

অন্তর্বর্তী শ্রম

变迁劳力

TRANSIT LABOUR

শ্রমের আবর্তজাল, অঞ্চল, এবং সীমানা

回路、区域、边界

CIRCUITS, REGIONS, BORDERS

DIGEST #1

JULY 2010

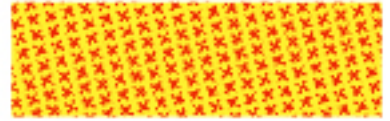
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# SHANGHAI PLATFORM STATEMENT



**JUNE 03, 2010**

Over the past several years, efforts to integrate invention, innovation and creativity into the core of economic production have been gaining momentum in China. These measures have been pushed by a combination of state and commercial capitalism, as well as growing social and cultural acceptance of entrepreneurial ventures. Shanghai in particular has taken up an ambitious program, with the intention to take a leading role in developing the creative and knowledge sectors within China as a means by which to 'upgrade' its economic structure. The evolution of creative, cultural and knowledge sectors accompanies, and has been accompanied by, accelerated urban development, new trends in higher education, increased rural to metropolitan migration, an influx of foreign 'experts' and new circuits of international trade. An emphasis on immaterial production has emerged within this configuration of China's labour landscape. This is not to say that manufacturing has been superseded. Rather, new combinations of manufacturing and immaterial labour are forming and becoming part of cross-border constellations involving economic infrastructures built on the logistical organisation and management of human mobility, waste and service sectors, transport and urban regeneration.

The first of the Transit-Labour platforms has been established in Shanghai to think through the different modulations of the shifts that are currently taking place across the city, the Chinese continental-state and the Asian region at large. In the frame of the project, we explore creative labour and its tributaries by widening the usual conception of creative work beyond the creative and cultural sectors. The platform examines industries often not associated with such categories, including services, logistics, waste management, technological development and engineering. The vertiginous speed at which Shanghai has emerged as a key player in China's creative, innovation and knowledge markets makes it a prolific location for experimental methods of investigation that look at the interactions between economic, structural, social and biopolitical labour apparatuses. As part of the broader project, we will explore these phenomena as they occur in Shanghai to find interconnections with conditions in Kolkata and Sydney.

At the same time, what interests us are the flows and impasses of mobility – the differential border zones and regimes – that such apparatuses engender: the relations that are formed between workers, the tensions that invest professionalism and

collegiality, the pathways that commuters carve out in the city, the sites of waste collection and exchange, the economies of aspiration and *guanxi*. Contemporary capitalism extends, retracts and multiplies the perimeters of borders across different geographical scales, effecting, and being effected by, practices of governance and production. By looking at changing patterns in zoning technologies, border policies and policing, market developments and social mobilities we can discern not only the shifts occurring in the Asian region but in the conceptions of the nation-state and regionalism more generally.

The Shanghai platform brings together local, national and international creative and cultural workers and researchers to investigate the different geographies of Shanghai's new labour fields. We hope to move in diverse trajectories, looking at these labour forms and processes in their many permutations, not to reduce them to a singular category of creative or knowledge work but to draw out the imaginative and cognitive aspects that they appropriate and valorise. Simultaneously, we want to trace and discuss some of the antagonisms, the points of conflict and stress, the psychic and somatic pathologies that workers in these sectors experience, the everyday struggles they face and the strategies they invent that both succeed and fail to generate the worlds they desire.

By organising three intensive events in Shanghai in June-July 2010 we are seeking to open spaces online and offline for dialogue and debate rather than to pursue an encompassing enquiry. The Shanghai platform is the first experiment in the larger project method, and with it we hope to begin a process of conceptualisation and exchange that traverses the regional and the transnational, to build networks of research and practice that can find ways to negotiate and analyse the current and future trends in creative, inventive and knowledge production across Asia, Europe and Australia.

[HTTP://TRANSITLABOUR.ASIA/BLOGS/  
SHANGHAI-PLATFORM-STATEMENT](http://transitlabour.asia/blogs/shanghai-platform-statement)

Alongside official procedures for waste management in Shanghai, lateral networks of high flexibility and efficiency have developed. Our research follows the logistics of waste management, the use of public space and the organization of transitory labour. The method is a form of descriptive empiricism and applies architectural tools.

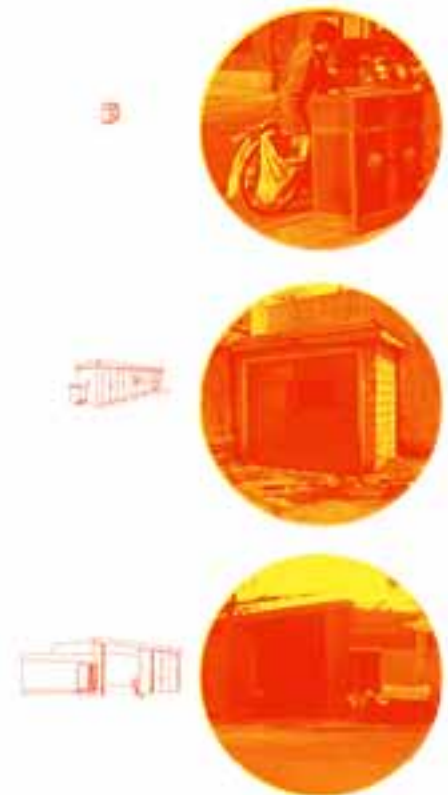
Our mapping of the official waste infrastructures locates three types of containers: the public waste bin (equipped with compartments for recyclables, unsorted matter, batteries and cigarette buds), the bins for residential household waste

