# Yogyakarta Exegesis

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## The Fieldwork

This journey took us to Yogyakarta for five days to meet with various arts and community organisations across the city, exchange information and learn about the work being done in Yogyakarta.  It was an opportunity for me to see a part of the world that I have never been to.  Indonesia is the first Asian country I have visited, and I didn't go in with preconceived notions of what to expect.

When I arrived, the overwhelming visuals, smells and sights were not unfamiliar.  I must have seen scenes like this from out of a movie, with motorbikes whizzing by each other and down laneways covered in street art, produce and food stands.  This environment became clear that there was a lot for me to take in, and to capture visually through photography.

We stayed at a nearby hotel during our visit around Yogyakarta, which was clean and sterile compared to the organic and sometimes chaotic nature of the surrounding city.  We first met with a group called Lifepatch, focusing their research around technology and interface, connecting everyday people through technology.  We toured a number of art spaces, community organisations and research centres.  What became interesting to me was how these spaces were situated amongst each other, with each space having a unique environment set up to welcome hospitality and exchange.  This was apparent in the design of the spaces with easy access to kitchens to make hot tea and food, big tables and lots of seating.

The aim of my fieldwork was to capture this experience and engage with the site more deeply with photography  In this exegesis, I explore what went into the photography, who was I in the space and what was the purpose of my intervention in my fieldwork.

## Who am I?

I am a student finishing my Masters of Arts and Community Practice.  I grew up in a small city in Maine, the northeastern most state in the United States.  Growing up, our family home was always warm and welcoming.  My parents enjoyed hosting others and we had foreign exchange students, travelling musicians and even Russian defectors stay with us.  Each time someone new would stay with us, they would get the full experience of Maine, by tasting fresh lobster, seeing the coastline, and meeting the community.  Connecting with new

people at home is similar to the experience of meeting people abroad. I've learned a lot from being a host and bring that experience and knowledge into my fieldwork with me as a guest.

I was interested in photography since I was a kid, using mostly disposable cameras I could get at the local pharmacy, I would capture many different things, usually involving trips and travel I did with school or groups. When I was in my undergraduate Multimedia Arts degree, I started the school's Photography Club and organised trips to the desert or other places of interest in Arizona, to collectively observe and capture work to be shared with each other and in the community.

My practice of visual fieldwork is something I have been naturally drawn to, and hoped to open up in the exploration of my semester three and four fieldwork activities, along the Bass Coast in Victoria, Australia and then Yogyakarta, Indonesia. My goal in this fieldwork was to use and test some of my methods that I have developed in digital photography to help capture and develop a compelling story around our Yogyakarta fieldwork.

# The Photos

## What is my aim?

When I undertake visual fieldwork, I like to think about who the photography is for, if it is for anyone. In the case of the photography in Yogyakarta, I considered my MACP colleagues, and the organisations we visited as who the photography is for. In this way, my aim was not to take stunning photographs that I could commodify and sell in a gallery, but use it as a unique contribution to exchange and share with my peers and colleagues. I knew that the photography would be a useful tool for people to use in order to remember the trip by, or to use as reference in reflection, research or an essay. It could be used by Kunci Cultural Studies Centre, for example, as documentation of their current place and aspirations. The photograph of the copy room, for example, showing so much potential in allowing self-publication at the cultural centre when the room is functional. It is not my aim to tell people what the photography is for, I presume the images have different meaning to each party.



Photograph of the new printing and copy room at the Kunci Cultural Studies Centre

In an article by Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Cornel West, "Marginality as site of resistance", they warn what being subject to research can be. It can strip the identity from the person and allow someone else to claim as their own. As they make an example, "No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer the speaking subject and you are now at the center of my talk." [1] This quote beautifully articulates the dominance that one's ego or ambition to have the spotlight while stripping the identity and authorship of the original. It resonates with modern Australian and International recognition of indigenous people and land. This describes exactly what I am trying not to do in the field and with my photography. I am not trying to claim ownership and authority over the representation of places and others through my work and travel with respect as an outsider in someone else's land.

Understanding who my work is for, I am able to focus on capturing moments, objects or scenes of interest that I find relevant to my, or my peers experience of the site. In this way, I become actively aware of the space, how it is operating, moving, and anticipating a moment to capture that I might presume to be memorable in some way for me or my audience.

