



Master of Art and Design for Public Space

## EXTREME LAB.

A kind of art practice that is context-based on extreme discrepancy  
/Lost and found; before you found something, you got lost/



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## Extreme Lab

Um tipo de prática artística contextual em discrepância extrema

/ Perdidos e achados; antes de encontrar algo, perdemo-nos /

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## Abstract

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The present dissertation/project was started at Fontainhas, Porto, a place extremely far away from my own cultural and geographical backgrounds. For the duration of 9 months, I have started a series of art practices to discuss the possibility to generate art projects that can cross the discrepancies found between the local inhabitants and me as an artist. I tried addressing to my art practice, and to my presence in this specific community, as artistic experiments, giving my dissertation the title “extreme lab”. The project explores how cooperating with people from public to private space, especially the specific group of people that is considered as non-art background, tends to allow art happening in a fresh and non-institutional perspective, but also exposes the dangers of community-based art as manipulative personal strategy. Some of the critical issues at stake in this project are: How can an artist deal with the materials from the community keeping an ethical practice, without improper appropriations? How can an artist reach a “successful” project with the cooperation with people?

*A presente dissertação / projeto foi iniciada nas Fontainhas, Porto, um local extremamente distante das minhas próprias origens, cultural e geográfica. Durante 9 meses, iniciei uma série de práticas artísticas para discutir a possibilidade de gerar projetos de arte que podem atravessar as discrepâncias encontradas entre os habitantes locais e eu própria como artista. Tentei abordar a minha própria prática e a presença nesta comunidade específica, enquanto experiência artística, dando-lhe à dissertação esse título: "extreme lab". O projeto explora como cooperar com as pessoas num espaço público, especialmente com o grupo específico de pessoas considerado como não-artístico, que tende a permitir que a arte aconteça numa nova perspectiva e não codificada, e expõe os perigos de a arte com base comunitária, enquanto estratégia pessoal manipuladora. Algumas das questões críticas em jogo no projeto são: Como pode um artista lidar com as matérias de uma comunidade mantendo uma prática ética, sem apropriações indevidas? Como pode um artista realizar um projecto "bem sucedido" em cooperação com as pessoas?*

### Key words:

Public space, community, context-based, non-art, life-like art, discrepancy  
espaço público, comunidade, contextual, não-arte, arte como vida, discrepância

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*- Lost and found; before you found something, you got lost.*

This master thesis is set as a series of experiments happening outside of the art realm, it consists of a practical project along a theoretical reflection.

The experiment happens in a local community with underprivileged and marginal conditions. Discussing the relationship between space, people, and myself, simultaneously this relationship is being examined carefully with the theoretical research.

Space: The public and private space.

People: Non-art people<sup>1</sup>, inhabitant, spectator, and audience.

Myself: The artist, foreigner, and outsider.

The project is titled “Extreme lab” due to the unique character and the current circumstance of the site that I worked with, which is based on extreme complex content and texture, especially for me as an utmost outsider, who comes from far east and with no relation to culture, language, history, or any kind of layer of the community. All those extreme discrepancies somehow provide me with plenty materials and give richness to many aspects of my art work and add layers (or depths) to it. Furthermore, they test me as an artist when confronting the content with less communal recognition in the community. And sometimes the less communal recognition can be generated by artist him/herself.

I’m skeptical to the numbness that brings after experiencing art, that is, there is a kind of stereotype for artwork, which leads spectators to affirm: “it’s not understandable, because it’s contemporary art!” People who are not educated in art don’t feel the connection or related themselves to it, and this “not understandable” becomes a prejudice.

The artist, Suzanne Lacy who made one of the projects for culture in action -a public art program of Sculpture Chicago- mentioned how she approached

making art works, especially the kind of work that happens in public or with a community which needs a lot of effort to engage people. “One of the goals I set up was to make a work that was extremely accessible. The dilemma is that the more complicated, layered, and esoteric a work, the less readable it is to a mass audience.”<sup>2</sup>

As an artist, it’s not easy to keep the balance between making a work of art to fulfill the artist’s own ideal state (condition) or like Lacy mentioned, to make it extremely accessible to a mass audience. I managed to find a balance in this thesis project because I set my target very clear to the community and the people from the community. However, I must work under a specific frame like “fair trade”, which is a social movement that dedicates itself to help the real makers in developing countries to acquire better trading conditions to against deprivation from developed countries, from this metaphor, I expanded my own vision for community-based art and to generate an efficient dialogue between the community and me, as the basic condition of my project. That the “fair trade” I’m seeking for in my work, I reach out to other people at my own will, not the reverse, as an active role in this relationship, I try creating the balance, and level the uneven position and avoiding the negative deprive from each other.

Through art practice, I will explore the discrepancy I found in between the subject and me, and transform this discrepancy into something that can communicate by its new interpretation, which is established and generated during the process. This innovating establishment could give more possibility for the people in the community to access to art and shape the project by their engagement naturally, not by the artist or organization that dominates and stands in different level of position.

Despite the differences there are also similarities, when the condition of the community is associated to marginal, underprivileged, low in-come, and working class conditions, there’s some interesting common phenomenon happening that exceeds its boundaries. That is, in my country, Taiwan, you can also notice that people living in similar conditions in working or low-class have a form of using public space with maximum effectiveness as to extend their private insufficient space. They expand their private space by using the public space, it’s common to

see them doing daily activities or social life outdoors. (See fig. 1 as an illustration of this usage)  
The harsh conditions push them to generate different perceptions of public and private, which is very different from the bourgeoisie class. The bourgeoisie in general gives very clear line between public and private.



Fig. 1 Flickr.com Filex-photo, Hua-Guan community in Taipei

On the other hand key words like marginal, underprivileged, low in-come, and working class that are likely be related to social issues, are usually preferred topics for the artist who, like me, is interested in encountering people outside the art realm to work with. However, the capacity for artist to deal with these issues carefully without abusive appropriation is one of the most important parts of my project, which is related to the discussion of “the artist as the ethnographer”<sup>3</sup>. That artist tries to gather material from the community by the way of making field research as an ethnographer, which is pointed out by Hal Foster, and is crucial for participatory art. Furthermore, that will also be the major theoretical discourse that I would engage deeper with in later chapter of the dissertation and address in relation to my art practice.

When Miwon Kwon<sup>4</sup> talks in the book, “One Place after Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity” about how the different processes (preexisting

“political-coherent” communities or those that are “created” through the delegate-artist) of engendering the identity of the community by the artist or the institution, that differences giving the chance to critique the practical benefits for artist and sponsoring institution have already led to the popularization of newly bureaucratized and giving the formulaic versions of community-based art below. “Community-based art: artist + community + social issue = new critical/public art.”<sup>5</sup> That the particular social issue often corresponding to the identity that artist would like to strengthen on their works, which were found in the more susceptible community and can be address to this formula even more easily, and this “identity of a community group comes to serve as the thematic content of the art work, representing this or that social issue in a isolated and reified way.”<sup>6</sup>

This sums up those relative social issues that are always around community-based art, then it wont be so surprising to see even a mathematic formula comes up for this genre of art.

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1/ Non-art people here refer to who has no art background.

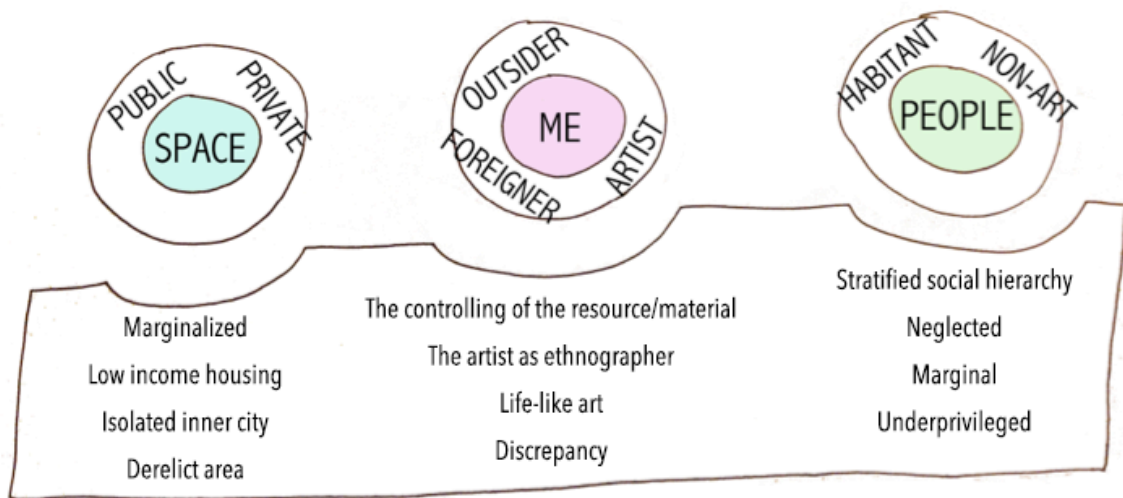
2/ Jacob, Mary Jane. Brenson, Michael. Olson, Eva M. *Culture in action: a public art program of Sculpture Chicago*. Eight Projects: Full circle By Suzanne Lacy, pp.64. Bay Press Seattle, 1995.

3/ Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century, The Artist as Ethnographer*. The MIT Press, 1996.

