts of the world trying to come together to produce something.

45:29 MALAVIKA I feel like when you talk of practice, it immediately refers to something that is being done or attempted again and again. So it refers to what is being produced. in the network it is yes, a nice term, but any part of the network can get activated and produce something at any point of time. So then in that sense the network offers that flux and fluidity for

46:03 A collective to exist. It just c connects people or makes possible many more connections in maybe unpredictable ways even. but what is being produced is my question. H is that what we are trying to examine or are we examining the form of this network of

46:31 Form or the function in some ways that's I'm I don't know where this is really going.

46:37 Oh

46:40 SHAUNAK I'm gonna take a sort of like slightly different response to that. like what is this produced? So you know there is this there's usually this sort of a banal platitude which is to say that the sum of the that the whole is larger than the sum of its parts. that there might be different kinds of impulses. So this is applied everywhere, right? That a collective of artists, their work is far greater than what just the three of them individually or together could have produced. It's as if the zone of togetherness itself produces a kind of like a kind of a produce which is much larger than what just the individuals together could have done. my main I mean th these lines are usually cliches, but my main interest in this comes from a sort of a biological perspective, which is something of emergence, you know emergence that very often what happens is that there are different kinds of organisms, and you see this across a range of more species and practices, and actually within human studies, which is that different kinds of agglomerations happen and yield produces that are unbelievable. So just to give you examples, so for so ants, for example, are often used for this. A single ant or ten ants or fifteen ants, you will not be able to home into food or a secure space, etc. If you left them. You introduce hundred, there's still complete chaos, complete like they don't know what to do with etc. you introduce two hundred more, nothing. You introduce three hundred more, nothing. Suddenly at some point after a number is introduced, it's almost as if a thing snaps in, you know, and immediately they come into a straight line and start homing into food sources with exponentially more efficiency than the one ant lesser. Similarly, we see this in a number of different kinds of species where the collective in itself seems to become a supra sort of a intelligent organization it's far bigger than the individual. So it's as if the whole station [?] is exponentially more. You we see this in different kinds of other kinds of species as well as human biologists will talk about how the brain also works through this kind of a emergence.

48:54 SATYA Yeah, like the emergence of consciousness.

48:56 SHAUNAK Yeah. Well, you can't really situate or release it within any one particular theory of frontal cortex or any other part. But sociologically I'm quite interested in how this works out because traditionally it's been thought that unlike other things, if you leave hum if you leave a hundred if you leave a thousand humans in a and expect order or a greater efficiency to happen, it just never happens, right? Because it's almost like there's more chaos when it does. But different kinds of say urban theory would talk about how city formations etc can also be looked at forms of emergence. Similarly in there's the Green Plat [?] experiment, which was this mathematician who went to a country fair and where there was this competition which was happening. So they bought this huge cow, okay, big cow, and they were asking which folk to guess the weight and whoever would guess it would win. So many guesses were made and m some were completely off, some were close, etc. And then he did a at the end, he did a sort of average or a median of the whole of the number of guesses, and he realized that the average was closest to the actual weight. And therein mathematically started to work around a probabilistic idea of emergence. I don't necessarily espouse to any of these ideas, but what I'm interested in is a relationship between the individual and the whole and how the whole seems to embody, which I also think is a bit of a like a theological sort of aspect to it. But this idea of the collective, which is almost unimpeachably larger, better, more efficient than the singular.

50:29 ADITYA (?) No, it's actually interesting. This reminds me of a statement that African American curator who yeah, African, Okwui Enwezor makes about collectives, art collectives very specifically, where he talks about that the modernist idealization of the work of art as a unique object of individual creativity is confronted with the simultaneous aporia of presences within collective practices and he thinks that this lends the collective work primarily a social character, than of a personal character. Which is a which is a very I mean, I'm not saying I agree to it, but it is something a distinction that is worth like probing into. Like somebody is saying that a collective by virtue of producing this ambiguity of not having a individual definitive stand, he's producing for something a social character as opposed to an individual who's like whether his practice is linked to his biographical or personal kind of character.