## Curation

My method as a photographer is not to burst shoot lots of photos and cull it massively when curating a collection. Generally, every photograph chosen was angled, positioned and captured for a specific reason and was timed to capture in as few photos as possible. In this collection of 102 images, 308 were originally taken. The 102 were chosen through a curation process weighing technical and narrative decisions in on the process.

Most photographs were captured an average of 2-3 times, with variations on exposure, timing or angles. This is not because burst shooting isn't an effective method if you are a photographer shooting action, but I prefer to orchestrate and capture a very specific moment. So in the collection chosen, the majority of images capturing people were taken only once or twice. In this sense, I am demonstrating that the fairly small number of photos to choose from, with a full third of the entire library being curated into the collection points to my method as a photographer, in that the image doesn't emerge through curation, it starts on the site.

## Post Production

Post Production extends the capabilities of the photographer by giving them flexibility to manipulate the image after capturing, hence where the term "post-production" comes from. It is common knowledge in the industry of film production that the term "we can fix it in post" should never be uttered on set. This is a true warning to artists, in that relying on post

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[1] Bell Hooks, "Marginality as site of resistance," (Cambridge, 1990).

production to produce a brilliant product will leave you wanting more.  Post production is powerful if wielded properly in photography or filmmaking, but can be best thought of as a 'safety net' for the work.

That being said, digital photography technology has advanced a great deal over the last number of decades with the invention of the digital format, the digital single-lens reflex camera ('Digital SLR'), digital mirrorless cameras, software and accessibility.  One powerful expansion of the digital technology was the adoption of the RAW file format, which began emerging in common operating systems by 2005.[2]  This new file format differs from that of the more common JPEG format in that it is not just an image, but stores lots of metadata about the digital photograph.  The camera stores many variations of colours within the file as well, with a RAW file storing an enormous 64 billion colours, vs a JPEG with 16 million colours.[3]  This means that the photograph can be brought into post production for 'non destructive' editing.  Non destructive means that because the 64 billion colours are stored the moment the camera captures the image, you can change your camera settings after the fact to achieve a more proper balance after the fieldwork is over.  While JPEGs are editable in software like Photoshop, this is destructive editing of the image, because it is digitally manipulating it beyond the original data that was captured by the camera capable by the JPEG format.  If your camera shoots on RAW, it is best to keep your files in RAW, which can easily be exported to the more standard JPEG format after your adjustments have been made.

With this in mind, Post Production can be considered in the field and weighed when capturing an image.  When it means capturing a moment at the wrong white balance, or other adjustments that might be off, post can give artists a large safety net if wielded properly and the right file formats are used.

In this collection, the work was catalogued and processed through Lightroom. Post-processing took more time than the photography itself because each image in the collection is carefully analised and adjusted to bring out the most balanced image for the output.  In this collection, I was particularly interested in capturing the natural light, colour, expressions of people and emotion of the site.  I often find new and deeper things within the photographs that I may not have noticed consciously when capturing during the post production process.

## When does the digital photograph become 'complete'?

It can become confusing when the digital photograph is complete, when it can continue to be manipulated beyond the point in which if in contrast, developing traditional film, your photograph would be set and final.  Sure, you could re-expose your negatives, but that differs in the way that a digital photograph is.  The digital photograph has no physical form, until it is output to physical form, such as printing.  The digital file itself is a malleable 'object',

[2] "Raw image format," Wikipedia, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raw_image_format.
[3] "How to make non destructive edits with Camera Raw," Howard Pinsky, Adobe, 2013, https://helpx.adobe.com/photoshop/how-to/make-non-destructive-edits-camera-raw.html.

as discussed in the Camera RAW section, in that it can continue to be shaped and tweaked without damaging its integrity.

In the case of the photography from Yogyakarta, the collection is complete for the output that was intended: to distribute it on Flickr for my peers and colleagues. If some of the work were to be output to print or gallery, I would consider adjusting it to be more suited for that environment. In this way, digital photography may not have a definitive line for what is considered 'complete' or 'original'.

