

Reflective Statement

“Social design” in this project begins with recognising that there are alternative and situated ways of perceiving the sea, particularly, the TAMBRAU Strait (Indigenous name for Tebrau Strait). It calls for an understanding of the Strait not merely as a border or a frontier for capitalistic speculation, but as a living space inhabited and cared for by the Orang Seletar, who perceive its natural environments in relational continuity with their culture and livelihoods. To design for a living TAMBRAU Strait, therefore, means to include these fundamental values when designing for their worldviews.

The envisioned “social change” is a shift towards a future where indigenous perspectives are no longer marginalised, but meaningfully included in shaping the shared ecological and cultural futures of the Strait. This involves cultivating a more relational understanding of the Strait’s environments, akin to what Donna Haraway proposes in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016). The Orang Seletar’s awareness of their mutual dependency and impact on the Strait echoes Haraway’s concept of interspecies sympoiesis. Haraway’s calls to learn from situated knowledges that are embodied and localised resonates with the importance of learning from the indigenous wisdom of the Orang Seletar, encouraging us to perceive and engage with the Strait through alternative, coexistent lenses with nature.

In my manifesto, which forms an introductory component of my design toolkit, I advocate for the importance of understanding and designing with the Orang Seletar’s perspectives. Drawing from *Critical Care: Architecture and Urbanism for a Broken Planet* by Angelika Fitz and Elke Krasny (2019), I reflect on their argument that our planet is “broken” by extractive capitalism and modernist ideologies of progress that erase existing ecologies and communities. They call for a departure from the modernist ideal of progress and the “blank slate” approach to building. Echoing their stance, my manifesto posits that the fictionalised “empty” gaze cast upon the sea by the state governments and developers has given rise to architectures that are complicit in socio-ecological injustices against both the Orang Seletar and the Strait’s natural environment. I then conclude my manifesto by advocating for design approaches towards the Strait that embody the Orang Seletar’s sensitive way of treating the Strait’s environment that have long sustained them.

In the rest of my design toolkit, which is conceived as a field guide to understanding the Orang Seletar’s perspective and what it means to design for a living Strait, illustrates how their relational ways of seeing and engaging with the Strait is practiced. These perspectives are explained through a series of objects, each tied to a specific Orang Seletar practice that I encountered during fieldwork at Kampung Sungai Temon and through secondary research. Together, these objects and the illustrated associated practices reveal a way of living with the environment that stands as an alternative to dominant land-based, extractive attitudes. This way of life is grounded on the principles of resourcefulness, sustainability, reciprocity, adaptability and advocacy. Building upon these principles, my toolkit proposes a series of general guidelines for designing within the socio-environmental context that are sensitive to, and representative of the Orang Seletar’s deep relationship with the Strait.

(514 words)