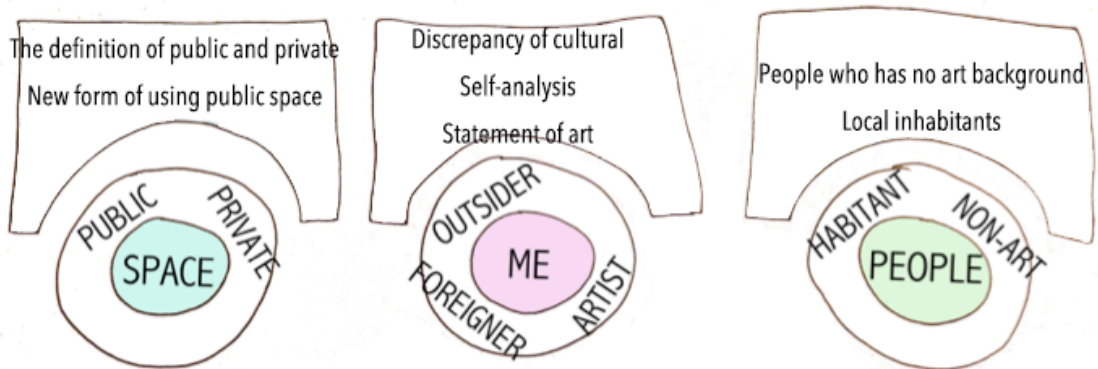
4/ A Korean-American curator and art history educator, who is trained in architecture that her work often focus on contemporary art, land art and site-specific art.

5/ Kwon, Miwon. *One Place after Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity*, pp.146. The MIT Press, 2004.

6/ Ibid, pp.146.



### COMMUNITY-BASED ART



### 1/People

Mostly I prefer to work with the people who have no art background. How do they influence and engage in my work? Do I have a specific field? If it's so-called public art, then how do I set a specific group of people as my object instead of the public in general? Am I using them as the material for my work?

### 2/Space

I realized that, people who live in areas with more marginal living conditions are using public space in very interesting ways. The dividing line between public and private becomes blurry due to their taking the maximum advantage of public space. They're giving a new form of usage to the public space, appropriating it to their private needs. Based on this interesting way of thinking public space, how can I deal with and transform this relationship between public and private in my work?

### 3/Myself

Making work of art in a community is like working in a mini society, how do I make decisions in those complex contexts? How do I control the initial objective of my project? How do I deal with sharing authority when all the outcomes can be seen as my statements?

As an outsider, how do I develop the project across the cultural barrier and generating a sense of connection when I come from a very different region so as to make the spectator fully access to the art that I'm creating?

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- *Subject: non-art people, people who live in Fontainhas.*



Fig. 2 Dong Zhou Grand Hotel Project, 2012-2013, Taiwan Yilan.

### **Why this specific subject - group of people with non-art background?**

Making a work of art is always a way of defining yourself, especially when you devote lots of time to it. During my bachelor degree in Taipei, as an architecture student, I was always confronting virtual circumstance and condition to make design and develop my architectural project. In the final year of architecture school I did a one-year project with a specific reality and harsh circumstances on my grandparents and their derelict, old and decayed grand hotel.

In this one-year project, constituted by 10 small projects that were based on and inspired from the Dong Zhou Grand Hotel, which is owned by my grandparents.

For me, working with blood-tied relations is the most difficult situation I encountered. There are intensive connections but also emotions to manage. I'm not just dealing with the project with them, but also getting to know myself within this process. It's all about the stories and memories that we share. It can improve the work of art but it can be constraining at the same time.

When working with them I'm confronting myself crucially and also understanding the position I'm standing in the realm of art step by step during the process. Furthermore, I'm working with the people who barely know anything about art. It's a fresh and despairing process. I set myself into danger but I can feel the boundaries of a territory I could explore.

Doing art installations in the hotel and trying to communicate with my grandparents was indeed an influential experience for me. It wasn't just about how everyone experience art with their own state of mind (beyond art language), it was mostly all of us confronting the status of art happening in this personal and unconventional space all together- my grandparents were engaged in the process of my artwork from the beginning (pre-work) till the end. It's not just about how art has been displayed in front of spectators, as is the norm. My grandparents had been in the "back stage" of the art production, which is one of the crucial parts of the project.

I felt the distance happening and huge obstacle in front of us, and then the cliché came right after that while I was trying to explain to them what I was doing in a more accessible and simple way and avoiding the jargon that we used to speak in the art field, it's more or less like a 5-year-old child try to ask the mother how they come to this world. Sometimes it's exhausting that you cannot chose a precise language to communicate, but it works, as long as they experienced.

In some of the projects, I cooperated with my grandfather by using the materials he used to work with and the technics that he is familiar with. Sharing experiences was not only important in Dong Zhou Grand Hotel project but it is also examples of community-based art and especially the kind of art needs participation.

The artist who is a predecessor of participatory art, Allan Kaprow had once put this sentence on the invitation of his event “you will become part of the happenings; you will simultaneously experience them”<sup>7</sup>. That’s exactly what an artist can share with the audience, the experience. Moreover, that is how I wanted to share with my grandfather, and made him part of it and completed my work of art.

When the kind of art that is participatory and involve people’s engagement, no doubt it’s variable and changeable by unpredictable external factors. The artist won’t be the only person who dominates the process and outcome. Just take a small example from the Dong Zhou Hotel project; my grandfather dismantled the artwork that I installed on site without informing in advance. The duration of the work is no longer fixed as the work in conventional art space. Thus, the documentation for the art’s happening or existence becomes crucial for this kind of art. Maybe the impact after art happening could be invisible physically, but it will be visible for those who have experienced mentally.

For me the work of art in public space or, moreover, to work with the people is an art practice that you can test yourself and make experiment on how art happening truly. The statement that you made in the process, in a sense is a way or an attitude that how you see and experience life in this absurd, preposterous society and reality. For me is quite interesting seeing myself through art making. This might be one of the reasons why I chose the group of people without art background.

Discarding the stiff language, which can only speak within a specific group of people and get a new, fine and fresh dialogue instead.

### **Introduction of the projects, Dong Zhou Grand Hotel and Extreme Lab**

\*Dong Zhou Grand Hotel:

A one-year project where 10 projects inspired by my grandparent’s old hotel, took place in site. Those projects were the trigger to my current interests. From this experience, I explored what art can do with the people with non-art background and started establishing the honest relationship between artist and

spectator within the more personal territory and bring these impacts and influences to my current project that even extend to the real public even outside of my comfort zone, a local community outside my country.

\*Extreme Lab:

Lab is a space for experiment; then “Extreme Lab” is a metaphor. It’s a project of making artistic experiments and creating a mimic lab environment, which is a neighborhood in Porto: the Fontainhas. This specific region, for me, as a cultural outsider, is interesting to experiment with my ideas of working with publics that are outside the art realm, and has potential to be the trigger to connect the relationship with the inhabitants in the community.

From the very different contexts on site, I tried to explore the communal recognition from those differences so as to have dialogue with the local inhabitants. The adaptation for an artist who comes from other culture making artwork in other cultural territory is some how a common practice for artist who explores being nomadic and experiences globalization and localization.

### **From Dong Zhou Grand Hotel Project to Extreme Lab**

When I was devoting myself to Dong Zhou Grand Hotel project I barely knew anything about the public art engaged with audience and the ethical discussion of the artist as an ethnographer (community-based art). However, when I was giving the final presentation of my work to the juries in architecture dept.; one of them mentioned “anti-art” when he commented about my work and that notion stayed with me till now.

I always prefer taking inspiration from daily life to make work of art; it gives the sense of recognition for people to access to art with more perception, which is accumulated from the daily life experience. The artist, Allan Kaprow who’s the creator of the artworks “happening” or “environment” in 50’s-60’s and the artwork of him is very related to performance, experience and life like art, gave the statement which is very close to my thought for art, “the line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps as indistinct as possible.” And when I mention perception or recognition, it’s a crucial part of the current project.

Cultural discrepancy alters the perspectives on the real world for people to have different perceptions on things happening around that depends on their culture and backgrounds. Therefore, the circumstance of the current project, being outside of my country, Taiwan, gives a more complex texture than Dong Zhou Hotel project.

It is a different context and a different project, but the same me making the approach with the same belief of what art could do for/with people beyond very limited condition.

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7/ From Tate Blog, Performance Art 101: The Happening, Allan Kaprow By Kirstie Beaven, 30 May 2012.

“My viewpoint is that wherever you live, you will face that place’s problems. If you have problems then you have art. Your plight and your problems are actually the source of your artistic creation.”

Xu Bing, 2006, Letter to a Young Artist 8

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8/ An artist from China, In 1977 he entered the printmaking department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing (CAFA) where completed his bachelor’s degree in 1981 and stayed on as an instructor, earning his MFA in 1987. He currently lives and works in Beijing and New York.

- Site: *Fontainhas (Tanques Públicos nas Fontainhas and Feira da Vandoma)*



Fig. 3 Feira da Vandoma happening in Tanques Públicos das Fontainhas

### **Why Tanques Públicos nas Fontainhas and Feira da Vandoma?**

Tanques públicos (public washing space) are located at the area “Fontainhas” in Porto, Portugal; under the Ponte do Infante, besides the Douro River. I found this space with stone-made washing tanks by chance. I’m fascinated with any kind of container filled with water (swimming pools for example). For me the Tanques Públicos nas Fontainhas is very appealing as a public washing space. Washing clothes along the Douro River, which is one of the most symbolic features of Porto, to have this view and make this as your daily life routine it’s unparalleled. But this area is also accompanied with problematic issues, it remains around 50 ruined houses from the collapse at the escarpment in Fontainhas in 2000 winter, and around 30 families stayed with fear that the disaster might happen again. From the interview with the inhabitants, they complained about the government

whom treated them as a bunch of forgotten citizen without taking good care. Also the drug-addicted problem has started around the time when ruins happened.

