

HOMESHOP

Location: Beijing, China
Operative between: 2008-2013
Practice: not legally or officially regulated
<http://www.indexofho.net>
<http://homeshop.org.cn>

Elaine W. HO (HK/USA) works between the realms of time-based art, urban practice and design. She uses multiple vocabularies to explore the micropolitics, subjectivities and alter-possibilities of an intimate, networked production. In her work, the act of describing takes on a number of forms – a kind of grammar, a documentation, a gesture, a biography. Between 2008 and 2013, she has been co-coordinating the artist-run space HomeShop in Beijing. She is a frequent contributor at www.iwishicoulddescribeittoyoubetter.net.

What desires, values and elements of support/discouragement made your practice evolve over time?

desires: growth, collaboration/community, to continue asking questions
values: idealism, sustainability
elements of support: naiveté, meaningful dialogue, kind words/observations from people not aiming to get anything
elements of discouragement: urban development and gentrification in Beijing, lack of meaningful dialogue, old hierarchies

What are in your case the advantages and disadvantages, strengths and weaknesses of working alone?

I have a tendency to over-analyse and get too coiled up in psychological roadblocks when working alone. Knowing that collaborative outcomes can never be exactly what you envision as a single author allows a greater degree of letting go that is crucial for me to allow a process to simply be. Of course, working more independently or autonomously can be more efficient to a certain degree, depending upon the scale of work one is doing.

How do you deal with money and wages when you collaborate with other people on a project? How do you deal with tensions and power relations when participating in collaborative projects?

Of course, the ways in which finances are managed are different - for example, depending, say, upon whether the budgets are designated and fixed beforehand by funding bodies or allow for greater degrees of flexibility. At HomeShop, because many of our projects were initially self-financed, any extra incoming funds were often put back with respect to the priorities of running costs, project-related needs or reimbursing the initial investment. As authors, we divided money equally. But it was also often the case that, because our skill sets were so different, incoming funds were divided based upon divisions of labour.

The fact that HomeShop was founded on such egalitarian, non-hierarchical values, but in the end seemed unable to overcome certain long-running tensions and power dynamics, made our project quite problematic in many ways, and, as hinted at above, this is perhaps more a matter of naiveté than of any gravely unique disaster. Actually, when we worked on singular projects, the distribution of skill, personality and power

worked quite well, as the nature of one-time projects allows for a greater degree of focus on a clear objective with foreseeable ends. However, it was at the level of the structure/organisation of the HomeShop project as a whole that each person's desires and ways of working caused a slow tension, or sudden moments of friction, to be ridden in the everyday, because there were no clearly agreed-upon ends. This is the nature of the self-described 'open platform', so to speak, and ultimately it is crux of the socio-political questions underlying our work. So, I would not say that our inability to overcome certain patterns of stratification was a failure, but that it's a matter of entering oneself into a situation and an experience and learning from that.

How do you access meaningful commissioned work and how do you finance and carve-out time for self-initiated projects? What strategies and tactics are you making use of?

We were invited on occasion by institutions, mostly museums or other funded projects, to make work that allowed for travel and production costs. We were hardly ever paid fees for our labour, however, and each person at HomeShop relied on their personal skill set to find other freelance work to sustain themselves. HomeShop was still beneficial to that end though, as it offered a networked resource for many of us to work at a reasonably steady degree. How to balance between 'money-jobs' versus personal interest or self-initiated work is always a challenge. There aren't any general strategies that I can imagine, however, because every person's relationship to money, how they value it and how they spend it, is different. In Chinese there is a saying: 'Dogs have their own dao (way), cats have theirs.'