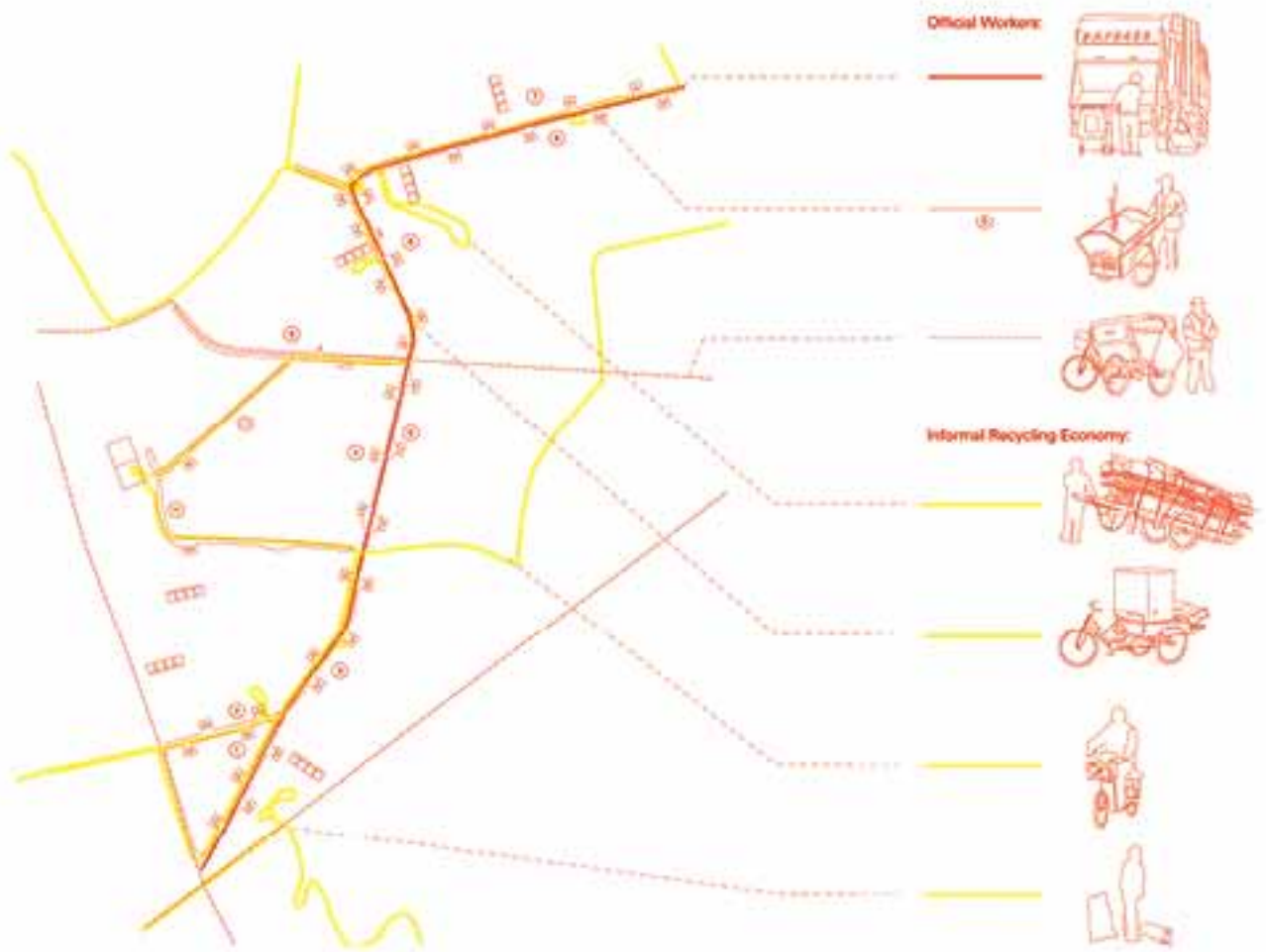
(contained in actual 'garbage buildings') and the district's waste depot for temporary storage. The typology of containers defines the hardware for the official municipal waste management as well as the informal networks of collectors.

The fixed points of accumulation have flexible uses and provide focal points for the labour of waste economies. Informal waste collectors work through the recyclables compartment of public waste bins or meet official street cleaners to secretly exchange the recyclable goods for money. Here waste turns into value and enters the global market of recycling.



Map Waste Collection Hardware














**Official Street Cleaner**

**Informal Recyclables Sorter**

**Informal Collectors of Recyclables**



<b>Working area:</b>	 600 m diameter	 200 m diameter	 5000 m diameter
<b>Monthly Wage:</b>	 1400 RMB	 2000 RMB	 Up to 6000 RMB
<b>Work Route:</b>	 12 km	 1 km	 12 km
<b>Hours per day:</b>	1.5h (1.5h lunch break) Monday - Sunday: 5 am - 6 pm	2 - 3h	10h per day Monday - Sunday: 7 am - 6 pm not on rainy days

# TRANSLATING // THE TRANSCULTURAL

SOENKE ZEHLE



## ACCESS

to language, explore conceptual reaches, collate connotations, record resonances across multiple registers of articulation, capture aspects of the contemporary conjuncture

## ANTAGONISMS

a refusal of the inheritance of sovereignty, a refusal to bracket questions of violence involved in processes of cultural constitution, a refusal of the subsumption of knowledges to serve predictability, risk management, creative neo-industrialization

## COMMON

always-already there, retrieved rather than created, creating possibilities to speak universality without sovereignty

## ECHOES

echoes of a will to connect that reverberates across borders, of post-tricontinentalist projects subsumed, to dismiss, to depoliticize, to de-singularize, under the all-too-generous umbrella of the postcolonial, echoes that cannot but involve our acts of communication in genealogies of usage

## ECOLOGIES

trace renegotiations of culture/nature dichotomies, follow shifts from disciplinary to security in regimes of nature, map the logistic of apparatuses, discourses, institutions that turn objects into objects, subjects into subjects, relations into relations

## LABOUR

the becoming-cultural of the economic, economies of expenditure rather than efficiency, a labour of loss at work in the return of the soul

## NETWORK

grasping the simultaneity of condition, state, process, of constitutive dimensions of contemporary and historical forms of networking

## SCIENCE

the production of knowledges to sustain ethico-aesthetic practices, sciences of sensibility rather than service

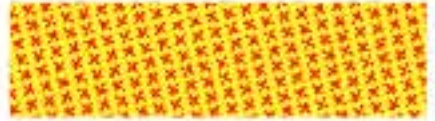
## TRANSLATION

paradoxes of correspondence and incommensurability, of acts of translation that are also acts of refusal, attentive to traces of the way experiences of migration inscribe themselves in specific idioms and languages, a practice to bring into existence alternative worlds and their representations

[HTTP://TRANSITLABOUR.ASIA/BLOGS/  
TRANSCULTURAL](http://transitlabour.asia/blogs/transcultural)

## XINDANWEI: NEW WORK UNIT

ANJA KANNGIESER MAY 20, 2010



Xindanwei is translated as 'new work unit'. When you enter it into a search engine, you are directed to sites that describe Shanghai's Xindanwei as 'a coworking space and creative community', as a 'workspace for out-of-box thinkers and action takers'. Put concisely: 'Xindanwei isn't just about sharing office space and desks, it is run more like a club of creative workers. Xindanwei is a community of freelance professionals, start-up entrepreneurs, tech workers, writers, designers, architects, artists, students and others from overseas and China; whoever thinks working with other cool people is more productive, more inspiring and a lot more FUN!'.

The space is located in the Changning district, which was formerly an industrial area reconfigured through creative clusters; Xindanwei is housed in what was once a Shanghai plastic mold factory. In 2008 the complex was turned into a creative space by 'creative chief' Song Bo. This is a form of urban regeneration and development that is increasingly common in Shanghai. The industrial aesthetic remains, however, and is put to use to accentuate the stripped back, informal and networked environment that the space advertises. Liu Yan is the CEO behind Xindanwei, which she opened in mid 2009 with two friends, Chen Xu and Xu Wenkai (aaajiao). All three come from creative, cultural and consultational backgrounds, whether as researchers, bloggers, programmers, artists or cultural entrepreneurs. Liu Yan has a creative commons sticker on her computer and she describes herself, Chen Xu and aaajiao as 'independent thinkers, not attached to any political powers'. This is perhaps reflected in the way that the space was set up, with the three operating as coworkers rather than in a hierarchical formation.

