



## Working Paper Series No.12

### *Position Paper*

September 2019

DUST: An artist statement

Karolina Breguła

Academy of Art in Szczecin

## © 著作權聲明

本文著作權屬作者擁有。文章內容皆是作者個人觀點，並不代表本中心立場。除特別註明外，讀者可從本中心網頁下載工作論文，作個人使用，並引用其中的內容。

徵引文化研究國際中心工作論文系列文章，需遵照以下格式：作者，〈文章題目〉，文化研究國際中心工作論文，文章編號，文章所在網址。

## © Copyright Information

The authors hold the copyright of the working papers. The views expressed in the ICCS Working Paper Series are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the International Center for Cultural Studies. Users may download the papers from ICCS website for personal use and cite the content, unless otherwise specified.

Citation of the ICCS Working Paper Series should be made in the following manner: Author, "Title," International Center for Cultural Studies Working Paper, No. #, URL of the publication.

國立交通大學文化研究國際中心

**International Center for Cultural Studies**

**National Chiao Tung University**

R212 HA Building 2, 1001 University Road

Hsinchu, Taiwan

Tel: +886-3-5712121 Ext.58274, 58272

Fax: +886-3-5734450

Website: <http://iccs.nctu.edu.tw/en/wps.php>

Email: [iccs.wps@gmail.com](mailto:iccs.wps@gmail.com)

## DUST: An artist statement

Karolina Breguła

On one of the first days of my stay in Taiwan, I went to Taipei where I was supposed to work on an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Taipei. The Museum is centrally located, near the Zhongshan station, amid a network of narrow streets lined with several-storey buildings from the 1960s. All the structures are quite simple, and although they seem similar, they bear manifold individual features – varied doors and windows, fancy window bars, multi-colour tiles on the facades and various types of extensions that grew on the buildings throughout the years. The ground floors house picturesque shops and services, where their aged owners can be seen enjoying a cup of tea. This is the kind of architecture that many consider boring and ugly, whereas for me it forms Taipei's most beautiful cityscape.

On my way, on one of the narrow lanes off Chang'an West Road, which leads to the museum, I saw a machine demolishing a house surrounded with a metal fence. I came closer. Standing amid rubble, a bulldozer was devouring one of the last six houses. There clearly had been at least twenty of them on that lot. Despite the dust and noise, the crowds rushing down Chang'an West did not pay attention to the demolition. The view of pulled down buildings is no surprise in Taipei, and giant machines destroying the city can be seen here every day. The City Hall calls it *dushi-gengxin*, or urban renewal, successfully promoting gentrification as a process that improves living conditions in the city. I did not stay for long either. I took a photo with my phone and got back on my way. Before I started working, I visited the museum offices to ask colleagues from the exhibition department if they had seen the nearby demolition and what they thought about it. They had. They thought there was nothing to worry about – local municipal offices care for the residents of the demolished houses and the new building will be clean and earthquake-resistant.

The conversation calmed me down for a while. But in the evening, I returned to Lane 19, off Chang'an West Road. The bulldozer was standing there motionless, and the workers had already finished their shift. The light was on in two apartments, only 20 meters from the machine's claws, and freshly hung laundry was drying on the balcony. That seemed strange. I called a few friends interested in the urban renewal programme and I soon found out that the

buildings near Zhongshan were a famous case of struggle waged by residents with the urban modernisation scheme. The refusal of some apartment owners to allow their homes to be demolished had stopped the project for several years. Now, the developer company who wanted to build new houses there finally managed to sort the matter out. They were in a rush, so the demolition had already begun despite two families still living in some of the six buildings, while other families were still removing their belongings. The machine was pulling down the house, slowly, and cautiously, as I heard from an engineer involved in the demolition. The last residents were supposed to leave before the end of the month. Then the bulldozer would start working full steam ahead.

### **Refurbish an abandoned apartment**

Together with my colleague Zongyuan we visited the company in charge of the demolition. We presented ourselves as an artist from Poland and her assistant, and we asked for permission to enter the buildings. We received keys to all the apartments already abandoned by their former residents. We immediately went to have a look. The apartments had already been stripped off the windows, so even though they were locked, they were regularly plundered by thieves who left an incredible mess. The flats looked like refuse dumps. I could not stand the fact that those beautiful buildings were awaiting demolition in such a decrepit state, so I decided to choose one apartment and tidy it up. During the next few days, alongside a group of friends, we removed kilograms of broken glass, fragments of metal window frames, ruined furniture and plastic wire coating. We then refurbished the flat with items found in other abandoned apartments in the same complex – a table from one flat, a bed from another, a kitchen counter and tableware from yet another flat. In the place of the former windows, we hang curtains from an apartment one floor downstairs. We finished by washing glasses and bowls left by the former owners.