Tanques Públicos is a public space with function and program, which is related to daily life activities for inhabitants; washing clothes, even though this public space remains there but by the changing of technology this space is no longer needed as much as before. The space is losing its function gradually, but in the other hand is increasing its contexts, the transition of time passing could transform this rusty space into multifunctional public space if it's not just been used as a public washing space.

This space has been used as a public washing space since the 1930's. Now this space is more or less derelict. One part of the tanks is already dried-up. The other part is still running and few residences are still using it. Moreover, it has other interesting usages by its organic development. The homeless people go there for doing their hygiene stuff like brushing teeth or avoiding the charging fee for selling secondhand stuff during Vandoma flea market, this public washing space turns into a free zone during the flea market.

The surroundings of the public washing space are constituted by residential areas that feature typical housing formations: Ilhas (Portuguese for islands), which is peculiar in Porto. From interviews with the inhabitants and the president of the local association (Associação Solidariedade Zona Fontainhas) I got to know that this community has a particular social structure and issue, part of the inhabitants come from low income families and suffered from the nature disaster, landslide (this was due to their houses being built on a steep slope and the wet weather in Porto). Some of them are now living without water and electricity.

This washing space serves mainly the people who live in this local community with limited range in geographic terms, so we can say that the people who use this space are very specific. They share the same background and resources of this area. The washing space is again a micro-cosmos of the local area; people go there to wash and dry their clothes, and to have social contact. For this reason,

the Tanques públicos nas Fontainhas is a perfect space to investigate and to generate the stronger identity of the community. Additionally, putting myself into the community as a practice in a micro-society is a baptism for me to understand and explore myself as an artist and my own identity.

This public space with its specific program can be seen as a similar function to a self-operating filter system, which centered the range of the subject during my initial approach to the community. In geographic terms, mostly the people who come here for washing clothes are the one who come from the nearby neighborhood and use it as daily routine. Thus, this alternative program speeded up my engagement to the community and created an objective way to relate to everyday life of the neighborhood.



Fig. 4 The community in East zone, Taipei city

Inhabitants living in narrow and crowded spaces tend to extend their private property as much as they can into the public space. For example, you can see they're putting sofas, wooden chairs, washing basins outside, or planting vegetable near the riverbank like a mini farm in Taiwan, and as well as here in Porto. Near the Douro River you can find a lot of similar spaces. This is how

people develop a new form of daily living when facing the harsh circumstance. In the US there's a research in the book "The social origins of private life: A history of American families", mentioned this relationship of public and private space in the same peculiar condition, "working-class families made fewer division between family and street life or public and private roles than did middle-class families though they do sharper distinctions between work life and personal life."<sup>9</sup>

In Japan, for example there are public baths in each district, which is another very particular way of extending private space to the public (But it's a bit different situation, the public bath is more about their own culture and history).<sup>10</sup> But from this you can feel that the private and public in different level of perception are changing by the way they are using the space.



Fig. 5 Feira da Vandoma

Another interesting event in the same area is Feira da Vandoma (flea market)<sup>11</sup>, from the front of the houses of this community extends up to the other street which is connected by each other, it forms a loop (living cycle) in an organic way; Feira da Vandoma, the Tanques Públicos nas Fontainhas and to the community itself. What interests me in this flea market is that it's a space to exchange the

daily used object, and share something that has been very intimacy for personal life before. Once again the issue of public and private could be discussed in different aspects in my art practice.

Fontainhas is a region with different social activities, which is the essential requirement to approach the public.

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9/ Coontz, Stephanie. *The social origins of private life: A history of American families*, pp480. Verso, 1988.

10/ The public bathhouse calls "Sento" in Japan, its history begins in the 6th century, when the time Buddhism arrived in Japan. Around 12<sup>th</sup> century this public bathhouse became common and worked as a business. The public bathhouse also satisfied those Japanese who have preference for enjoying the bath and don't have bath at home.

11/ Open every Saturday from very early morning around 5am till noon.

*-Physical: the environment around the Fontainhas area and the public washing spaces.*



Fig. 6 Ilhas, rua de S.Victor, during my second time of The Worst Tours.

### **Ilhas do Porto: Common housing for working class people.**

The development of the ilhas is very related to the Portugal's historical background and socioeconomic development, around 19century, there were a big amount of immigrants (mostly farmers) coming from rural side to the big city like Porto or Lisbon. The need for cheap places for the working class to live became very urgent. Hence, the ilhas appeared. Besides the social problem, there's also some land usage limitation involved in the ilhas's existence. The ilhas have been built behind the middle-class's house, and the owner of the house is the one happened to have the chance to use the land under the limitation, that initially started this prototype of social housing; while they got the benefit from this business somehow helps the poor to settle down. In the period of 1864 -

1900 more than 11.000 ilhas were built in 1050 plots. In the Fig.7 you can see how those different types of ilhas had been built behind the mid-class housing.

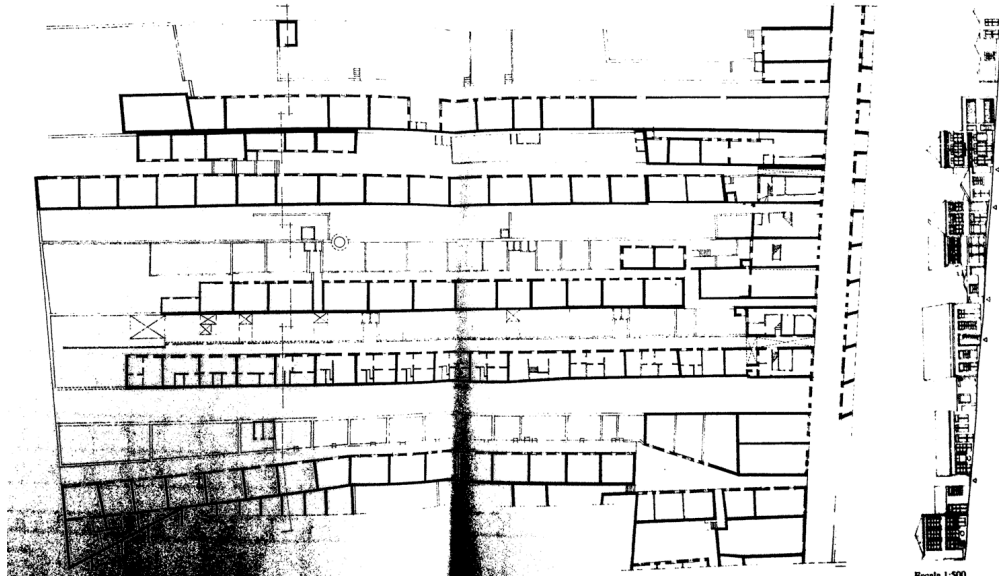


Fig. 7 A big group of ilhas in the street "Rua das Antas" in Porto.

In Porto nowadays, you can still find lots of the ilhas around the city, hiding in the middle of two houses. Basically the entrance of the ilhas starts with a gate and in the central of two lines of one-floor small houses will be a long narrow path to enter, which you can see from the Fig.8. The living condition, as seen in Fig.6, is that normally the inhabitants share the public sanitary facility with neighbors.<sup>12</sup>

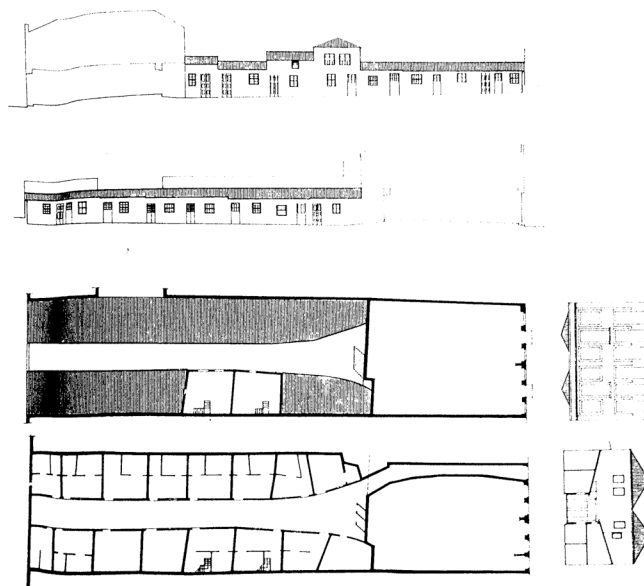
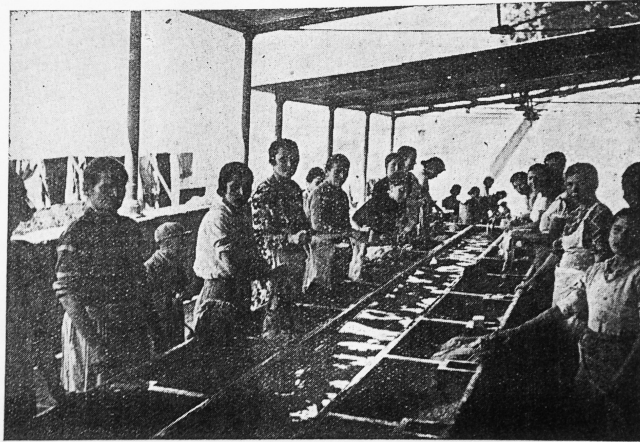


Fig. 8 A small ilha near the square of Alegria, Porto.