## The Full Collection

The collection of fieldwork photographs were published to Flickr, a free photography hosting and sharing platform with lots of control around copyright and metadata for the photographer. This is the creative component to this exegesis, along with the 'Photo Groupings' section below and for the purposes of this paper, is referred to as the 'Full Collection'.

View the Full Collection here

# Photo Groupings

Part of what emerged after curation were pools of perspective and images that related to a specific experience of the fieldwork. These photo groupings were arranged into the following areas, which tell key parts of the story during the fieldwork trip. Groupings which emerged included: street art, texture, hospitality, accommodation and ritual. These groupings are only highlights of what could be pulled from the full collection.

## Street Art
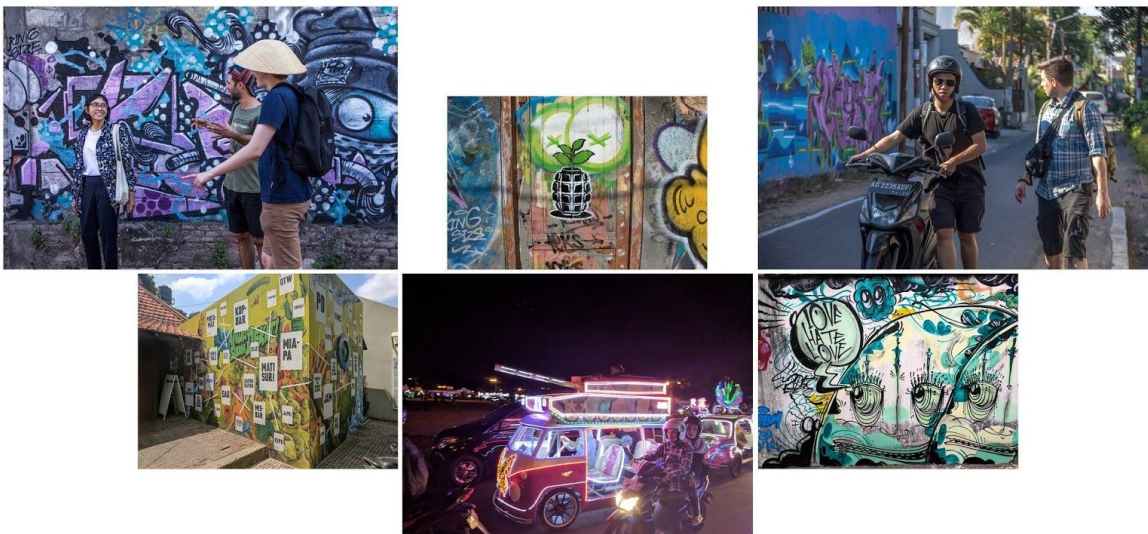


[View Full Size](#)

Aesthetically, the colours and shapes jumped off the walls to me in Yogyakarta. Vibrant street art complimented the bustling and energised city. Coming from living in Los Angeles and Melbourne, street art acts as a marker in those cities, with prominent artists that easily emerge by walking the streets and observing the work. Yogyakarta was no different. The street art was whimsical, detailed and complex. There were a number of artists with multiple works that our group picked up on throughout the different neighbourhoods around the city. The street art in Yogyakarta visualises part of the environment of being in the city.
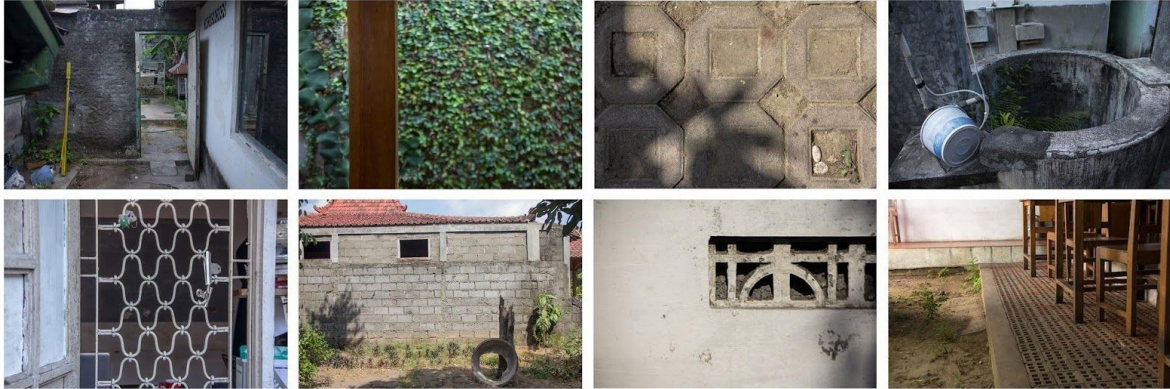
# Texture