Every day after work in Zhongshan I returned home to read about the Taipei urban modernisation scheme and exchange e-mails with some experts in this field. I was coming across many stories about resettlements conducted against the will of all residents, such as the most notorious current case of the Dagan district.

Dagan is a poor housing estate built years ago on land that today belongs to a government institution. It is soon to yield place to a new housing project. The demolition date has already

been announced to the residents, but they have not been offered replacement homes, so they are protesting against the demolition. I read on the website run by the Dagan community that the dwellers of threatened buildings were seeking to attract public attention and invited everyone to visit the area. I decided to go. Dagan is in Banqiao, 15 minutes by urban rail from Taipei. As soon as I got there, I met Ms. Zou, an energetic resident of the district, whose unshakeable faith in the sense of the protest inspired the entire community to fight for the survival of their homes. Ms. Zou explained to me the problem with Dagan, about which I had known a bit from the media. The buildings where Ms. Zou lived suffered flooding in 1962. The majority of the then residents of the area accepted help offered by the authorities and moved to new apartments. But some chose to refuse the government's support and renovate their destroyed homes with their own resources. Yet, they lost the right to use the land on which their buildings stood. They are now inhabited by the children and grandchildren of those people, while the land officially belongs to the Ministry of Defence. Part of the ministry, the Veterans' Affairs Council is planning to build there a house for retired soldiers. That is why it wants to demolish the buildings without compensating the residents of Dagan, while also burdening them with many years' worth of land tax.

I returned to Dagan a few days after my first visit. That was when I met Ms. Huang and other neighbours. They shared with me the history of the area. They talked about a marketplace located in the alleys among the buildings and about their childhood between the market stalls; about the flood which destroyed their district in the 1960s and about the never-ending struggle with the local authorities, who had consistently ignored appeals for regulating the legal status of the houses since the catastrophe. We also talked about the community of neighbours uniting together, the constantly growing mosquito population in the humid ruins, and about waiting for the demolition – sadness and fatigue caused by protracted uncertainty. They finally shared their own situation with me: part of the community still had no new homes, although the demolition of Dagan was due to begin in less than two months.

After my meetings with Ms. Zou and Ms. Huang, I would get on a train and return to Lane 19 off Chang'an West Road, where I was finishing the refurbishment of the apartment in the house earmarked for demolition. The bulldozer had been idle for the previous two weeks, which gave me and my team the impression that our action was staving off the planned destruction.

## **From Daguan to Zhongshan**

After several visits to Daguan, I invited Ms. Zou and Ms. Huang to the already refurbished flat in Zhongshan. Sitting in a freshly cleaned kitchen and drinking tea from glasses found in the building, I showed them a script I had written after our meetings. We read it and made a few changes together.

Ms. Zou and Ms. Huang agreed to become actresses in my project, so for the next few days we would meet in Zhongshan to shoot the film. While we were working on the first part, workers hired for the demolition were sawing off the metal elements of the facade. While we were shooting the second part, they were building a scaffolding on which to hang a sheet to separate the building under demolition from Lane 19. When we were leaving the building for the last time, on April 26, they were on the point of launching the bulldozer, dormant for the previous two weeks. The engineer in charge of the demolition said that we could no longer enter the building the next day as the demolition of the roof was about to begin.

Having finished shooting, Ms. Huang told me she wanted to sing a song in front of the camera to express her sadness about losing her home. Ms. Zou asked me to include images from the street in Daguan in my film. I therefore went to Banqiao to shoot the two final scenes of the project.

After shooting, I left the city for a few days. When I returned to the centre of Taipei in mid-May, the buildings in Lane 19 off Chang'an West Road no longer had their upper storeys. On the top, amid the rubble, stood a giant bulldozer which was pecking on the building walls akin to a huge bird with its beak. The engineer in charge of the demolition told me that the process would take around twelve more days.

The demolition of Ms. Zou's and Ms. Huang's houses was planned for the end of June 2019. When I last contacted Daguan community, ten families were still living in Daguan.



DUST 灰塵, a film installation produced by Karolina Breguła during an artist residency at the National Chiao Tung University, Hsinchu, Taiwan

Several excerpts from the film can be found here: [One](#) | [Two](#) | [Three](#) | [Four](#)