

# ARTS OF THE WORKING CLASS

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## **AWC x BERLIN QUESTIONS 2021 - METROPOLIS: THE NEW NOW**

*Aswers from Chamonix-Mont-Blanc and Yogyakarta.*

*In the framework of Berlin Questions, a conference for the immediate present held with mayors and empowerers of the world, and in the spirit of our upcoming reedition of the 2038 issue for the German Pavilion at the 17th Venice Biennale, Arts of the Working Class has invited artists, creatives, students, and thinkers from its global network to respond to the urgent problem of urban development.*

*These are some of the questions directed to the guests of the conference and which we attempt to tackle this week. From tropical megacities to laid back alpine localities we are all facing intense change and cultural upheaval due to the intensifying climate crisis, renewed social struggles, and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the global economic crisis following in its step. These changes will manifest in the urban*

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*microscopic plane of our deepest social interactions. How will we shape these changes? What do we want for the future of our cities and our societies? Berlin Questions & Arts of the Working Class open up a horizon of possibility by gathering potential answers to these pressing questions.*

With this first round of questions we set into dialogue responses from Laurene Marechal (**LM**), Founder director at Artocène in Chamonix-Mont-Blanc, FR and Rifki Akbar Pratama (**RAP**), researcher for KUNCI Study Forum and Collective, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

***If you could envision a ‘New Now’ for your city, what would that look like?***

**(LM)** I live in Chamonix-Mont-Blanc, a town of 10’000 inhabitants, hosting a few million travellers every year. This place has a real cosmopolitan soul - with almost half of the permanent population being international. At the crossroads of France, Italy and Switzerland, the town is facing the Mont-Blanc and other spectacular summits, bearing witness to global warming and climate change. As an iconic spot for mountaineering and scientific research, with a strong natural and architectural heritage, Chamonix-Mont-Blanc is a unique place to live in. For my city, the ‘New Now’ would focus on the society’s well-being through Nature and Culture.

Nature and culture are central to a society’s well-being. Surrounded by nature, the town where I live offers many opportunities to immerse ourselves in the green, to spend time to feel, smell and listen to the harmonious woods and mountains. Every city should offer easy access to green life. Investing in parks and trees is a major contribution to a community’s daily life. The sensorial and physical experience of nature is also a visual and spiritual journey. Delving into green fields is a moment where we can retreat, learning to use introspection to connect with ourselves.

What is lacking the most in my town is access to culture. Inviting artists, thinkers, writers, musicians to take part of the community’s life should be a priority for any city. A film, an artwork or a tune carry the vision of the artist. Beyond being essential to our emotional or intellectual happiness, the arts fuel our critical analysis and thinking relevant to the world’s current issues. Arts allow us to envision a better now and a better future. Connecting to nature and culture is a way to adopt slow living. The other day, before I started writing this, I met a young culinary designer. While listening to her, I realized how important it is to appreciate any ordinary moment like cooking or eating. Slow living means taking the time to understand the products we are eating, as much as taking the time to observe the wind flowing through the woods, or the time to

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well-being but also foster people's awareness of their natural surroundings. A city should set the frame and allow its citizens to embrace Nature and Culture in many different places and forms.

**(RAP)** To answer the question of novelty we need to reflect again on how often we ask the same question to think about the post-socio-economic crisis. One thing I'm wondering about is whether this 'nowness' is a form of *retour à la normale*. Just like innovation, which is nothing but an economic operation, novelty can also be caught in the same thing. Referring to that, I would imagine our city as one that avoids being entangled in a return to an unfair-normal situation. A novelty that I imagine also transcends economic operations and leads to social and ecological justice. A city without eviction, starvation, destruction, or oppression. The city that formed by a helping hand without the sacrifice of either party.

***During the pandemic, did you feel disconnected or isolated in your city?***

**(LM)** Away from the usual day-to-day routine, and deprived from the out-of-the-routine adventures, I definitely felt disconnected during the pandemic. Slow living became part of my new habits, taking the time to cook, read, think, look out the window. Exploring the surrounding areas and looking at ordinary details through the neighbourhood, opened new ways of seeing. Constantly using my mind and imagination made that period rich in intellect wandering. On the other hand, I also felt fully connected to my friends and family. Isolation created the opportunity to call our loved ones and carry long 'in-depth' conversations with them. Sharing empathy, nostalgia and dreams of tomorrow made us feel stronger together, even hundreds of kilometres apart. Besides, technology brought culture and well-being into our living room which was a brilliant discovery. Never replacing the real get-together or physical art experience, these new tools invited us to intellectual escapades. To me, the pandemic made the border between 'disconnected' and 'connected' truly inspiring.

**(RAP)** As a person who works in the middle of the city and sleeps in the middle of the village, the pandemic presents a threat but never forces me to feel lonely. Unlike people who live in the cities where risk is being individualized we still fairly evenly share the risk. Collective efforts such as solidarity kitchens that serve as safety nets for the most vulnerable groups in the city make the idea of being isolated so foreign. We each live in a place that we can call home but are connected through hardship.

**(LM)** In the context of ‘restricted life’ - where the experience of travelling and exploring different cultures was suspended - we had to seek inspiration elsewhere. Our inner self proved to be one of the most exciting resources. As rules were easing a little, I was invited to participate in a sound bath. For over an hour, I was guided into a meditation state punctuated by the sound of gongs, crystals and rattles. Focusing on my breath and intuition, these sounds brought emotions, memories, sequences of films and visual artworks into my mind. Losing a bit of control, I let my body fully experience the multiple noises, sometimes torturing my soul, sometimes making me cry, sometimes making me peaceful. The sound bath felt like an exorcism to me, taking out of my body a lot of negative energy and reminding me of the essence of life.

**(RAP)** After returning from Shanghai at the beginning of the year, I think I have sufficient awareness of the possibility of an endemic turning into a pandemic. All the anticipation that was engraved in my head about everything that could be done if the pandemic did occur turned out to be failing. Instead of all the ideals that I thought about, what I managed to do was embrace the situation and make the most of everything. This privilege makes me do the best I can, providing space to tell stories through support groups, welcoming peers who burn out from activism, or by cramming peer-counseling schedules into my spare time.

### *What challenges do global cities currently face?*

**(LM)** How to build? How to consume? How to move? To me, these are some of the main questions global cities should address. These questions reflect on the Anthropocene’s outreach. Reducing the impact of our activities to ‘heal the world’ is the priority. By looking for new solutions, cities should call for architects and designers to reshape our living environment. Sometimes these new solutions rely on simple schemes including the use of local materials, recycled products and traditional crafts. Other times, these new solutions can be found through contemporary technologies. The role of the cities, in collaboration with architects and designers, is to focus on resource-saving and sustainable techniques, giving people access to new tools to consume, move and live differently.

**(RAP)** Connectedness is a source of strength when it can be organized. But if the relationship that appears is one of inequality, the connection itself needs to be re-examined. Cities need to avoid returning to an unequal normality. There needs to be a real rupture between the conditions before and after the pandemic crisis. Because

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understand that something is wrong when normal conditions are conditions that are  
bolstered by injustice. So there is no other word but change.

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Dive the full program of *Berlin Questions METROPOLIS: The New Now* [HERE](#).

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