The textures and patterns in Indonesia are unique, from bricks lining the walls and houses, to the water streaking on the concrete.  There were many natural elements around Yogyakarta, like dirt, natural light, plants and open-air dwellings.  All of this helped form part of the unique environment that Yogyakarta was to me, versus areas I have lived, such as Maine, Arizona, California or Melbourne.

With photography, I like to capture the tactile feel of the places I go, which is one element that helps form my visual narrative about my place.  I want to be able to share with others how the concrete feels, smell the plants and soil.  Through this visual narrative, I am mindful to include 'texture' as an important component of my collective visual documentary work, so people can touch and smell the environment, providing a more accurate context of any subjects or stories of interest in the collection.

Going back to an article from Danny Butt's "Techniques of the Participant Observer: Alex Monteith's Visual Fieldwork", he references ethnographer Clifford Geertz in describing the practice of ethnography in which he says, "'certain activities everywhere seem specifically designed to demonstrate that ideas are visible, audible, and one needs to make a word up here — tactible, that they can be cast in forms where the sense, and through the senses the emotions, can reflectively address them.'" [4]  In a similar way, the photography doesn't just aim to be a singular narrative of a subject, such as 'the art centres of Yorgakarta', but rather intends to show a rounded picture of all of the senses and emotions around the fieldwork.

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[4] Danny Butt,"Techniques of the Participant-Observer: Alex Montieth's Visual Fieldwork," in *Alex Montieth: Accelerated Geographies*,(New Plymouth: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2012),128.

# Hospitality

The hospitality in Yogyakarta was generous and warm with fresh tea awaiting us at most stops, along with fresh food that was placed out or being shared with us.  Perhaps this hospitality is similar to the way I might go out of my way to greet guests into a new space, but this culture of hospitality felt genuine and deeply rooted in the local culture.  This is evidenced by the communal spaces, in which lots of seating near the kitchen is available, with fresh plates, glasses and tea.  The importance of food and drink gestures of hospitality was supported by many of our discussions with organisations and collectives in Yogyakarta, many of which had easily accessible kitchens.

In Nuraini Juliastuti's article "Wok the Rock & Co.: Making Sense of Friendship in Yogyakarta's Art Scene", she introduces her friend, "As an artist, his works are based on his histories of friendships. These are the kinds of friendships that border on partnership. Collaborators in a partnership can be friends. While building on a state of shared emotions and trust, in the case of Wok, friendship can be seen as a labour association from which a partnership can potentially be constructed." [5]  Juliastuti is describing the importance of personal connection in the work that is done in the Yogyakarta art scene.  This is perhaps why the environments around the art collectives and spaces are set up for such an intimate exchange.  Lifepatch described the importance of choosing a house as their site for their office so that people feel like they are at home and are more comfortable to exchange than they would be in an office environment of a business district.

Also captured in this collection on the leftmost photograph is the generosity of the invitation into so many spaces.  Pre-fieldwork commencing, part of our larger group received a tour of Survive Garage, a local artist collective.  The photo of our host touring us around with open arms represents how I felt about most people I met in Indonesia.  Warmth and hospitality seemed central to the culture of those parts of the cities I visited, leaving me with inspiration of how I can be more hospitable as a host in the future.

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[5] Nuraini Juliastuti, "Wok the Rock & Co.: Making Sense of Friendship in Yogyakarta's Art Scene,".

# Accommodation

I found it interesting how separate our accommodation was in every way to the actual experience in and around Yogyakarta.  It was as if you stepped into a portal to another place entering the pristine, air conditioned hotel building.  Prior to the start of fieldwork, a smaller group of peers and I stayed at a hostel close to the city.  The building was open-air, not air conditioned.  It was hot, so hot that I couldn't sleep much my first night there.  After a night, however, I acclimated to it, and I preferred the fresh air at night while I slept.  I am glad that we had air conditioning to enjoy after a warm day, but the stark contrast between the environment inside the hotel ecosystem is apparent and captured in the photography juxtaposing it with the hostel and among the rest of the collection.