Liu Yan explained that it took around six months for them to discover their roles in the organisation; she is passionate about event organising, she plans the content of events and enjoys narrating the stories of Xindanwei, so took on the role of spokeswoman and CEO. When I asked her how much she works she laughed and replied that her job is 24 hours a day. She works after she has put her children to bed and often finds that even though she would love to spend more time in the school community she often has to cancel the commitments she makes there. At the same time she makes sure not to book work events for more than two nights a week. She sees the key social skills required for her job as having charisma – 'when you say something people really have to feel it' – and being a good listener – listening to other's suggestions, putting others 'on stage' and letting them take charge. In other words, she is well trained

in soft skills. aaajiao, she said, 'doesn't like talking to strangers', he spends a lot of time on his computer, so he acts as the web maintainer and designer. Chen Xu is careful with money and always pays attention to the financial aspects of their ideas, so she takes over the financial and administrative duties. These roles, says Liu Yan, formed naturally according to desire and talent, although there was no way to avoid conflicts and misunderstandings during the process of navigating each others capacities and interests.

According to Liu Yan, their need to establish a space like Xindanwei came from an exhaustion of large scale, financially oriented cultural projects. With the boom in creative and cultural industries, the majority of such projects are employed for propaganda and commerce in China. In reaction to this, Xindanwei was set up to be small, intimate and not purely commercially driven. The founders see it as a 'social enterprise' rather than a corporation or non-profit, and it acts as a locale to facilitate a community for the fragmented industries of creative immaterial production: design, visual art, writing, architecture, amongst others. Here, the meaning of social enterprise becomes clear; socially driven organisations that use market strategies and structures to achieve a social goal.

There are four different categories of users of the space: full time, part time, random and contact. For 2000rmb/month, full time users can enjoy the 'security' of biometric recognition – fingerprint scanning to allow for differential access. It is unclear whether this kind of surveillance is benign or not, given the local context. According to Liu Yan the space is open to anyone to use, and a range of people go there for meetings, talks, debates and events, from professionals to what she describes as 'activists'. Predicated on principles of knowledge and idea sharing, the hope is that the space will spark new connections between people, modes of exchange and reciprocities. Indeed, the cofounders set up Xindanwei as a space for 'dialogue'; as a platform to offer people 'space...to let them explore a bit more and think again about ideas and get connected with others and inspired by others and maybe mix them up with other ideas to become a bigger idea'. The aim is to generate collaboration, models of coworking counter to the hierarchies of conventional labour structures, and to encourage 'innovative' social and professional developments.

Yet there is a certain ambivalence around the space to do with its organisation and its model. Liu Yan is candid about its operation. When we spoke about the intersections between culture and commerce, she recounted a story concerning the

model they desired. A meeting was held with supporters of the space to gauge their opinions. Half of the group recommended the discourse around coworking and collaboration be dropped to limit confusion in favour of positioning the space as a service or business centre. The other half recognised the 'competitive advantage' of the space being its uniqueness and its distinction from conventional models. This difference is what allows Xindanwei to fill a niche in the market. Liu Yan says such spaces are almost non-existent in Shanghai and this is why it attracts interesting discussion and debate not found elsewhere.

From its classification as a social enterprise, to its emphasis on social networking it is obvious that Xindanwei predominantly deals in the production of social and cultural relations. Its mode is one of affective entrepreneurialism, under the rubric of sharing and the common, echoing a particular brand of Californian liberalism. But the usual questions used to critically analyse such spaces to do with statist and commercial complexities seem too clumsy to fruitfully apply here.

The processes of labour on which such spaces run are not hidden. If anything they are celebrated. This is an hub for hyper connectivity, freelance innovation, 'sharism', with a 'social agenda'. It is doing something which verges on radical in that this social agenda is ostensibly its driving force, with its dedication to coworking and open knowledge production – practices that have been understood in autonomist traditions as the social production of value. At the same time, there is a concern with political critique. 'I would never position us as politically correct or as an activist organisation as its very risky', says Liu Yan. 'If you really want to do something in China you better avoid those words'.

Xindanwei navigates these different discourses and agendas. Much of this has to do with Shanghai, one might suspect. 'Shanghainese also have an opinion toward the political system here in China but this is a commercial city and those voices are not so loud', explains Liu Yan. 'I wouldn't say that Shanghai is politically indifferent, its just those people compared to the West are still quite small. I mean this is quite normal when you have a country that's been censored for a long time and has a planned economy and people don't really have too much of a sense of expressing ideas but it's coming, definitely. If you check twitter you have many followers from Shanghai and every day they are talking about politics'. While the immediate questions about complexities, collusions and agendas may be inappropriate given the regimes and systems of this city, the circuits of production playing out at Xindanwei require a careful and tactical dismantling. Moreover, the question needs to be asked, in a city with such a strong history of surveillance, statism, censorship and now economic growth, what does it mean to be politically and culturally subversive? And it's only in this context that Xindanwei can be understood.

[HTTP://TRANSITLABOUR.ASIA/ABOUT/](http://transitlabour.asia/about/)

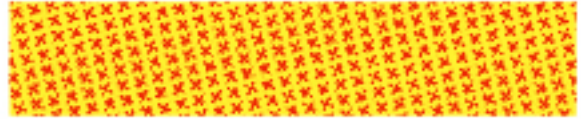


Michele Traverso,  
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# FROM IT FACTORY TO ELECTRONIC MARKETS

Ned Rossiter, June 13, 2010



## FROM IT FACTORY TO ELECTRONIC MARKETS: SPECULATIONS ON CIRCUITS, REGIONS, LABOUR

In programming field trip visits to two seemingly incongruous settings - an IT facility on the outskirts of Shanghai and Baoshan market for electronic waste, second hand products and fake gadgets - we see how both regions and social mobilization are configured as singularities within a larger constellation of relations. Following earlier waves of manufacturing across East Asia where 'Made in Japan' and, later, 'Made in Taiwan' became synonymous with a range of electronic commodities and attendant mythologies of techno-cultural dystopias, over the last two decades China has become renowned as the planet's epicentre for electronic manufacturing. When purchased, one of the primary attractions of an electronic commodity is how clean it seems. The lovely smooth surfaces coated in buffed plastics or complex metal composites provide a suitable black box of mystery for their interior circuits and generation of values that betray the toxic conditions of production and their effects on worker's health and the environment. Such is the fantastic power of the commodity-form to abstract itself from the experience of labour and life.

But the index of labour, as Marx so astutely observed, is never entirely divorced from the commodity-form. The relation between labour and the production of electronic commodities will of course be palpable at an IT factory in ways that can never be the case at some flagship store for global electronic brands. But even at the factory, the body is separated from the commodity-form as a result of the division of labour and the centrality of machines to the manufacturing process. What we see is the body in toto, but it is a body that is at once machinic (as technical apparatus rather than social assemblage of the general intellect) while refusing any totalizing subjugation by the machine through the assertion of special human qualities. We hear the language of dialects and notice the skin of ethnicities. Here is the most basic of anthropological encounters. Without some kind of hermeneutic device we are left in the realm of the senses - responses that nowadays are discredited within academe and its disciplinary sensitivities to the politics of the other (which arguably are more about a narcissistic politics of identity and the self). No matter how momentary or partial, we

search for a cognitive model with which to render the mutability of sensation as stasis in the grid of reason. This is the problem of method.