Lavadouro das Fontainhas — junto da Alameda do mesmo nome  
Um dos grupos para 20 lavadeiras

Fig. 9 Lavadouro das Fontainhas

### **Tanques Públicos: A very specific hygiene revolution.**

“Tais são as principais características do lavadouro das Fontainhas donde a roupa sai agora bem lavada e com “um cheirinho que até da gósto” como dizem as pobres mulheres que ali vão lavar.”<sup>13</sup>

In the 1937 paper<sup>14</sup> Dr. Oliveira Lima from the Faculty of Medicine at Universidade do Porto e inspector de hygiene e sanidade municipais, mentioned a very specific hygiene issue for the public washing tanks from the old time Porto.

It was a report from the observation of the hygiene problem for the public washing space, so as to find out the urgent need to solve the problem and improve the circumstances. For example, he affirms that some of the tanks were even making the clothes dirtier and that the space smells because its system is

not well designed. Therefore, while the renovation for the washing tank is done, even the police appeared at the washing space to keep an eye on the procedure of how the women were washing the clothes at the renovated public washing space to avoid the bad habit from past of putting dirty clothes into big tanks to contamination the clean water.

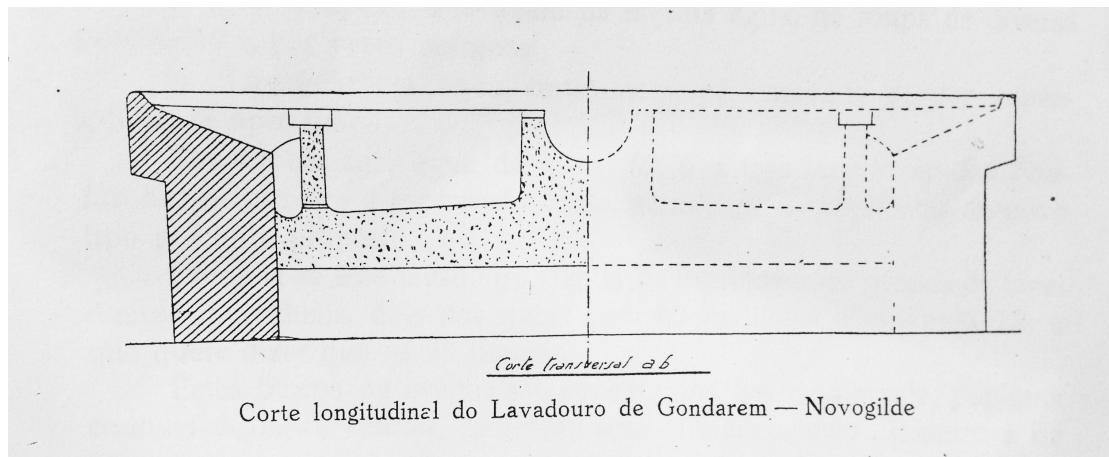


Fig. 10 The longitudinal section of washing tank.

The illustrator, Vereador Snr. Dr. Luiz de Pina made a design (see Fig.10 and 11) to provide more detail about how should clean and dirty water goes perfectly through the innovated washing tanks, providing better condition for those washing clothes in them.

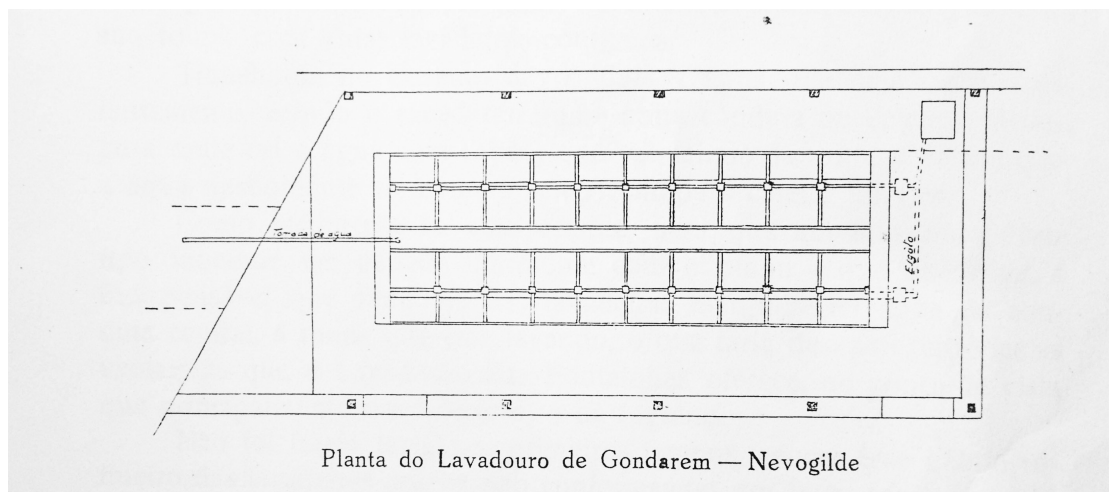


Fig. 11 The plan of washing tank.

In this report mentioned that in the 30's in Porto it's very common for local families to wash their clothes in the public washing space, the statistics during the research: 60(washing ladies for one washing space) x10 (renovated washing spaces) x7 (working hour from 6am-8pm, shifting for 2 hours each period)=4200 lavadeiras (washing ladies), every day in Porto. And thanks to the engineer Snr. Antonio Maria Trigo, who improved the system of the washing tanks and provided the massive usage of washing clothes in public a better condition.

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12/ Images resource: Teixeira, Manuel C. *Habitação Popular na Cidade Oitocentista: As Ilhas do Porto*. Lisboa, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1996.

13/ Translate in Eng.: The poor washing ladies who were washing their clothes describes how good is the smell of the cleaned clothes after washing in the Fontainhas. (Lima, Oliveira. *Os Lavadouros Público do Porto*, Câmara Municipal do Porto, 1937.)

14/ Lima, Oliveira. *Os Lavadouros Público do Porto*, Câmara Municipal do Porto, 1937.



Fig. 12 The washing tanks, March 15'

## **2nd public washing space.**

In between the end of January and beginning of February, I moved to a new place. Geographically, something changed the daily path of the movement of my body. One day, I rode my bike along the riverside then went up hill to the Massarelos area, and then I found the other old public washing space accidentally.

Compared to the one in Fontainhas, the system of hygiene in this one is not so developed. Basically this washing space only has two big tanks filled with water, doesn't have neither any well-designed tanks for washing, nor a separate function for washing with foam and cleaning with water. What interested me in this new discovery is the surrounded environment.



Fig. 13 The 2<sup>nd</sup> washing space I found accidentally, March 15'

As you can see in fig.13 there's one ramp, which is the entrance to this kind of city-valley space. This ramp is just besides the main street, Rua Dom Pedro V with really big difference of ground level (height); it's more or less like a hidden space, which you can easily pass by without noticing. The washing space is embedded in a tunnel or arch-formed space which is very unusual. Besides, in the image below you can see this city-valley did reach some function what valley should have. Plantation, there're small pieces of craggy lands plant with fruit and vegetable in an organic way and ruins with broken bricks scatter around.



Fig. 14 The ruin and the small scale farm, March 15'

*-Theoretical: The rational side of the research.*

## **I. Community-based Art**

The feeling of numbness, which comes after something constantly happening and creates the obstacle for people to experience art. The shock should be generated and break this numbness, and evoke the consciousness of the people, to sense the happening around them so as to keep away from it. Somehow it's relative here to the community-based art, when this continuously happening becomes a phenomenon and the "shock" must happen to recall people's awareness to break through this numbness brings after phenomenon.

"The artist who is able to stand outside the social order and reflect back critically on its shortcomings, bringing the shock of his or her insight to the benumbed viewer."<sup>15</sup> This "able" appears above I'd like to see it as the gifted "ability" that as an artist would have, that can see trivial things differently, by using this ability to invite people to experience art-happening, even though Kester criticized this because it turns the artist into a "privileged bearer of insights, patronizingly informing audiences as to 'how things really are'."<sup>16</sup> when artists see themselves as the one to give the audience sense of being sensitive and receptive to re-experience the "things really are".

"Community-based art: artist + community + social issue = new critical/public art."<sup>17</sup> When Miwon Kwon made the above formula, which should arouse some kind of awareness because of something is reaching certain amount that could accumulate and generate a fixed mode. People should be more critical when something is frequently happening and that frequency could pretty much become the phenomenon, the proper suspect should be brought up to examine this continuously happening.

I am going to take this formula as a critical clue and examining it carefully. I see the difficulties of working with this community in this project. One of the reasons is the difficulty to have very intimate or intensive relationships with this

community in Fontainhas due to the language barrier. Moreover, the definition of community also changed the way of thinking about art, this means how the way a community is constituted could vary the way a project develops. But still, no matter how I define the community in different perspectives, the very specific space where I have worked, Fontainhas, is the place where I have cultivated my project and inspired me to develop the narrative and artistic side of the project.