# Ritual

One of our last outings was to a temple just outside the city where we saw a number of traditional performances and dances from people in surrounding communities.  Afterwards, we had a group discussion with food and tea with the performers, learning that these dances are deeply rooted in the local communities that these performers come from.  Each of the performances tells a unique story about Indonesian culture.

I focused on capturing the performances from many angles, showing the juxtaposition of expressions and movement among each other, in the environment on stage, with musicians playing in the background and other performers engaged with the current performers on the sidelines.  I was particularly interested in the expression and personality within each of the performers and the artistry and craft that went into their clothing, masks and puppets.  The body language and facial expressions of the dance communicated beyond language barriers.

# Outputs

There are many possible outputs for the digital photography. It could be printed and displayed in a physical space. For the moment, the images are in digital format, waiting for some kind of physical output. The groupings above aim to visualise how the work could be displayed in a physical space as collections or parts of a physical display. The interplay among photographs in a grouping brings the work of curation to a new creative level, allowing the narrative to be controlled by juxtaposing the sizing and positioning of the work together.

Many possible digital and physical outputs exist with the RAW photograph. For the purposes of this fieldwork exercise, the work was distributed using Flickr, which was one of many possible hosting options for the work. Flickr is owned by Yahoo and offers free hosting and sharing of photography without retaining any of the rights to your work. [6] [7] The privacy policy of Instagram, in contrast, illustrates that the Instagram and Facebook platforms are set up to keep and distribute your intellectual property.[8] Yahoo, in contrast, is not set up to have rights to your photographs. Flickr does not express any rights to your work in their Privacy Policy, which is managed as a company under Yahoo. The photography on Flickr is not data that is accessible for Yahoo to distribute or use.[9] Public who access the photographs are not required to sign in, nor are they encouraged or prompted to sign up for Flickr or Yahoo, making Flickr an all-around good option for me to host and share my work with others online.

This platform is not as secure as self-hosting your photography, which is not difficult and would require a subscription to a hosting service such as Squarespace, for an entry-level web-design experience at a more costly price, or a local hosting and domain, which is inexpensive to maintain and platforms like Wordpress are easy to install, use and maintain. Self-hosting bypasses the worries of privacy policies and can be effective ways to show portfolios or public work.

These considerations around distribution and outputs tie in to my seminar at ISI, in which we explored the questions: 'What is data?', 'Who owns our data?' and 'How can it be made accessible?' It may seem accessible to share to Facebook the fieldwork photos right from the camera app of the phone, but the cost of that is sending your intellectual property rights into the shredder of the Facebook Privacy Policy. The work on Flickr can still be stolen, but the platform aims to protect the intellectual property of the artists who submit to it. Deciding how to distribute your digital work is a prescriptive model, with each possible outcome with a unique set of benefits, and side effects.

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[6] "Flickr Privacy," Flickr, 2017,
https://policies.yahoo.com/us/en/yahoo/privacy/products/flickr/index.htm.
[7] "Flickr Intelectual Property Policy," Flickr, 2017,
https://policies.yahoo.com/us/en/yahoo/privacy/products/flickr/index.htm.
[8] "Instagram Privacy Policy," Instagram, 2013,
https://policies.yahoo.com/us/en/yahoo/privacy/products/flickr/index.htm.
[9] "Yahoo Terms of Service," Yahoo, 2017,
https://policies.yahoo.com/us/en/yahoo/terms/utos/index.htm.

# General References

There were a number of references around my fieldwork activities, some of which I bring with me always, and some that were specific or new to my time in Yogyakarta. Each of them influence my activities in the field, regardless of the activity I am undertaking: photography, exchange of information, forming new relationships and in many other contexts.