Where the IT factory's PCB circuit board - 'the basic platform used to interconnect electronic components' - is part of an East Asian regional formation at a transnational scale, sites such as Baoshan electronic market in urban Shanghai combine intra-national regional formations in terms of the domestic sale of second-hand commodities and electronic waste with a global traffic in the recycling of e-waste. By studying the movement of e-waste, we find that electronic components - many of which have been made in China - are grafted in different ways to national and international regulations designed to govern the treatment of electronic waste. As is well known, the Chinese government banned the importation of e-waste in 1996 (Maxwell and Miller). Yet the informal e-waste economy is substantial and thriving in small businesses in cities along the eastern seaboard. Some of these businesses located in places like Baoshan market integrate the reassembly of second hand computer parts with a sideline in recycling e-waste purchased both through domestic and transnational circuits of trade. In both instances, electronic objects that may come from the same family of parts hold substantially different status at the spatial scale depending on their circuits of movement.

In moving from the site of manufacturing to one that deals in the detritus of consumption, we might discern the multiplication of regions. The circuit boards produced at the IT factory are part of a social life of things that become mobilized across the regional space of Asia during the process of assembly. The composition of low-wage labour also constitutes a regional formation, but one that in the case of the Shanghai IT factory is drawn from provinces set back from the special economic zones stretching along the eastern seaboard. In China's manufacturing, construction and service industries there's a tendency for labour to assemble according to provincial filiations. The network of waste workers in Shanghai's Xu Hui District (or former French Concession), for example, are migrants from Anhui province and their self-organization of labour is predicated on provincial connections. To take another example: many of the workers in the e-waste and second hand electronic markets in Ningbo, a city south of Shanghai, migrate from Jiangxi province. And in the case of Nanhai - 'one of the best digital cities in Guangdong'

(and one of the biggest centres for e-waste and second hand electronics) - workers stem from Hubei province. It's worth noting that Nanhai also has a substantial ship building industry, and it's perhaps no surprise that Guangdong province has more relaxed borders of control when it comes to the importation of illegal e-waste from overseas markets such as Japan, Europe, the US and Australia. Businesses in Ningbo, where border control at the port is more stringent, find alternative routes for the movement of illegal e-waste - cities such as Nanhai serve as a key source for the transit of waste from within the sovereign territory of the nation; in turn, unsold products in Ningbo's second hand markets are considered e-waste and sold back to junk men and women from Guangdong and Taizhou (Lv Yulin).

In a site visit to Baoshan electronic market last week, Anja Kanngieser found that workers came from quite a wide range of cities and provinces: Suzhou, Nanjing, Henan, Jiangxi and Anhui. Yet at another electronic market, not so far away on Fuxing Lu, workers came predominantly from Guangdong province, the centre of the electronic manufacturing and waste industries. While e-waste seemed to be something on sale in the case of Baoshan with all its regional cosmopolitanism, this wasn't the case at Fuxing Lu. Yet often e-waste is hard to see immediately, and it's a sort of sliding object or category in the sense that unsold second hand products, which are often reassembled into hybrid objects to be sold again, then become 'e-waste' when they can't be sold as products and are sold on to junk men/women as waste. Junk is not junk, in other words. Or rather, the same looking junk becomes quite different junk – an object lesson on the empty signifier. Both waste and labour; then, comprise forms of social mobility that can be understood as special intra-national and trans-national regional formations whose borders are highly elastic.

In searching for an analytical method with which to make sense of these various mobilities, we have been struck by the role of logistics as a biopolitical technology of control in governing the movement of people and things in the interests of communication, transport and economic efficiencies. 'We understand method to emerge precisely from the material circumstances at hand .... Border as method thus entails not only an epistemic viewpoint from which a whole series of strategic concepts as well as their relations can be recast. It also requires a research process that continually accounts for and reacts to the multifarious battles and negotiations, not least those concerning race, that constitute the border both as an institution and a set of social relationships' (Mezzadra and Neilson). What, then, might logistics as method hold for the analysis of transit labour? As we note in our catalogue of project concepts: 'Logistical methods of organization apply to contemporary production and patterns of mobility'. Organization, in turn, becomes a question and practice for the arrangement of bodies and brains mobilized as labour:

In governing labouring subjects and the treatment of objects

or things, logistics deploys vastly different technologies of capture depending upon the scale of the business. In fieldwork undertaken with my MA students at Nottingham, Ningbo this past semester; it was fascinating to get a sense of the differences between logistics operations at CMA CGM, a large French multinational shipping firm, compared to Maoyu International Freight Agency, a local Ningbo company with around 20 staff that acts as 'a forwarding agency which in fact doesn't have cargo but only work as a coordinator linking and smoothing the communication between shippers, carriers and other relevant links within the whole logistics network' (Wu Yang). As Huang Yunbo noted in her fieldwork report, 'Software used in KPI tracing in the big company differs from the small one. As mentioned by our interviewee that a powerful EDI [Electronic Data Interchange] system is extensively applied within international companies that it can automatically generate update information from different database instantly to ensure the operation go efficiently and properly'.

In terms of working conditions and experiences, 'People working in the international giant seem to work in a less stressful environment for most of them show confidence in achieving targets for their performance and can finish work on time without OT. Interviewees in the small company expressed that sometimes they need to work after office hour for customer-relationship building. Other findings are the role and influence Worker's Union in the big company. Although most people apply for Union membership as joining the company, they don't treat union as a powerful place for right protection. Even most of them don't know how the Union usually work. The way workers claim their rights not through any organization as Worker's Union or Foreign Enterprises Service Company but through the communication with the immediate boss which are regarded as the direct and efficient way. The reason for this, according to the interviewee, that there is no a culture here to seek help from 'Worker's Union' (Huang).

In the case of the local Maoyu International Freight Agency, Mukda Pratheepwatanawong found that the 'The culture of the company is very informal. As the company is small, investments on KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) or ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) databases have not been done. Employees use traditional clocking machine to record their working hours and the Human Resource department will measure their performance based on their work, working hours and their behaviour. There is no labour union in the company and therefore employees would seek government support if they have any issues with the company'. And Wu Yang: 'Because Maoyu is not a big company and quite a free styled privately-owned enterprise, the working environment is casual and eased. No formal dress is requested and non business talk is fine as well. Meanwhile, there is no KPI (Key Performance Indicators) or ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) to systematically measure the employees' performance but only depending on customer

numbers, profit margin, workload and working behaviour: The only visible measurement on site is clocking machine. Though the physical environment seems quite informal here, the working pressure still exists everywhere. For sellers, they have to keep good relationship with existing customers and search for new ones; for buyers, they have to negotiate lower prices from shipping companies so as to compete with other forwarding agency; for documentation specialists, their job is most detailed and trivial, so intensive concentration and well-organized personality are requested. For all of them, working over-time or working outside workplace is quite normal... Besides with social ability, computer skill is also a very important way to increase communication efficiency. Instant messenger like MSN or QQ are used to not only timely report updated information to customers, but also track and trace shipment from carriers. Other software like Cargo2000 as an internal data system and communication platform can help keep the orders systematically and follow up the processing more easily'.

In visiting the IT facility and second hand and electronic waste markets, we might inquire how logistics plays a role in governing labour and commodity flows. In doing so, we might also discern how regions are constituted differently according to such technologies of management and control. Perhaps, more curiously, we might discover the possibility for what I have termed elsewhere 'the production of non-governable subjects and spaces' that translate 'the indifference of communication'.