***-From traveller literature to artist as an ethnographer.***

I used to be fascinated by the travel literature, I loved spending time in the travel section of bookstores and daydreaming about those incredible stories in those far away places. Countless stories that the author had been through and wrote down every very detailed piece of the honest dialogues with the people he/she had met and talked in the grand odyssey.

But then, almost every context of the travel literature seemed to repeat the same approach that is, the stories that they're dealing with is from others. The author is drawn into those stories, when the reader cannot no longer feels the existence of the author, and barely see their figure in the book. The action of "documentation" becomes controversial. It's getting more difficult to delimit the character of being as an author. Is it the person who documents? This person can be seen as an author? In community-based art, the artist is also facing the issue about being as an author. It is a kind of art could be invisible if there's no "documentation" to prove it's happening (existence), especially community-based art is always the kind of art should be seen as a series of process, not a concrete outcome. Therefore, both the author of the travel literature and the artist of the community-based art are kind of in the characters of making "representing".

In 'The Artist as Ethnographer', the art theorist, Hal Foster critiques the ways in which contemporary art has absorbed certain methodological strategies from anthropology, and deconstructs the 'collaborative' interaction between an artist and a local community group in ethnographic terms.<sup>18</sup>

This absorption of "certain methodological strategies from anthropology" can be

addressed through the issue of documentary and travel literature, which the biggest common ground of these types of works is that they are based on the collection of material that belongs to others and can be related to the innate character of human being, which is extremely appealing. But meanwhile it reveals its weakness. The artist as a dominator to control those materials that they hold in hand is tricky to deal with. Mostly, the community-based art is having a big possibility to work with the inhabitants who are tend to be willing to share their stories, hence it become easy and fast for artist as a transformer of their stories to collect those narratives as material for their artwork. This easy and fast is providing a short cut to accomplish the kind of artwork that concerning of human being.

The way to transform and to represent the material into their artwork is the crucial part to expose how artist facing this very contemporary circumstance that had been discussed by Grant Kester, Miwon Kwon or Hal Foster.

“The artist as Ethnographer.”<sup>19</sup> by Hal Foster, is precisely giving the explanation of this conflict between the artist and the community-based art. Even the title of the essay points out sharply to the danger of doing community-based art. The “ethnographer” is the one who’s making a systematic and methodological study of human being and its cultures and from the perspective of the subject in the study to explore cultural phenomenon that happens in the society. By knowing beforehand what an “ethnographer” is about, then it gives better connection of how the artist being seen as an ethnographer in the community-based art.

The role of how the artist engaged himself or herself into the community can be like the one of the ethnographer. Seeing the community as a study object, they are expected to have filed research for the place before the art project starts, made the study of the community its own developing or localized culture and most of all, the human. In this case, interview is advised to support the research work, thus when artists approach to the community, the strategy they’re taking is similar to what ethnographer is doing for study.

A concern about artists doing ethnographic work as a strategy to approach community is the procedure of gathering the material from it when doing field

research. And this process becomes a kind of deprivation of taking away a lively part of their lives. The metaphor of fair trade represents the uneven relationship between the developed country and another still developing one corresponding to the same situation that I see between the artist and the community. The more neglected and underprivileged side is always the one, who is not able to fight and being deprived of their stories and belongings. Yet it's not as radical as the real fair trade issue, nevertheless this "fair-trade-like" model somehow is what I believed that the cooperation with the community represents when we speak about community base art.

Kester argues that:

The rhetoric of community artists who position themselves as the vehicle for a unmediated expressivity on the part of a given community is a potentially abusive appropriation of the community for the consolidation and advancement of the artist's personal agenda, in the same way that the delegate confirms and legitimates his or her political power through the act of literally re-presenting or exhibiting the community itself, in the form of demonstrations and other political performances.<sup>20</sup>

This "re-presenting" or "exhibiting" exposes the weakness of the human being (the social problems) to the public, which is always considering the topic that artist, would like to promulgate and increase the social concerning issue into their work to be more humanitarian, moreover, is the approach that the intermediary organization or association (the one who's taking charge of organizer the intervene of the artist with the community, often is the one who dominates the context of the art projects, even determines the issue that artist should work on) would love artist to deal with towards the kind of "success" they're looking for, to assert they have consciousness for caring the social issue to make them a better reputation with social responsibility.

"Success" is also mentioned in Kester's essay:

The ways in which community artists who address social problems or engage economically, politically, and culturally marginalized groups in

their work overemphasize the primacy of individual transformation as a measure of their project's (artistic) success.<sup>21</sup>

Miwon Kwon mentions that, "Community groups themselves, usually understood as victims of society."<sup>22</sup> Additionally, artists tend to work with the group of community with the problematic and underprivileged condition, hence it's the environment, which is almost living at the edge of the society and considering as the minority. The weakness and the bad living condition even make most of it to be understood as victim. The inappropriate intervention of the artist could bring the small scale of colonialism for witnessing the existence of unequal relationship that the artist puts on the community.

Hal Foster, also mentions how artist may twist the initial virtue towards to negative consequence when they approach the community:

Community-based artists may inadvertently aid in the colonization of difference—for benevolent and well-intentioned gestures of democratization can have effects of colonialism, too—in which the targeting of marginalized community groups (serving as Third Worlds found in the First World) leads to their becoming both subject and co-producer of their own self-appropriation in the name of self-affirmation.<sup>23</sup>

As Hal Foster points, "collaboration" is not linear and always "fair" when artist works with the community, they're often attempt to make the work of art to reflect and arouse the social issues as if community-based art would function as a kind of "soft" social engineering. Miwon Kwon says that artist tends to defuse, rather than address, community tensions and to divert, rather than attend to, the legitimate dissatisfaction that many community groups feel in regard to the uneven distribution of existing cultural and economic resources.<sup>24</sup>

Marginal, underprivileged, neglected those tend to be the usually targeted communities of public art. In my practical project, the community (Fontainhas) that I chose to work with happens to have the conditions above as well, and often the group of the people who lives in this condition is having more difficulty to

access to art, or art is not so popularize for them. Somehow this happens to be the group of people that I'd like to work with because art is something abstract and far from their reality. I'd like to make the connection in between. Nevertheless, it's always accompanied with the issue like in those essays, normally the community is like a small social entity like Miwon Kwon says, is typically understood as a descriptive practice in which the community functions as a referential social entity.<sup>25</sup> It's inevitable to encounter social issue.

***-Art happening outside the conventional space.***

According to artist Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle:

‘There is a growing and disturbing similarity between initiatives such as community policing and (community-based) cultural programs’, both motivated at times by a paranoiac fear of social upheaval. Which is to say, community based art ‘on the streets’, despite the ‘real-life’ siting, serves a disciplinary purpose just as do art museums.<sup>26</sup>

Like in the case of the project “Hu Tong Studio”<sup>27</sup>, which is constantly making art projects with different scales, can be small as mural designing on the wall or big as sculpture or space installation in the community. This is one of the types of community-based art that reflecting and exhibiting the context of the community to the public, and through the action of constantly dig the possibilities from the same working site, and based on this site to develop all kinds of art projects and bring different appearance of it, then this creating an art museum atmosphere that is very specific for this community only.

Most of the community-based art, they tend to make art happening outside the white cube (or white-walled space), which is the common place for exhibiting the work of art. But somehow it's not really break through too much limit that you expect for.

Indeed, working outside the white cube offers the audience the stronger connection of work of art and the specific site, they can experience art in different ways but it also accompany with uncontrollable factor. For instance,

during my art project in Fontainhas, suddenly the flea market event that I've been working on was cut off and the City Hall tries to move it to another place, in the process this changing factor is influencing the final outcome of my project, thus, the artist is not in full control. Moreover, the artist does not always have the control over the duration of the artwork or every piece of art has its own uncontrollable objective to deal with in the process to accomplishing, unlike most of the artwork shown in the gallery or the museum, before it has been exhibited to the public, it's a very one-sided process, the artist works or accomplishes the work under the individual experience.

"Dong Zhou Grand Hotel", the previous project I did, was indeed an art project happening in an unconventional space, from the same site I developed a series of art works talk about different stories but all about shaping this old hotel as a main concept of my project. Thus, it achieved some sort of art museum-like, the hotel is being exhibited in a diverse perspectives.

In *Conversation Pieces*, Grant Kester argues, "Consultative and 'dialogic' art necessitates a shift in our understanding of what art is – away from the visual and sensory (which are individual experiences) and towards 'discursive exchange and negotiation'." <sup>28</sup> Compare to the conventional space like gallery or art museum, when art happening outside of it (like in the community) can somehow break this "individual experience" into another level of "share experience" to create a sense of agglomeration for the place where art truly happen, people can experience the complex of the locus around the art happening with more sensation involved, the experience become more profoundly.

Just as the desire to engage 'real' (non-art) places can prepare the way for the conversion of abstract or derelict (non-) spaces into 'authentic' and 'unique' locales ripe for development and promotion, so the engagement of 'real' people in community-based art can install new forms of urban primitivism over socially neglected minority groups.<sup>29</sup>

That new forms of urban primitivism as the interpretation of doing the community-based art strengthen the identity of the community to be seen as the

minority, even, the minority of art-filed that the community-based artist in terms of sees the community as the “urban” tribe.

