In 2019, South Africa celebrated its 25th anniversary of the abolition of the Apartheid while racial inequality still remained deeply in society and xenophobic riots broke out all over the country. In the midst of the turmoil, I furthered my project around the language and cultural translations, being inspired by the dichotomies and affinities based on humanity I experienced and felt in my everyday life in Johannesburg.

Encountering the philosophy of 'Ubuntu', and associating it with the form of a Chinese character for human 人, I evolved workshops with physical exercise to embody these concepts of human, where two people stand back-to-back supporting and leaning on each other to sit down and stand up together. There the documentation of the previous workshop became the backdrop for the succeeding workshops.

PHILOSOPHIES MEET

In Johannesburg, my social and cultural observation and its rumination grew deeply through the dialogue with the locals who are Bantu speakers. There appeared the word 'Ubuntu', an African philosophy of humanity: a person is a person through other people. The perspective to perceive oneself in the relation with others resonate with the Chinese character for human 人, a pictograph with two oblique strokes leaning on each other.

I found the form to embody these two worldviews in an action to sit down and stand up in pair without using hands. It is a basic move of Contact Improvisation, a dance that explores one's body in relation to others by sharing weight and touch.

PRACTISING HUMANITY

I conducted the workshops to write this character through a simple physical exercise with various forms of societies, such as family, school, and workplace. It begins with a brief introduction of Chinese characters as logogram. The participants work in pair, communicating back-to-back, trusting each other to find the balance and synergy in order to achieve the goal. As many successful cases, there were struggles, attempts, misunderstandings, new interpretations, and some moments of emotional interactions and expressions between the pairs and among those who were present at the workshops.op.

REDUCTION TO GREY

I put up an installation where I used the documentation of previous workshops and projected on fabric hanging on a structure. Using it as backdrop I conducted the third workshop where the participants used it as reference, trying to learn from the previous attempts,. Placing the exercise between projector and projection surface, it made participants reduced to grey-toned shadows in the projection, regardless of race, gender, etc.

Cultural appropriation appeared repeatedly as an issue, and its sensitivity created room for great discussion. Therefore I made it clear during the introduction that my mother tongue Japanese uses Chinese characters, which we started to borrow since late fourth century, and the physical exercise derives from Contact Improvisation, which developed since early 1970s in New York inspired by Aikido, Japanese modern martial arts, in order to question the concept of cultural ownership and inheritance.

(left page) workshop at the Bag Factory (right page, from top to bottom) workshops with an family in Cape Town, students at St James Preparatory School, and audiences at the Bag Factory; installtion view

video footage of the workshops (excerpts, 5min):
https://youtu.be/PlGLLbuNtWU

Graphic Movements
2019
workshop + installation (metal grid structure [mobile art rack], light-weight cotton cloth, projector)
projection surface: 255x158 cm
as a part of the project *After-Ripening & Corruption: Verbal Acts & Graphic Movements* at the Bag Factory, Johannesburg

the workshops of practising humanity
Graphic Movements
(from workshops + installation, 2019)

video footage (excerpts, 5min):
https://youtu.be/PlGLLbuNtWU

Background of the workshops
The workshops in South Africa were carried out with different forms of society: private (family), collective (school classes), and public (workplace/ exhibition space). It was right after the xenophobic riots broke out nationally, which started three days after my arrival in Johannesburg.

Concept of the workshops
The workshop is to exercise humanity by writing the Chinese character of human "人" through a simple physical exercise in pairs, where two people stand back-to-back supporting and leaning on each other to sit down and stand up. It is an embodiment of Ubuntu, African philosophy interpreting that a person exists through others' existence, and a basic movement of Contact Improvisation.

Contents of the workshops
The workshop begins with a brief introduction of Chinese characters as logogram. The participants work in pairs, communicating without facing and using hands, trusting each other to find the balance and synergy in order to achieve the goal of sitting down and standing up together.

Outcome of the workshops
While there were many successful movements, there were also struggles and attempts without succeeding, misunderstandings, new interpretations, and some moments of emotional interactions and expressions between the pair and among those who were present at the workshops.

date: 8 October 2019
place: suburb of Cape Town with middle class residents
backdrop: living room in a family house
participants: three siblings of an interracial family

date: 16 October 2019
place: poor working class area in central Johannesburg
backdrop: multicultural school based on Hindu philosophy
participants: students in the classes aged 4-8

date: 24 October 2019
place: area with a major shopping mall of oriental culture and Jewish community in central Johannesburg
backdrop: exhibition space with collective artist studios
participants: fellow artists and audiences

The excerpts from the audio visual recording of the two previous workshops were projected on the fabric hang on a metal grid structure as an installation, which became the score and the prop for the workshop, possible to be seen from both front and back side. The participants were reduced to the grey-toned shadows in the projection, regardless of race.