#### LINKS

<http://transitlabour.asia/concepts/>  
<http://transitlabour.asia/publications/>  
Maxwell and Miller, [http://orgnets.net/urban\\_china/maxwell\\_miller](http://orgnets.net/urban_china/maxwell_miller)  
Mezzadra and Neilson, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0608/mezzadraneilson/en>  
[http://www.meadville.com.hk/pcb\\_conventional.html](http://www.meadville.com.hk/pcb_conventional.html)  
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BLOGS/WHAT-RESEARCH-PLATFORM](http://transitlabour.asia/blogs/what-research-platform)



2009 factory district, Shanghai



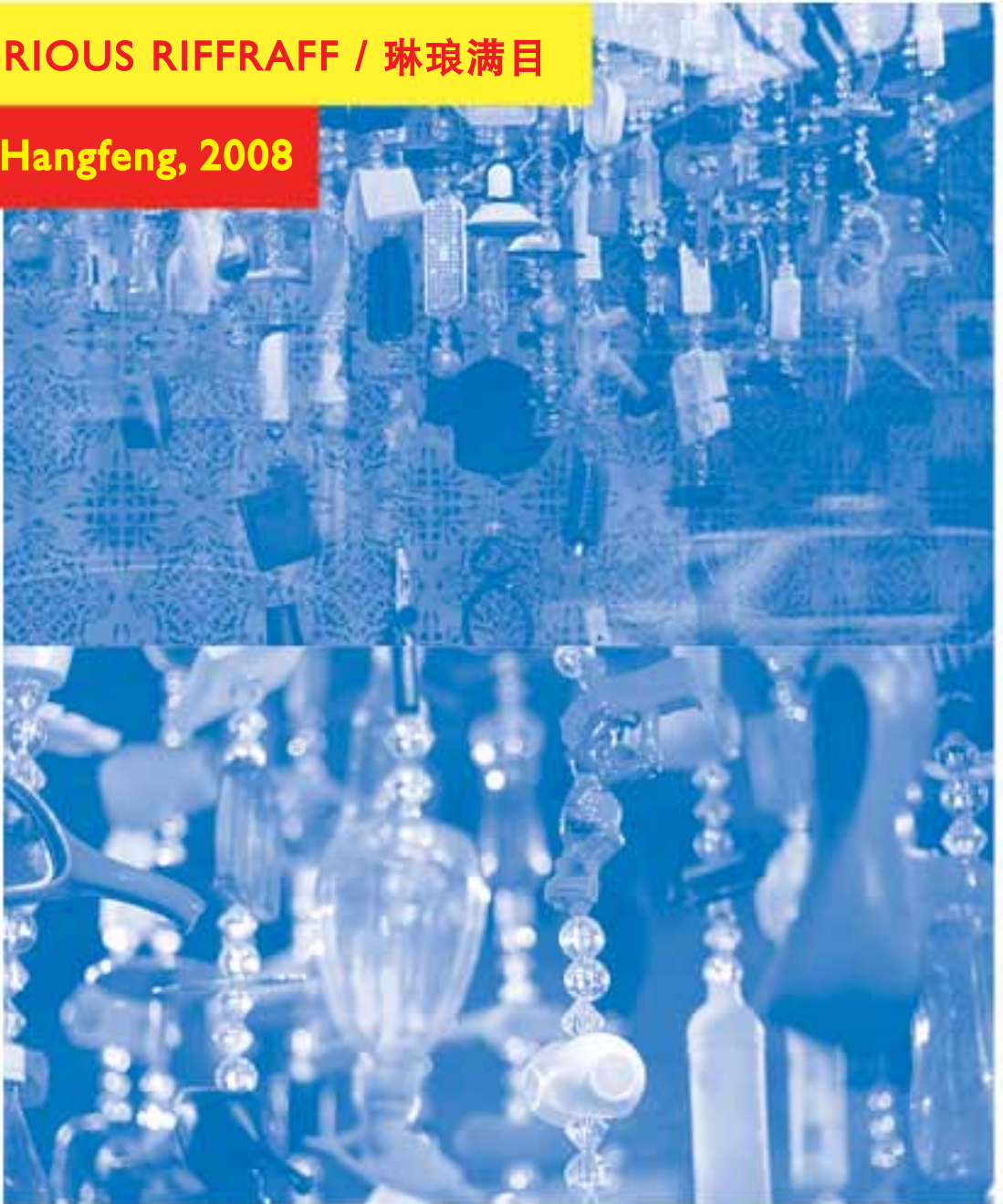
2004 factory district, Shanghai



2002 factory district, Shanghai

## LUXURIOUS RIFFRAFF / 琳琅满目

Chen Hangfeng, 2008



I spent nearly three months collecting those items, choosing them by color, shape and function. Since most people in Shanghai don't separate their garbage from their recyclables, the recyclables are often filthy and malodorous. Thus, I have sterilized the various items before assembling them into the installation. Washing and cleaning the garbage has become the education instead of the process of an artwork.

我花了将近3个月的时间，在家周围的垃圾回收中心收集了很多垃圾，根据其色彩，形状和本身的功能来选择它们。因为大部分的上海人没有垃圾分类的习惯，这些可回收垃圾常常是十分肮脏并臭气熏天。因此在制作装置前，我得将它们消毒并清洗干净，这个过程更象一种自我教育。

Recycled plastic, metal, acrylic ball and metal wire, Dimension variable /  
废弃塑料，金属，有机玻璃球和钢丝绳，尺寸可变（2008）

# WHAT IS A RESEARCH PLATFORM?

Anja Kanngieser, Brett Neilson, Ned Rossiter,  
June 08, 2010

For a brief moment in 2007 it seemed that everything was a platform. Seemingly a ubiquitous moniker in the world of tech marketing, the term platform became a substitute for the word product. The idea was to add an air of strategy and Web 2.0 savvy to the tireless rollout of software solutions and business objects that marked this particular moment in internet history. Indeed, at the first Web 2.0 conference in October 2004, Tim O'Reilly and John Battelle declared that one of the preliminary principles defining Web 2.0 was 'The web as a platform'. Technically a platform is something you build upon. But it can also describe a declaration of principles (e.g. by a political candidate) or a piece of infrastructure dedicated to public discussion. In the computing world its most basic meaning is a piece of equipment or computer architecture that runs a particular operating system. But as a term of business jargon, its sense has run beyond this to describe what one technological consulting company calls the creation of 'an environment of promiscuous integration as a way to accelerate operations, get closer to customers and partners, unlock innovation, and discover efficiencies'.

This paper explores a counter-posed notion of platform that has its roots in the worlds of art and activism. More specifically, it asks how the organisation of platforms can serve as a research tool for transcultural mapping. The paper takes as its focus a currently unfolding project entitled 'Transit Labour: Circuits, Regions, Borders'. This project investigates changing material and conceptual connections between labour, mobility and subjectivity in the whirlwind of Asian capitalism. Moving across three cities – Shanghai (2010), Kolkata (2011) and Sydney (2012) – it employs a platform methodology to move beyond both the activities of the monastic scholar who writes theory and the sole researcher who does fieldwork. Each city becomes the site of a research platform that combines online and offline methods to gather researchers from across the world and bring them into collaborative relation with local participants through workshops, site visits, symposia, exhibitions, mailing lists, blogs and publishing. There is an emphasis on processes of inter-referencing between the three cities. The aim is to flee the

data-mined, self-referential universe of social networking sites by building a multilingual environment for collaborative invention and the common production of knowledge.