## **II. Community**

### ***-The definition of community.***

Since I’m setting my target to work with the community, then it’s necessary to define what does “community” means for my project; it can be very substantial and very abstract at the same time. In a more perceptual and humane way, the community could be seen as a group of people sharing the same resource of the limited range, and this range (in geographic way) is delimited by the inhabitants themselves, within this range the information (from big as the political coherence discuss to small as the discount of the vegetable or fruits) in this community circulate in intimacy way in neighborhoods. The relationship between neighbors is very close so as to exchange their daily life self-experiences of their community. Those relationships or the connections delimit the range of a community, or form or generate a community.

Jean-Luc, Nancy, in “The Inoperative Community” gives an expanding definition of community, though its has more difficult interpretation of community with the rational side but the basic essence is still from a very organic form, about sharing within your members (neighbors) and about the intimacy happening in the community:

Distinct from society and opposed to empire, community is not only intimate communication between its members, but also its organic communion with its own essence. It is constituted not only by a fair distribution of tasks and goods, or by a happy equilibrium of forces and authorities: it is made up principally of the sharing, diffusion or impregnation of an identity by a plurality wherein each member identifies himself only through the supplementary mediation of his identification with the living body of the community.<sup>30</sup>

That singularity of identity could be intergraded into collective one by sharing

with the members of the community, and to gather stronger identity of coherence for the community.

But once I really stepped into the community to start my project, the concept of what constitute a community changed. Kester also mentioned how the community to be formed before and after the intervention of the artist. Kester made a clear distinction between “preexisting, “politically-coherent” communities and those that are “created” through the delegate-artist for the fulfill of an art project.”<sup>31</sup> The one “created through artist” always defines the community as “Socially isolated individuals whose ground of interconnection and identification as a group is provided by an aesthetically ameliorative experience administered by the artist.”<sup>32</sup> This is not what I think before starting my project but agreed afterwards. Once the artists start getting involved themselves into their projects, the community will be seen as a representative object that artist expected them to be in their master plan. Thus, somehow the identity of the community have been chosen or determined by artist not from the community itself.

The relationship between the artist and the subject determined the context of the community in an abstract way. The inhabitants I met there were limited in terms of number, due to the language barrier, so how I feel about this community became a very general perception. In this way, I can only expand the singularity that I encountered and address them to it.

For instance, the washing lady, Luisa, which I met at the public washing space, from our encounter I started my project, and expanded it. Somehow, I centered myself too much around this figure, and making her as a representative character of the place, as she’s having a very particular profession, to wash her neighbor’s clothes. How she lives her life and how her figure immerses around the neighborhood gives me a sense that I know Fontainhas. Meanwhile, I was knowing the place from a very specific object, the appearance of Fontainhas forms gradually from the illusion that I thought it was and the fiction that I created together with Luisa.

***-The collective identity in dislocated community.***

As a cultural outsider, the issue of identity becomes more complex in the dislocated territory. And this is one of the conditions for me to fulfill this extreme laboratory in Fontainhas, which is a very local and a very typical area in Porto and magnify this “dislocated” to extreme.

In the first year of my masters, I made a small intervention at Praça Alegria in Porto, Portugal, and this square happens to be in Fontainhas as well. I tried to cooperate with the local food vendors at the square, and asking them to be part of my “one-day business” project.<sup>33</sup> This was my first approach with the public outside of my country through my art practice. Something interesting happened during the process, my identity as an outsider actually helped project to go smoothly. I felt the outpouring zeal from food vendors because of their curiosity for a foreigner. I think somehow the feeling of being susceptible connects them with the artist easily but this connection could be quite disingenuous. And the intention of taking advantage of those people who is willing to help artist to fulfill the project despite of the barrier of the culture or language, always towards to the danger of abusive appropriation.

Miwon Kwon talks about the way the artist creates or re-creates the identity of the working site through the art project engaging in the community,

Put another way, the identity that is created by the art project is viewed as a self-affirming, self-validating ‘expression’ of a unified community (of which the artist ostensibly is now an integral part), as if the community or any collective group (or any individual subject) could be fully self-present and able to communicate its self-presence to others with immediacy.<sup>34</sup>

Yet, this self-affirming or self-validating expression of the identity that Miwon Kwon mentioned in this paragraph is often seen as the common methodology for community-based artist to connect with the community, but just as the mostly problem in community-based art, it can be a very one-sided communication. In the experience of making projects in Fontainhas, the dislocation seems not only bring the personal influence for the project but also enlarge the social issue. No matter how hard I made the field research, the site, the place isn’t the place I am living in, not the place I grew up with, not the place happening every small

daily life activity that I am familiar with, I have no such connection about it, I'm always the outsider. To have the collective identity seems to be the ultimate way to break the ice.

The art project "El Proyecto Milagro" of the artist Cristen Crujido gives a very accurate interpretation of "A collective identity":

Which is constructed around both their shared class and cultural identification as Mexican workers and the contingent circumstances that brought them together specifically at Sycamore Farms, where they are working in Arizona, 1999. Also there's a interviewing mentioned about the "shared experience".<sup>35</sup> That "shared experience" beyond the limitation of the location or more other barriers, and is exactly what I mentioned previously that what makes a community. Crucially, "Far from needing an artist to 'create' community for them or to school them in the dangers of essentialism, the workers at Sycamore Farms were able to teach Crujido something about collectivity."<sup>36</sup>

This is a very straightforward and honest confession that awakens the community-based artist who wants to create a new identity through their art project.

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15/ Kester, H. Grant. *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, pp.160. University of California Press, 2013.

16/ Bishop, Claire. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, pp.26. Verso, 2012.

17/ Kwon, Miwon. *One Place after Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity*, pp.147. The MIT Press, 2004.

18/ Ibid, pp.138.

19/ Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century, The Artist as Ethnographer*. The MIT Press, 1996.

20/ Kwon, Miwon. *One Place after Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity*, pp.139-140. The MIT Press, 2004.

- 21/ Ibid, pp.142.
- 22/ Ibid, pp.144.
- 23/ Ibid, pp.139.
- 24/ Ibid, pp.153.
- 25/ Ibid, pp.154.
- 26/ Ibid, pp.153.
- 27/ Please check the appendix: Case Study.
- 28/ Bishop, Claire. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, pp.23. Verso, 2012.
- 29/ Kwon, Miwon. *One Place after Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity*, pp.138. The MIT Press, 2004.
- 30/ Bishop, Claire. *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, pp.60. The MIT Press, 2006.
- 31/ Kwon, Miwon. *One Place after Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity*, pp.145. The MIT Press, 2004.
- 32/ Ibid, pp.145.
- 33/ Please check the appendix: One-day Business.
- 34/ Kwon, Miwon. *One Place after Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity*, pp.151. The MIT Press, 2004.
- 35/ Kester, H. Grant. *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, pp.164. University of California Press, 2013.
- 36/ Ibid, pp.164.

*-Pre-action*



Fig. 15 Me, washing my clothes in public in January, 2015.

**Washing my clothes in public as a routine.**

I took my intimate clothes -underwear and pajama- to the public washing space in Fontainhas to wash and dry them there. I started immersing with the community by very particular action, “washing clothes”. Bringing private daily practice to public, trying to experience and to have contact with the local inhabitants who are using this public washing space as well. This small practice gave me lots of feedback so as to drive me forward of my project.



Fig. 16 The washing lady, Luisa.

I met three ladies there while I was washing my clothes, one of the ladies, Luisa told me that she washes clothes for neighbors as a part time job, and the paid is about one basket for 5 euro, which is quite surprised me that this kind of work still exist.



Fig. 17 Drying my panties and pajama.

And when I was drying my clothes there and planning to pick them up the next day, the lady warned me, “No no no, don’t do that! The prostitute around loves

stealing the panties.” Thus, the action can’t be completed, but I like the fact that it changed my initial plan in this way. It’s the process when I started dealing with the reality; I accepted this external factor as part of my project.

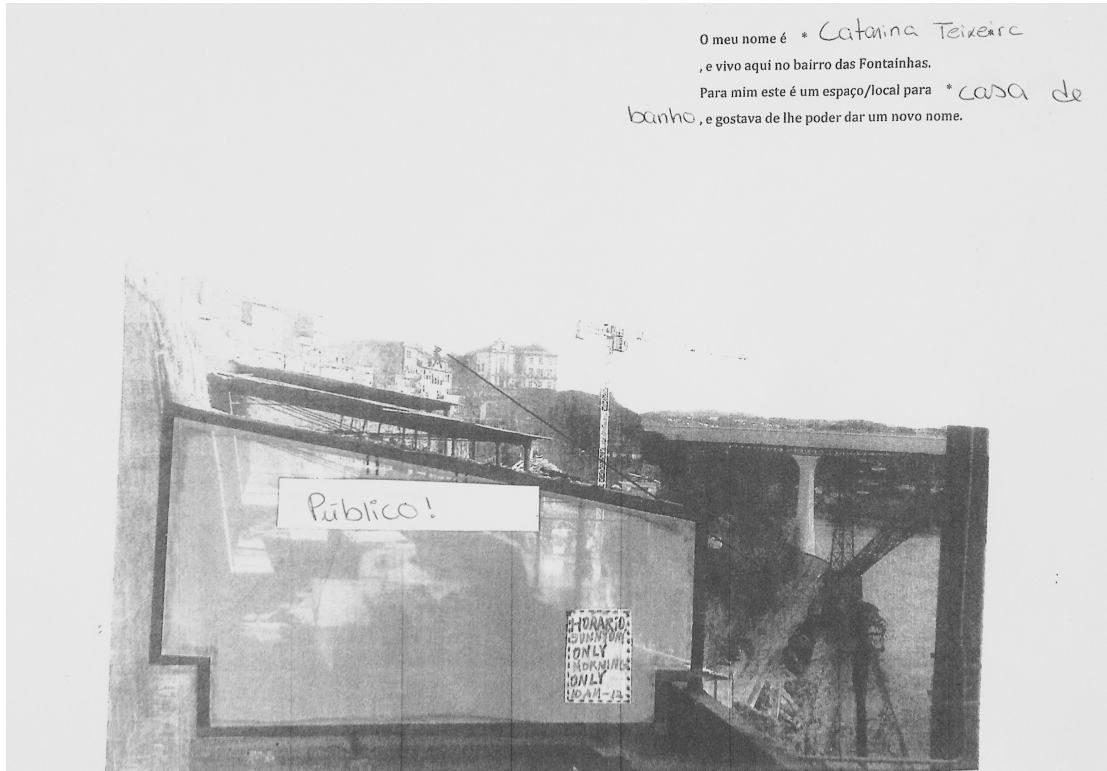


Fig. 18 One of the questionnaires I made with the local kids: by Catarina.