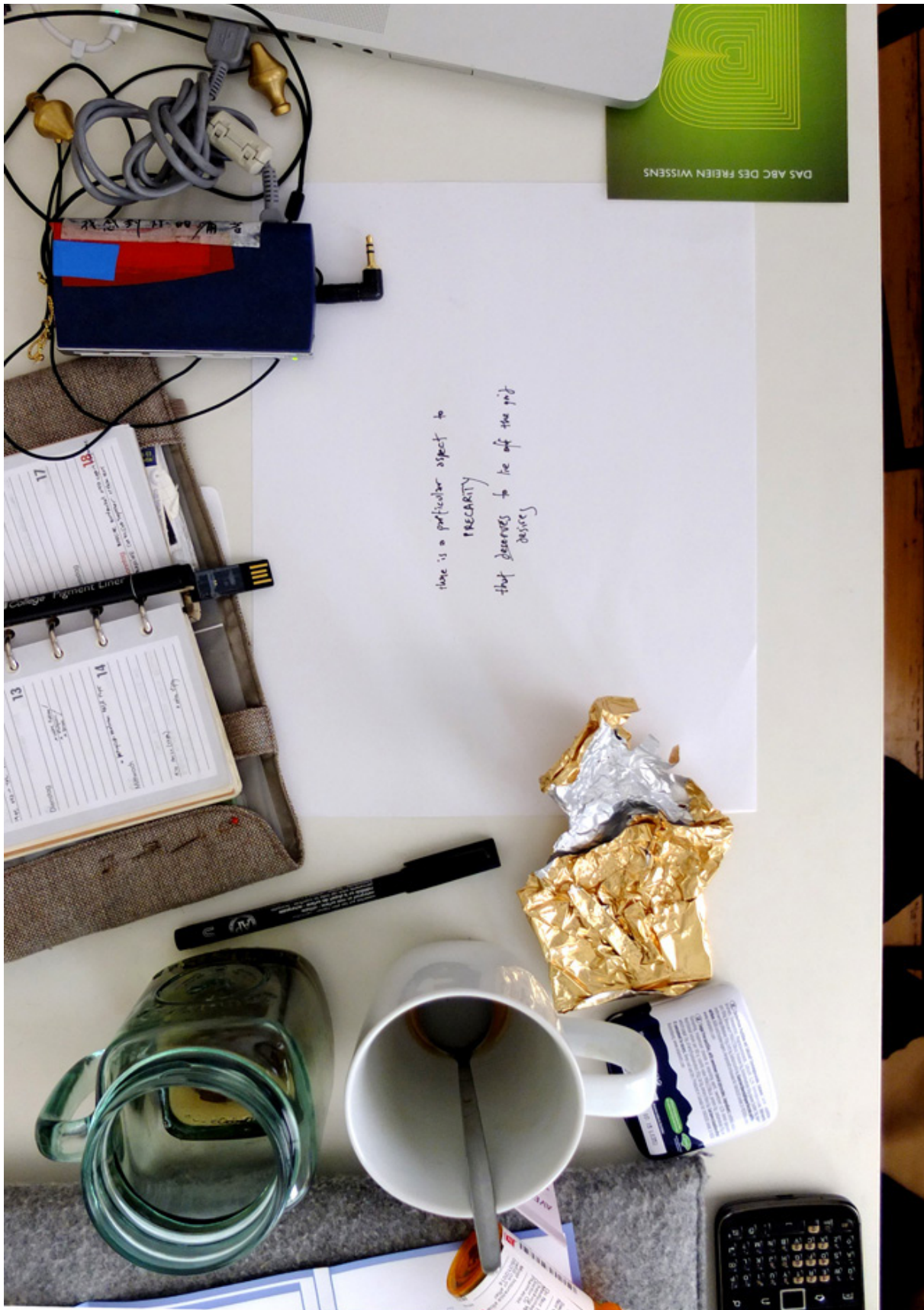
How do you organise your time between work and non-work? What systems do you use to keep track of where you invest your time?

Another interesting facet of the 'open platform' and the precarious worker dancing upon it, is that the organisation of categories becomes highly ambiguous. There are few divisions between work and non-work, especially in the context of a community-oriented, artist-run project space. Labour and work are confused in the first instance, because what must be done to keep the space running (as a form of labour) is also, to a degree, the meta-processing of the work (as an aesthetico-political creating of form). You are at once your own master and a slave to both the neoliberal, post-Fordist system and the art system (in the sense of our positioning as an off-space, often set against the more established contemporary art institutions/organisations in China).

How does your current working and living environment (geographic location, spatial arrangement) reflect (or not) the ethos, methods and dynamics of your practice?

HomeShop unfortunately was not able to survive a number of the difficulties it faced, and it is perhaps a form of thinking in retrospect to consider that ephemerality as inevitable, necessary, or—in your words—part of the ethos of the project. Hakim Bey refers to this as the 'Temporary Autonomous Zone'. And, as Susan Sontag has cleverly noted, perhaps it is in acknowledgement of the nostalgia we look upon it with now (and did not then) that we can admit, in some sense, its utopian becomings or desires.

Please draw a diagram of all the elements and structures that support your design practice (monetary & non-monetary resources, people, spaces and institutions, family, other assets, ...)? Can you note how these elements support you and the flows of exchange related to them? Can you also include elements that “threaten” your practice?



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interviews