It is important to emphasise the differences between this platform methodology and the boosterish employment of the term by the advocates of Web 2.0, crowd sourcing and the like. As mentioned above, it is in art and activist worlds that the construction of platforms has precedents that work against these tendencies. Olga Guriunova and Alexei Shulgin use the term 'art platform' to describe a 'platform that differentiates itself from other websites by the relations of creative, social, instrumental, educational and historical character it establishes and is involved into'. Such platforms, as opposed to blogs or social networking sites, are 'single interface'. In other words, they are 'devoted to a single "theme", a shared aesthetic, creative, even political horizon'. Furthermore, they are administered or 'moderated by a small group of people (usually 1-5)'. Contrary to the libertarian ideology of openness and horizontality that characterises Web 2.0 hype, they create focus by applying 'mechanisms rooted in the offline histories of power and institutions'. Guriunova writes:

For instance, with art platforms, the technical bottlenecks of moderating, featuring, voting and making comments that channel the collective effort help create an artistic or cultural phenomenon. An art platform works as an art institution – it allows for the bias of the curator or editor; it allows for the storage and exhibition of works, as do museums or libraries with journals; it allows for contextualising, as do publications or conferences; it allows for feedback and peer review, as do magazines. An art platform produces histories, identities, knowledge and social clusters, exactly in the manner of those interrelations constituting power which Foucault grasped. It represents a quite centred power model that is seemingly not characteristic of platforms considered to be Web 2.0 services.

While agreeing that the vertical aspects of 'single interface' platforms contrast the supposed horizontality of Web 2.0, we

are less comfortable with the assertion that this verticality reproduces the workings of ingrained institutions such as museums, libraries or peer reviewed publications. Rather, we view platforms as social-technical means for experimenting with new institutional forms that connect highly distributed modes of digital communication with offline worlds. In this sense, our understanding of the term resonates with that developed in activist communities. Long before the term platform was appropriated by Web 2.0 enthusiasts, it was deployed in political contexts. For instance, the 1926 text entitled 'The Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists' argues for a new set of 'organizational principles and practices'. More recently, platforms have become a feature of political organisation for social movements, activist collectives and other non-governmental actors. Often crossing with art worlds, examples include Global Project, Sarai, Edufactory, Fadaiat, Transit Migration, Preclab and the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies.

The common element of these platforms is an attempt to invent new institutional forms that do not inhere solely in the digital domain. As Emil Sotirov writes, the platform is 'the thing we want to enable ... and not the web media by which we would enable it'. Moreover, there is an effort to work with networked, unstable structures that deliberately contrast the kind of centralised institutions mentioned by Guriunova. We can understand the difference between these established modern institutions and the new institutional forms enabled by the platform by referring to the distinction drawn by Lovink and Rossiter between networked organisations and organised networks.

Networked organisations are formal institutional bodies such as museums, universities, newspapers and governments that seek to confront the difficulties presented by the rise of digital media and informatized society by integrating its processes into their structures. Newspapers begin to run blogs, universities set up research networks, parliamentarians send tweets and so on. These efforts of networking are driven by top-down systems of command compared with those of organised networks, which are initiated within digital media but face the challenges of governance and sustainability associated with online environments prone to weak social ties, uncertain funding, a reliance on free labour and ephemeral relations between participants. Platforms bring a strategic logic to network cultures that otherwise tend toward tactical short-termism. They also seek to provide a means of scaling up digitally based projects without compromising their distributed architectures in the name of stability and longevity.

Returning to the Transit Labour project, there are a number of complexities, problems and ambivalences that characterise the platform method. The first concerns the ambition to operate across different cities and geographical spaces. What kind of methods can be employed for such a transcultural and transdisciplinary project beyond the traditional methods of the

social sciences? John Law writes: 'while standard methods are often extremely good at what they do, they are badly adapted to the study of the ephemeral, the indefinite and the irregular'. This is particularly the case for a project that examines the transformations of subjectivity associated with precarious labour regimes in the creative and cultural industries. There are problems not only of making the platform worthwhile for local participants in each of the three cities but also of bringing actors in the different sites into meaningful interaction through online exchanges.

One key challenge is how to communicate the logic of platform as method among participants coming from diverse disciplinary, social and cultural backgrounds. In our experience, it helps enormously to combine long term research participants with more recently met participants. In this way, a productive environment of mutual testing of constitutive limits or tension is created, where the risk of entrenched practices and dispositions is set against the at times sceptical interventions and queries of more recent project researchers.

These difficulties are compounded by the fact that the choice of cities is arbitrary, based more on the existence of previous research ties than the particularities of culture, labour and geography in the various sites. The latter is a problem familiar to anthropologists of distributed phenomena. Christopher Kelty writes:

The study of distributed phenomena does not necessarily imply the detailed, local study of each instance of a phenomenon, nor does it necessitate visiting every relevant geographical site – indeed, such a project is not only extremely difficult, but confuses map and territory ... The decisions about where to go, whom to study, and how to think ... are arbitrary in the precise sense that because the phenomena are so widely distributed, it is possible to make any given node into a source of rich and detailed knowledge about the distributed phenomena itself, not only about the local site.

The hope is that the visits of researchers from across and beyond the arbitrarily chosen sites can galvanise participation in each of the cities. But there is a delicate dynamic in which the costs of transporting researchers across the sites mitigate against the remuneration of precarious workers who might contribute to the project in any one locality. This raises the question of free labour within networked settings that has been explored by Tiziana Terranova among others. For Terranova, there is always a danger in 'open systems' that 'qualitative, intensive differences' turn into 'quantitative relations of exchange and equivalence' that 'reimpose hierarchical relations at the service of social reproduction and the production of surplus value'. This danger is further amplified in a project like Transit Labour that operates across the economic, cultural and racial divides that separate and connect Australia, India and China.

That the project, which has attracted funding from organisations such as the Australian Research Council and the Asia-Europe

Foundation, has the financial resources to modestly reimburse participants does not necessarily provide a way out of this dilemma. This is because these bodies impose ideologically informed restrictions on how funds can be committed, the former in a nationalist frame. There is a need to negotiate or circumvent these restrictions as part of the platform methodology. This negotiation, in itself, is part of the ongoing tension between networked organisations and organised networks. The staging of a research platform cannot and should not be imagined as a means of escaping or avoiding this discord, which is one of the defining conflicts of our times.

Something more needs to be said about how the tension between networked organisations and organised networks crosses the problematic of transcultural mapping. Transit Labour is a project that questions the classical division between labour and culture. In so doing, it approaches the globalisation of culture as inseparable from the mobility and precariousness of labour. There are three points we wish to make about this in conclusion.

First, there is a need to recognise that regionalism has become the decisive scale in the world today. A focus on the nexus of labour and culture means understanding the role of borders,

both those that limit political spaces and those that traverse them, in establishing and sustaining regional formations of cognition and culture. Second, the precariousness of labour, particularly in the cultural sectors, needs to be studied vis-à-vis the claims for culture and creativity as engines of innovation in the contemporary global economy. Finally, the business of transcultural mapping cannot be separated from the question of labour. This is not merely a question of the relation between theory and practice or the ethics of the transcultural encounter. The organisation of a research platform involves a necessary confrontation with the question of labour; and how it crosses borders as well as differential levels of pay. Collaboration is not a process that can be separated from the politics that joins labour to life. Only by working through these politics is it possible to invent conceptual tools and institutional forms adequate to the task of translation and the mapping of future tendencies in social, economic and political organisation.