### **Collective work: “Name the public washing space” questionnaire.**

From the first action, I became very interested in that private on-going business of the washing lady in Fontainhas. Trying to make several small interventions on site to create a real laundry shop environment. Before the action, I made some questionnaires (see Fig.18) for warm up for the project, and would like to know how the inhabitants who live in this region and the kids in the association of Fontainhas think about this public space. The questions were simple, it was asking their name, and for them this is a public space for \_\_ (verb.) and asking them to (re-) name the space.



Fig. 19 Making the collective work with the kids in the Association of Fontainhas.



Fig. 20 Making the collective work with the inhabitants in Fontainhas.

The different names that I collected from the questionnaire are quite funny and random, from just “Ola, sumo!” (Portuguese for “Hello, juice!”) to “Piscina da Fontainhas” (Portuguese for “Swimming pool of Fontainhas”). All kinds of

interesting names can appear.



Fig. 21 The protest: against the City Hall's decision to move the Feira da Vandoma.

### **The Protest: Say no to the relocation of the Feira da Vandoma.**

In June 2015, more and more news came up about moving this local flea market to other place near Campanhã (about 2 km away from Fontainhas), while most of the inhabitants or the sellers want it to stay, hence the Fig. 21 is the protest in front of the Porto's City Hall, which I was also there to support. This issue just happened during my project and in a sense it gave another layer meaning of my later experimentations (souvenir shop in Fontainhas and silk printing t-shirt project).



Fig. 22 The words floating on the washing tanks, the shooting I made for supporting the stay of the Feira da Vandoma.

#Feira da Vandoma, Fica aqui (Flea market of Vandoma, stay here).

Project

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*-Action*

### **Intro: Fiction in community.**

Fiction works like a verb for me, when the reality is too harsh to deal with, then “fiction” it. Community-based art is always considering working with this kind of condition, the object or the environment both are in a more complex status for artist to deal with, normally it’s all about very real reality that I’d say.

The community provides the ready-made script for making fascinating narration, and the inhabitants are just like born to be the characters for the story. Community-based artist would just take those materials and create their own fiction stories from the community with the conflicts between the reality and unreality (fake).

The way I approach my project is always to reflect reality by re-creating a fake or virtual scene (scenario). In the four experimental projects I made on site, I worked on two spaces in Fontainhas with two specific activities, washing clothes and selling second-hand clothes. From empirical observation, I tried work with the real material and deal with the issue around the reality of the community, and through my artistic interventions, giving the different perspectives to reflect those realities through the fiction I created for Fontainhas.

### **I. Tanques Públicos nas Fontainha:**

Three uniforms, three jobs, and three spaces

/ Through the action “wear” by the specific objective to fulfill my work of art

The Fontainhas laundry shop

/ Work with specific objective/ to create a public space from the localized features

### **II. Feira da Vandoma:**

Silk printing I love Fontainhas t-shirt

/ Through the action “wear” by the random objectives to fulfill my work of art

The Fontainhas souvenir shop

/ Work with random objectives/ to create a public space from the localized features



Fig. 23 Luisa with her uniform.

### **Three uniforms, three jobs, and three spaces**

The idea was to create a laundry shop atmosphere so as to bring up the private business working under the table (secretly, only knew by word-of-mouth) to the public.

During the interview, I got to know more about the lady. She actually has three part time jobs, thus she showed me each apron corresponding to each job she has. From this, I tried to become an apparel designer and redesign the uniforms for each job, by creating three uniforms representing her three professions and the places she's having her own daily life, and sneak into her reality by wearing my art piece in disguise as her daily object –Apron (uniform).

Through the action by giving some one my customized work brings the relationship of the artist and the participant into intimacy. The feedback became two-sided in this way, moreover the status in between the artist and the participant reach some sort of balanced level, which is the ideal status for me to work with people to accomplish my art without improper appropriation.



Fig. 24 The plastic fabric with the words “Lavandaria das Fontainhas” hangs on site.

### **The Fontainhas laundry shop**

To create the laundry shop environment at this hand washing public space, I started not only giving the uniform for Luisa, the washing lady, but also in physical aspect, inspired on how the shops on the streets of Porto show their shop sign, I developed the similar way, I used the plastic fabric with the symbolic colors of Porto, blue and white, as the light material so as to hang on the old structure on site. Adding the words “Lavandaria da Fontainhas” (Portuguese for Laundry shop of Fontainhas) on it as the sign of the shop at the entrance of the space. Through very simple action by giving a shop sign, and point out or enlarge the specific program in this local public space, also expose the existence of this private business to the public by creating a fake laundry shop.

For me it's very interesting to fulfill my work of art not just with something external but be accomplished all together with the original elements from the site.



Fig. 25 The “I love Fontainhas” printed on the clothes hanging at the public washing space.

### **Silk printing t-shirts with “I love Fontainhas”**

The idea is to get the material from the site itself, so I thought about buying cheap second hand clothes exactly at the Feira da Vandoma. Through the very simple connection of “I Heart NY” t-shirt as a symbol of souvenir for tourist from worldwide, I transformed it into a Fontainhas version, which is not a touristic developed area at all here in Porto, but actually full with rich contexts of local culture. The clothes are secondhand thus the original diverse of pattern with the same printing “I Heart Fontainhas” gave a sense of humor of the project.

Now, the City Hall of Porto wants to relocate this event not only geographically but also in abstract way, to relocate the context (orientation) of the event and make profits from changing the local event to tourism-oriented. The t-shirt with “I Love Fontainhas” in this case is a way for people that against the City Hall and support the Feira da Vandoma to stay in Fontainhas. Put another way, it is not a t-shirt for tourist but actually for the inhabitants of Fontainhas, who truly love the community that they live in. Once the t-shirt has been worn somehow it’s a voice speaking for representing their identity for their beloved community.



Fig. 26 The printing event on site in front of the local cafe during the flea market.

### **The Fontainhas souvenir shop**

One Saturday morning I brought all the tools at Feira da Vandoma, creating a temporary souvenir shop of Fontainhas by giving free printing the words “I Love Fontainhas” on the clothes or any fabric that people gave me, through the printing session to spread the concept of strengthen the identity fast and efficiently.

Maybe the series of the projects for the Feira da Vandoma in Fontainhas just came in the right time; now the market’s location is under threat. The t-shirt I bought on site seems the last stock of memorial souvenir from the flea market. Besides the tourism meaning, the souvenir in this project has different interpretation because of its place, its issue and its own context. Souvenir is an object about the space and memory, people want to own them to represent the places they’ve been to and the time they’ve spent in the past, thus, creating own souvenir shop specific for Fontainhas somehow is like a ritual in memory of the disappearance of the Feira da Vandoma about to happen in Fontainhas.

After action

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### *-Conclusion*

Humane connection is always how I assert art's happening truly; therefore getting people involved is important for my work and the reason why I chose a local community to work on. From the singularity of the human being to the plurality of the community, I made art happen from the production of very specific objects to the collective ones.

### 1/People

Community-based art is extremely process-driven, the artist experiences the fluids of change constantly during the process, and "people" is always the crucial factor that dominates the orientation of the project. For instance, the washing lady, Luisa who is the key character in my project, determines where my project should move. The narrative of the project is re-constructing from the people who lives there, gives me clues and motivates me to the final outcome of the project. Community-based art is the kind of art that alters along the process, and for me this process can be simply described as the process of having a dialogue with "people".

During the time I worked with the inhabitants in Fontainhas, I realized that the artist is always the active side of the dialogue. It was reasonable, since the artist is the one in need. And this "need" represents, explains all that is concerned when the artist is dealing with the "people" as the material for the work. Does this "need" means that the artist needs "people" to fulfill their own work of art and to reach "success"? Or can this "need" be transformed into a two-sided need so as to achieve a "fair trade" situation that I'm trying to reach on my experiments? This can be as simple as enabling the "people" to experience art as how they experience the surprise, which brings the joy, or the changing of the emotion. At least in my projects, from the apron I made for the washing lady or giving the free printing for the inhabitants, both are representing as two-sided feedback and worked as a fair trade.

## 2/Space

From the initial site-observation I tried to transform the complex relationship between private and public to new forms of thinking in my work.