51:38 ADITYA (?) Rohini, what do you think?

51:45 ROHINI (?) There was an something else I was reading about, which was talking about how the collective is reality. So in a sense, I think I mean it's not what Shaunak was saying, but something about the idea that it's sort of the other way around as well, right? Like whatever you perceive as being reality is collective, but who's collective and who is defining what is you know what I mean? Like this idea of this mass of information that who decides what is true and happening and all that sort of stuff. Yeah. I mean it's slightly frightening actually.

52:24 ADITYA (?) Okay, we have five more minutes. Any remarks from this house that was silent?

52:33 SHAUNAK (?) That's

52:40 ADITYA Sandip.

52:43 Nandita and Rebecca.

52:48 REBECCA Hierarchies is also interesting to look at if you look at a collective or the idea of a collective. as opposed to earlier groups that call themselves groups. I'm always looking at the term that the people who came together used, I'm not attributing that term to them. and I think this utopia of getting away from hierarchies is something that defines not all, but probably many contemporary collectives. Not only breaking away from authorship, as we said, or from locality, but also from this strong question of hierarchies in the artwork. Where you don't have a gallery system, you don't have a gallerist, but you produce and you sell on your own. and show on your own. But not I mean on your own means in this new structure which is breaking away from the old structure, but then of course you're creating a new kind of network that can be questioned and criticised as well.

53:59 ADITYA So you're saying that it generates hierarchies or it

54:02 It engages with the

54:03 Hierarchies in a new way.

54:05 REBECCA (?) Tries to break away from hierarchies, but as we see it creates new hierarchies as well.

54:13 ADITYA (?) It comes a new set of like things to itself.

54:19 REBECCA Yeah, for example if you have a group which consists of people from different backgrounds or different professions, if you have curators and artists coming together, there must always be a sort of hierarchy that you try to break away from but you never can, I suppose.

54:46 SANDIP I think certain loneliness of the collective also has to be you know thought about right.

54:51 ADITYA Sorry, you have to be a little louder something.

54:53 SANDIP (?) Being collective or the loneliness of collective. No, it has happened in history where like people have come together and they were they failed to convince other people, you know, certain isolation that they feel that they feel, right? So in fact that mentioned in regarding the communistic history that was the most, you know, lonely, you know, collective project that ever took taken place in history.

55:19 ADITYA Which one? Sorry, repeat, I think we lost one.

55:21 I'm just a moment. [?]

55:22 ADITYA (?) Communist movement.

55:23 SANDIP So I think this also need to be

55:30 NANDITA (?) Hello.

55:30 NANDITA (?) In this collective

55:31 ADITYA (?) Moment.

55:33 SPEAKER 6 Communists are going to kill us.

55:38 ROHINI (?) Okay. On the on the loneliest

55:41 ADITYA Any final notes? We have two minutes.

55:44 MALAVIKA Yeah, I'm I was quite interested in how Shaunak illustrated the thing about the ants and it I'm connecting it with what Rebecca mentioned about the network because you can have a network but to have an active network where that network is there's this moment when things fall into place and what is just a network can become something far more. It can become an entire uprising or it can become an entire revolt or revolution. So I'm interested in that moment when things flip and something just changes, it completely transforms. And I think that moment actually defines that mechanism of collective practice in some ways because maybe it's i it's in that transformation that the individual journey actually changes. Thank you.

57:01 ADITYA (?) So we'll talk about the individual more tomorrow. I think we are now done for our time for today. And then yeah.

57:15 Thank you.

57:16 I will see you all tomorrow.

57:18 MALAVIKA Yeah, and we'll send the link tomorrow before we start.

57:25 Okay.

57:26 Thank you.

57:29 SHAUNAK (?) Thank you.