[HTTP://TRANSITLABOUR.ASIA/BLOGS/  
IT-FACTORY-ELECTRONIC-MARKETS-  
SPECULATION](http://transitlabour.asia/blogs/it-factory-electronic-markets-speculation)

在世博轴上，  
午餐的工人们。



春海 张, Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial Share Alike

### TRANSIT

In transit there is neither departure nor arrival. Transit gives the illusion of joining the past to the future. It elongates the present so that one lives within the passage of displacement. Transit is not without its special border devices and rules of movement. Nonetheless it can move history beyond the linear time of the state and progress. The resonance of transition multiplies the possibility of politics today.

### 流动

“流动”不仅仅意味着“来”和“去”，“流动”的涵义可以是追述过去，参与未来，延伸至个体此时此刻流离失所的生活状态。而“流动”是有其特殊的运动规律和界限分划的。然而，它可以超越时间前行的线性状态，推动历史的前进。对“流动”的共鸣增加了当今政治活动的可行性。

### LABOUR

Labour is not simply work. It is the name of subjectivity under the domination of the state and capital. Labour is living and thus animated by energy, unrest and movement. Ever more it inheres in bodily and cognitive relations. But it is also subject to processes of abstraction that seek to reduce it to temporal measure. The tension between abstract and living labour is constitutive of political struggle. This tension not only crosses human bodies and souls. It also shapes the heterogenous domain of global space.

### 劳动力

劳动力不仅仅只是一项工作。这个主观的名称产生于在国家和资本统治的环境下。劳动力的生存方式受到能力，不稳定和调动的驱动。更多的是受到来自于其所固有的物质和认知之间关系的驱动，但不切实际的幻想和为了生存而劳动之间的拉力构成了政治纷争。这种拉力不仅涉及人们的身心，而且也决定了全球范围都朝着异质质的方向发展。

### CIRCUITS

The circulation of bodies and brains comprises the space of politics today. Circuits do not necessarily lead back to where they began. As technologies of control and freedom, they maintain the movement of labour, life, finance and things. 'Circulation sweats money from every pore' (Marx). Contrary to the libertarian cult of openness and infinite freedom, circuits can trigger resistances with explosive potential. When time is captured by new logics of accumulation, the political task is to short-circuit capital.

### 循环

当今，群体和智慧的循环包含了政治范畴。而循环也并不一定要与初始之处相连。随着对技术控制的自由度不断提升，循环维持着日常的劳动，生活，金融等事物的运转。马克思曾说过，“流通使得每个毛孔都能渗出钱来”。与自由主义者对开放和无限自由的狂热崇拜相反，循环会引爆潜在的阻力。当新的累积逻辑捕获了时间，政治性任务成为急功近利的资本主义。

### REGIONS

Cognition and culture today subsist in the space of regions. Whether regulated through protocols of distributed knowledge production or integrated within national webs and trading blocs, regions are at once stubborn civilizational constructs and provisional assemblages of markets and states. Regions hold internal differentiations that refuse the logic of unification. Stretching across linguistic, temporal and territorial borders, their footprints shift with relays, compressions and traffic in cognition and culture.

### 区域

文化认知度维持着当今各个区域的生存。无论是通过协议分配知识生产，还是以纳入国家综合网络和贸易集团的方式对区域进行调配，都会立马使区域内的文化结构变得顽固，成为临时性的市场和区域组合。区域的内部差异使其拒绝接受统一的逻辑，这种差异性随着文化认知的接替、挤压和买卖而转变，延伸至语言、时间和领土的边界。



# 方法

## METHOD

### BORDERS

Borders are instituted through social, technical and political practices. There are two sides to every border: connection and division. This tension underscores labour in transit. Far from the myth of a borderless world, globalization is characterized by a proliferation of borders. Not limited to marking the edge of territory, borders have moved 'into the middle of political space' (Bailbar). They supply an analytical rubric through which to investigate the modulations of labour and capital across different geographical scales, affective registers and institutional settings.

### 边界

边界是通过建立社会，技术和政治活动而建立的。每一个边界都具有双面性：连接和分工，这种对立强调劳动力的流通。全球化的特征之一是边界的扩散，但并不等于是无国界的神话传说。边界已经涉足到了“政治空间中”（巴里巴尔），而不仅局限于标明领土边缘的作用。通过跨区域地情感记录和机构设置，边界提供一个对劳动力和资本的调配进行调查分析的名义。

### PLATFORMS

Platforms organize. They bring bodies and brains into relation. While they require highly distributed formats of digital communication and translation, platforms must connect with off-line worlds. Platforms bring a strategic logic to network cultures that otherwise tend toward tactical short-termism. Practices of collaborative constitution hold generative capacities that invent new institutional forms. When multiplied across time and space, platforms connect seemingly disparate events along circuits of experience and experimentation. The work of platforms at once tests and produces concepts. Platforms address contingency and movements as constitutive methods of analysis and organization.

### 平台

平台的创办使群体和智慧互相关联。平台必须连接离线世界，虽然这需要高度分布的数字通信和翻译。平台必须具有战略性网络文化逻辑，否则它将只是个短期行为。合作性章程的实践具有生成新形式体制的能力。当平台跨越时间和空间成倍增加时，平台与经验和实验的循环一起，链接起了看上去迥然不同的事件。平台的运作是对概念的一次测试和扩展。平台作为分析和组织的构成方式设法解决偶发事件和活动。

### LOGISTICS

Logistical methods of organization apply to contemporary production and patterns of mobility. The global logistics industry is the key to understanding emerging configurations of the social as well as their implied technologies and labour regimes. The primary task of logistics is to manage the movement of people and things in the interests of communication, transport and economic efficiencies. Central to logistics is the question and scope of governance – both of labouring subjects and the treatment of objects or things. When connected to the multiplication of borders, the informatization of subjectivity and the capitilization of culture, logistics holds broader implications around the governance of transnational worlds.

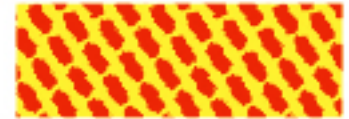
### 物流

有组织的物流方法适用于当代生产流动性的生产模式。全球物流管理的关键不仅是了解隐性的科技和劳动力体制，更是要了解新兴的社会形态。物流的主要任务是从通讯、运输和经济效率的利益的角度出发，管理人员和物品的流动。物流的核心问题是其统筹范围 – 包括对劳动对象的统筹，以及对对象和事物的处理。随着边界成倍地增长，主观的信息化和文化的资本化，物流在跨国性统筹的基础上，将拥有治理更广泛的影响。

[HTTP://TRANSITLABOUR.ASIA/  
CONCEPTS/](http://transitlabour.asia/concepts/)

# SHANGHAI PLATFORM

## 30 DAYS OF RESEARCH AND EVENTS



### RETHINKING REGIONALISM THROUGH SOCIAL MOBILITIES

JUNE 24, 2010 – JUNE 26, 2010

This event addresses the multiple ways in which regions are constituted when social mobilities are placed at the forefront of analysis. The working hypothesis of the event assumes a tension in how regions are both understood and configured according to the agency of social mobilities as distinct from statist and geopolitical formations of regionalism. A key aim of the event is to discern how regionalism - which is always a historically transforming complex of forces - operates not only as a technology of governance, but also how regionalism invites new questions and analytical possibilities for understanding social and cultural dynamics. The symposium will invite consideration on the particular fluxes of social life in and out of Shanghai and their role in establishing analytical, economic and political borders across China and the region. Participants will address these dynamics with their own regional locations and trajectories in mind.