The object I worked with was the user of the public space in Fontainhas by what is normally considered as a more underprivileged group of people. The way and the frequency they're using the public space is very different from the bourgeoisie class. The process of having contact with the specific class or group of people brought me to explore all kinds of alternative and local spaces in Fontainhas, and giving a new norm to define the private and public with uncertainty. The condition of how people live their life that determines the function of the spaces and also that the context is decided by its usage. The people and the physical object appears in the space somehow tells the spectator of its private or public, and it can be very perceptual.

Through my project I exposed this uncertain relationship I found on site. When Luisa was making her private business in the public space, through the artistic intervention, I revealed this private business to the "public", and exposed its "publicity".

## 3/Myself

How the community-based artists expand their power from the community, in a way is how artists think about art as a tool of empowerment. And this process of "empowerment" can be seen as a statement of art.

Working with communities brings the discussion about ethics in art. The more interactions I have with people the more I know myself, and how I think about "ethics". Does art exist as some kind of authority disguised as democracy in community-based art? I believed the answer is an obvious yes (unfortunately), but it shouldn't be concluded as a negative result, it's a tactic to work with the community, and what should be the concern is the ultimately purpose or motivation of embodying the authority. From the experiments I did, taking the human being/citizen, as the priority is somehow how I expected myself to be

acting. Humane is the ultimate action in art; it's the reason of art's happening and existence.

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Appendix

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-One-day Business-

-Case study: Hu Tong Studio-

-The Worst Tours-

-Associação Solidariedade Zona Fontainhas-



Fig. 27 One-day Business, Cheng Ching-yu, Dec. 14'

### **One-day Business.**

(My previous project from the 1<sup>st</sup> year of master)

It's a temporary intervention at Praça da Alegria in Porto. From the initial observation of the strange water basin in the middle of the empty square to the vegetable and fruit market take place at the square, I started my project.

The ladies sell the stuff there are the people who stay at the square most of time, thus I took them as the subject implying the character who is in between the vague line of private and public. I made a one-day business contract and asking them to rent me one piece of land at this square, and indeed the way I approached is pretty much like renting a piece of land, I made a architectural plan on the floor by using tape, and the plan I made was a bathroom, a very private space in the public space, and via this plan the water basin no longer doesn't make sense, now it's reasonable to be there. The tricky part of the contract is while the ladies signed the contract, they did see themselves as the owners of this square, which is so called public space.

## **Dislocation: The relationship between the project from Instant Hu Tong Studio and my thesis project.**

This is a case study that is pretty much related to mine. Making projects in the other side of the world, west, and far east (Asian in west and Westerner in Asia), moreover we both zoom in the scale into the very local and very typical community and discuss the way of living, which accompany with the massive cultural impact.

Just as the ilhas in Porto, Hutong is the very typical neighborhood in Beijing, China. Based in this neighborhood, all the projects are developed from this particular type of living. Small intervention happening in Hutong in micro-urban scale, but at the same time the visionary perspective of the intervention can be extended as big as a city-scale so as to reflect the circumstance of the Beijing city.

I like these two projects “The Urban Carpet” and “The Identity”, somehow inspired me how could a foreign artist try to immerge into dislocated territory. Thus when I start my project, I asked myself is it any possibility that I’m not just like a foreign artist at service for the community? Representing my self-identity into the artwork also should be discussed in my project.

Introduction: About Hutong and the Studio.

(Resource: <http://www.instanthutong.com/index.html>)

The city of Beijing is formed by a succession of parallel alleys mainly crossing it from east to west, which have the ancient Mongolian name of Hutong. The width of these alleys varies from 3 to 9 meters. The Siheyuan courtyard houses form a continuous tissue, filling the space between the alleys; they are more or less 70m deep and about 20m wide. An ancient architectural typology has been used to build the entire city of Beijing. Every single building is considered part of the whole that is harmonized in a kind of great horizontal monument. Like the Hutongs, also the Siheyuans were built according to a project that has remained almost unchanged since the time of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.). The buildings forming each Siheyuan, organized in a sequence of courts, may house

an extended family of up to three or more generations. As a result, since the publication of this treatise all buildings are governed by a rigid system of standardization that has eventually become an essential element of Chinese architecture. The spaces of Siheyuan have proven very adaptable to changes during different periods of history. Since 1949, following the strategy of redistribution of dwellings, spaces that were originally occupied by one family was assigned to several nuclei. The wooden frame structure and the brick partitions, through simple rearrangements and constructions of new rooms, made it possible to adapt the buildings to a new lifestyle.

### **“INSTANT HUTONG”**

Instant Hutong project explores the borderline case of Hutong districts in old downtown Beijing threat by development. The project started in 2006 and it is intended as a series of installations and events on the border between arts, social investigation and urban research to screen the uniqueness of an urban tissue made of lanes and courtyard houses and the community of people living in it. The work involved questions such density, unstructured re-appropriation, gentrification, relationship between people and their physical space, property speculation, disappearing community and identity.



Fig. 28 Embroidery on canvas, approx 200x200cm, 2008-2009

## Urban Carpet

Series of 8 maps embroidered on canvas with the same technique of the propaganda slogans realized on large fabric and used by the communist party during the seventies, which have been lately filled with white thread wool insertions. The 8 maps depict different Hutong areas in downtown Beijing, with a size of approximately one square kilometer each and a population of 30000; these areas have been isolated as autonomous towns within the big city. Since 2009 the carpets have been shown to the Hutong dwellers through street public temporary events, hanging them up on ropes, wires and threads commonly used by local Beijing residents for their clothes to dry.



Fig. 29 1500 red stamps, Plexiglas display, dimensions variable, 2007

## **Identity**

Stamps have a central role in Chinese people's life: they are used to confirm agreements and validate actions. In a certain way losing your stamps is like losing your own identity. The stamp doesn't engraved with a name but it has been carved with a fragment of map, a group of house, and a piece of city, to mark the relationship and identification between people and their living space.



the typical social housing in Porto. This was my first experience of the ilhas (island in English).



Fig. 31 The worst tour organized by Porto-based local architects, explaining the typical social housing “Ilhas”.

I did the tour again during my thesis research. I tried to gather more information about Fontainhas and asked them to go a bit further for my 2<sup>nd</sup> The Worst Tours.

“The context of ilhas is changing by time, now the inhabitants of the ilhas is getting less and less, the new generation of original inhabitants are leaving this bad living condition houses, the immigrants from North Africa or east Europe move in instead”, said Pedro (Guide) while we stopped by in front of the ilhas.

Regarding Fontainhas, where the washing place is located, he said:

“You know they used to pay the rent by day in the ilhas, it’s a very precarious life, and that super steep path from the public washing space toward the Douro River used to be the way that women carried the stuff unloaded from the boat on their heads to Fontainhas.”



Fig. 32 The entrance of the Associação Solidarieidade Zona Fontainhas.

### **Associação Solidarieidade Zona Fontainhas**

I got the contact of this association in Fontainhas from the parish office (Freguesia da Sé). I took this clue to start the connection with the more “social issue” side of the project; ironically this is how community-based art should fulfill as a stereotype.

I was a bit surprised that this association actually is inside of the elementary school territory also how this association function, it is more like a day-care center for local kids (from low-income family and having problematic issue at school), wasn't like a meeting place for inhabitants that I expected before I got there.

The president of the association in Fontainhas, José, explained me how he runs this association and had already been working here for 5 years. Most of the students here pay very less (12euro per month) because most of them are from low-income family (some of them are here is because the social welfare department from council gave the association some cases who needs help or support). The teachers here are all volunteers from all kind of fields or students

from University who need credits by being as a volunteer for some exclusive course.

I presented my project for the public washing space and explained him the process of how I started and developed. Based on the knowledge he got from my brief introduction, he provided me so much interesting information about Fontainhas afterwards, which is really out of my expectation. The evolution of the washing clothes as a profession in this district, the documentary, the narrative, and the old movie.



Fig. 33 Portuguese movie, "A Costureirinha da Sé", 1959.

The reason why he showed me this movie is because his aunty was in this film; also the place is exactly the public washing space I'm working on, but back to around 50 years ago.

The other material I acquired from Jose is exactly about the lady, Luisa who I'd

like to work with for my project. When I showed Jose some photographs about my project he recognized the lady Luisa and told me that he had an interview with her together, that's why I get the chance to watch this documentary from Porto canal online website.

## **"Lágrimas não são argumentos" - A miséria das gentes do Porto**



Fig. 34 Documentary from País Porto Canal, 15-10-2013, <http://portocanal.sapo.pt/noticia/9186/>

“20% da população do Porto vive em bairros sociais, mas ainda há quem esteja em lista de espera. No bairro clandestino do Nicolau há 15 famílias que vivem sem água, sem luz e sem saneamento. Luísa Pereira, 43 anos, é uma das moradores de um bairro onde as lágrimas já secaram. Traz para casa 280 euros por mês e diz que não tem como sair do bairro que tanto adora.”

\*Following are some quotes or fact that I found it important for my project in this interview.

“I had a dream about it that one day I'll have washing machine at home.”

“I am the washing machine.”

“Sometimes my son takes the bath at the public washing tanks.”

“Every day my son complaining and wants to move out from this house, but I like here, the surrounded environment and the neighbor I used to have. I only hope I can have water and electricity at home.”

Said by Luísa Pereira.

There’s no water no electricity in the house but she still have everything at home, like television, fridge, computer, and video game but without function.

“These group of inhabitants who were forgotten by government are like living in the sub-world, it’s not easy for them to be part of the society.”

Said by José Alcarva.

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