## "How Do You Feel About Squeezing Oranges" [10]

Perhaps one of my favourite texts that has come along with me into new work is co-authored by Sally Treloyn. When I was introduced to her in 2016, I was given a copy of her paper, "How Do You Feel About Squeezing Oranges? Dialogues about Difference and Discomfort in Intercultural Ethnomusicological Research Collaboration in the Kimberley". The writing is a collaboration with Rona Googninda Charles and discusses how research can be, has and is an extractive method in many cases. We assume that the extraction of information from a community is good, for the greater knowledge and archival of that information, but from the perspective of the community whose information is being taken, this process can feel like "Squeezing Oranges", as Rona put it, "'How do you feel about squeezing oranges? Do you think that you leave the glass of juice with the community? Or, do you think it is empty?' Confused, but aware of the power of the metaphor to communicate the symbolic violence and colonialism of the documentation project, Sally responded, 'How am I squeezing an orange? I am not taking knowledge away. Those old people sat down with me day after day for two years and had their own agendas for putting down the knowledge that they did.' Through this exchange, while our shared agendas were noted, our difference was clearly marked. We sat in a place of discomfort, both unsure of the ramifications of ethnomusicological intercultural, intergenerational collaboration." [11]

This article applies to me in the field, in that my work must always aim to be a process of vitalisation, not extraction. As a photographer, this informs my practice in that I am capturing something that can be given back and shared with hosts and peers. I am not capturing people from Yogyakarta to tell a compelling story that can be commodified and sold, or locked in a prestigious archive, but rather as a way of exchange and sharing.

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[10] Sally Treloyn and Rona Googninda Charles, "How Do You Feel about Squeezing Oranges? Dialogues about Difference and Discomfort in Intercultural Ethnomusicological Research Collaboration in the Kimberley," Melbourne University (2016).
[11] Ibid., 172-173.

# Reflecting on my practice through Yogyakarta

What this fieldwork exercise has allowed me to do, was to collect data from many angles.  I was able to analyze how I work and operate through traveling with good colleagues and friends, in an area of the world I had never been.  The photography, as has been in much of my traveling, gives me a thread to focus on while I experience my surroundings and connect with people.  In many instances, photography frees me to explore more deeply, because I have the interest to capture a complete picture.  This is a method that I will continue to use in my practice and through my travels.  My exploration through photography deepens the engagement for me in the site and offers something personal to exchange.

The fieldwork exercise also illustrates to me how much I value the room to be curious, explore and discover, rather than sometimes building off the techniques of others in a research methodology.  In the article "R-Words: Refusing Research" by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, they describe the importance of this space, "Research is just one form of knowing, but in the Western academy, it eclipses all others. In this way, the relationship of research to other human ways of knowing resembles a colonizing formation, acquiring, claiming, absorbing, consuming. In the current neoliberal moment, there are few spaces that remain dedicated to human curiosity and human inquiry aside from research. This component of research is valuable, and worth sustaining, yet we must simultaneously protect and nurture other non research spaces/approaches for curiosity and inquiry. Calling everything research doesn't help to ensure that there are multiple opportunities to be curious, or to make meaning in life. We aren't advising anyone to insert artificial or insurmountable barriers between research and other forms of human inquiry, or to think of research and art as impermeable or discrete—just to attend to the productive tensions between genres/epistemologies, to gather the benefits of what might be a dialogical relationship between research and art." [12] What has emerged through reflection of my fieldwork practice is how important this space of openness to discovering the unknown, driven by curiosity is in my practice.

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[12] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "R-words: Refusing research," (Harvard, 2014), 237.

# Conclusion

Through this fieldwork, I was able to explore my documentary photography practice as part of my growth in developing my overall fieldwork practice.  Photography provides a way for me to engage more deeply with my site, and intervene in a way that can be used as a resource for myself and others.  Through this paper, we explored my personal and artistic background and how it relates to the site of Yogyakarta.  I unpacked the photography, methods on site, curation and post production.  The collections offer some key story narratives that emerged through the curation of the work.  I explored how the digital photograph can be output to many formats, and the considerations around distribution.  My visual fieldwork practice extends my seminar topic, using the documentary work as an example when considering the questions: 'What is data?', 'Who owns our data?' and 'How can it be made accessible?'.

These key areas are what helped inform my intervention in Yogyakarta through photography.  The opportunity to meet new friends, colleagues, organisations and collectives with my cohort is an unforgettable experience and will continue with me through my life and practice into the future.

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