#### PARTICIPANTS

Ilen Ang / Christopher Connery / Min Dongchao / Paul Gladston / Anna Greenspan / Xin Gu / Anja Kanngieser / Isaac Leung / Sandro Mezzadra / Brett Neilson / Justin O'Connor / Ned Rossiter / Ranabir Samaddar / Tim Winter / Giovanna Zapperi

#### SCHEDULE

24 June: Visit Meadville Enterprises IT Facility  
25 June: Visit Baoshan and Modern Electronic City  
(Fuxing Lu) electronics market  
26 June: Symposium at BAU Architecture Space

### NEW MEDIA WORKERS ACROSS EUROPE AND ASIA

JULY 08, 2010 – JULY 11, 2010

The central concept that frames this initiative concerns the conditions of labor and life among new media workers in Asia and Europe. Inviting new media practitioners from Asia

and Europe to collectively analyze and discuss their work practices with artists and civil society organizers provides an innovative means of tracking transformations in the web-based industries and encouraging dialogue between the regions. In Europe, images of new media practitioners as either exploited precarious workers or free creative spirits abound, but have these same stereotypes proliferated in Asia? What are the cultures of creativity and work that frame these practices? Bringing together various actors whose intellectual, artistic and social expressions confront these questions is highly relevant to policy making that seeks to address the changing relations between culture and economy as well as the ongoing transformations of borders and regions. Funded by Asia-Europe Foundation & Australian Research Council.

#### PARTICIPANTS

Venzha Christ / Mauricio Corbalan / Chen Hangfeng / Maurizio Lazzarato / Geert Lovink / Anja Kanngieser / Angela Melitopoulos / Brett Neilson / Ned Rossiter / Shveta Sarda / David Teh / Soenke Zehle / Manuela Zechner

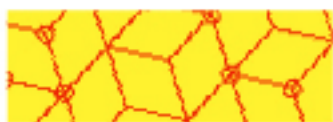
### CREATIVE LABOUR AND ITS TRIBUTARIES

JULY 15, 2010 – JULY 17, 2010

It is only in the past few years that the economic conditions and social experiences of creative labour have emerged as a concern in academic and policy work. With frequently fragmented experiences and highly insecure forms of work, the circumstances and social divisions of creative labour require an analysis that locates them within a wider spectrum of labour processes and global transformations. It is particularly important to ask how changing regional configurations and patterns of transition affect the composition of the creative workforce, the mobility of creative workers and the testing of borders between creative and other forms of labour. This symposium will investigate the challenges - institutional, cultural, linguistic, etc. - that attend research that seeks to inform and facilitate a multi-dimensional comprehension of the conditions and dynamics of creative labour in the Asian region. It will also ask how Shanghai figures as an analytical device and set of practices to track and understand the tributaries of creative labour?

[HTTP://TRANSITLABOUR.ASIA/EVENTS/](http://transitlabour.asia/events/)

# ABOUT THE TRANSIT LABOUR SERIES



Transit-labour investigates changing patterns of labour and mobility in the whirlwind of Asian capitalist transformation. Mindful of the view of Asia as the world's factory, this three year research project examines the role of creativity, invention and knowledge production in the new economic order being forged from the region's capitalist centres. Particular attention is given to changing relations of culture and economy in this transition and their entanglement with the production of new subjectivities and modalities of labour:

The research focuses on the precariousness and mobility of creative labour across three cities: Shanghai (2010), Kolkata (2011) and Sydney (2012). Each of these cities is the site of a research platform that combines online and offline methods to map conceptual and material linkages between labour, mobility and subjectivity. Based on previous research conducted in Beijing (<http://orgnets.net>), these platforms gather researchers from across the world bringing them into collaborative relations with local participants through workshops, field trips, symposia, exhibitions, mailing lists, website documentation and the preparation of publications.

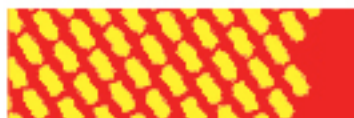
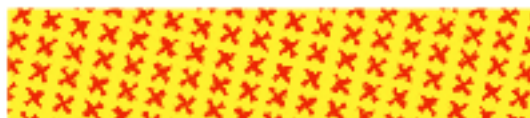
The project's interest is not merely in the transition of labour and culture in each individual city. Recognizing that the regional scale has become decisive in the world today, it places methodological emphasis on processes of inter-referencing between the research sites. This website is a principal research instrument for such inter-referencing. Fleeing the self-referential universe of social networking, it provides an environment for collaborative invention and the common production of knowledge. It is at once an open archive of research activities and a means of organizing them.

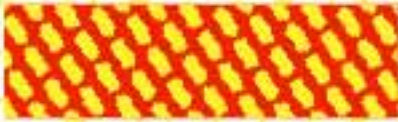
Creative labour refers not only to work in the creative and cultural sectors: music and performing arts; film, television and radio; software development and multimedia; writing, publishing and print media; architecture, design and visual arts. It also encompasses the various forms of service labour that feed into and enable work in these fields. Transit-labour conducts research that tests the boundaries between these forms of work. By tracing conceptual interconnections between the conditions of creative labour in Shanghai, Kolkata and Sydney, the project also aims to rethink how global regions are configured under current economic and social circumstances.

At a time when market rights interfere with territorially-based forms of citizenship, the effects of national creative enterprises are by no means confined by national borders. The project explores how changing patterns of economic, geographic and social flexibility (including labour migrations) are generating new forms and practices of governance in the Asian region (and how regionalism is redefined through such transformations). The role of borders, both those that traverse political spaces and those that define their edges, is crucial to understanding the theoretical and practical linkages between labour, mobility and subjectivity.

At the regional scale, it is possible to observe the emergence of production regimes that exploit differences between labour conditions in various territorial zones, leading to hierarchically organized regimes of labour mobility and attempts to coordinate and manage these mobilities through market, border and zoning technologies. The analysis of such differentially organized systems of inclusion and mobility is also a part of the project. Set against the rapid expansion of communication and information technologies, the re-ordering of intellectual property and conflicts in the production of knowledge, transit-labour probes these transformations to discern future tendencies of social, economic and political organization.

[HTTP://TRANSITLABOUR.ASIA/ABOUT/](http://transitlabour.asia/about/)





SHANGHAI, KOLKATA, SYDNEY:

THESE CITIES ARE SITES FOR MAPPING  
NEW PATTERNS OF LABOUR AND MOBILITY  
IN THE WHIRLWIND OF ASIAN CAPITALIST  
TRANSFORMATION.

TRANSITLABOUR.ASIA

