The School of Improper Education

KUNCI STUDY FORUM *&* COLLECTIVE

The School of Improper Education is a long-term collective learning process initiated in 2016 by KUNCI Study Forum & Collective. When KUNCI envisaged the School of Improper Education, originally called the School of Invisible Economies, the intention was to create a program that would also allow us to reflect on our existence as a collective. The initiation of KUNCI in 1999 was part of the wave of civil society organizations that bloomed after thirty-two years of living under military dictatorship.

When we began to work on the idea of building a school, we felt that we had made some inroads through our past projects. At the same time, however, we felt that what we had done was not sufficient. Over the course of Indonesia's experiment with the process of democratization, we were faced with ongoing political polarization, religious radicalization, gender- and sexuality-based oppression, and the informal censorship of the media in post-1998 Reformasi Indonesia. Against this backdrop, we located a new political challenge that required us as a collective to practice thinking and living together in a sustainable way. On reflection, it seems more apt to refer to the school as our lifeline, rather than treating it as a mere project. The School of Improper Education emerged as a means to embrace the unknown and precariousness, to unlearn the productivity regime of schooling, and to expand our vernacular vocabularies for studying. We perceive the school as a means to survive ongoing uncertainties in the contemporary social and political situation through the act of studying together.

The school reflects the trajectory of our thinking about research in action and our intention to learn about studying together. The School of Improper Education works by exploring the historical remnants of various practices of study, in order to carve out "an alternative." As the starting point for this endeavor, we experimented with four pedagogical practices: (1) the Jacotot method (reconceptualized in Jacques

Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*), which we set up to demand the recognition of universal intellectual equality and to propose possibilities for creating a learning environment in a situation where the students and the teacher do not know anything about a certain subject; (2) the *Turba* method, whose name is an acronym formed from *turun ke bawah* (literally "going below"), an approach to art, research, and activism formulated by the LEKRA (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, Institute of People's Culture) in the 1950s and 1960s—Turba encourages artists and intellectuals to seek knowledge by generating dialectical practices that work the wisdom of the masses; (3) *nyantrik*, an ascetic studying practice that evolved from *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and is now often used in the "traditional" performing arts community—*nyantrik* undoes the boundaries between life and study, and the process of acquiring knowledge in *nyantrik* is premised on students' ability to become more sensitive to their surroundings; and (4) *Taman Siswa* (literally the "Garden of Students") taken from Soewardi Soeryaningrat's teaching principles, formulated in 1922 in an effort to counter the infantilizing nature of Dutch education in the colony.

The following materials are selections from the school's archives that we revisited for our contribution to *Critical Times*. We divide the following sections into three parts. The Past Call for Participants attests to our desire to begin a school from a place of curiosity and uncertainty. The second section presents a series of photographs that were taken during different events held in the school. We sought to create a dialogue using the existing photo documentation, our modest way of recollecting and making sense of what the school has done so far. The third section, "The School Tools Series," is a selection of tools that we have used in organizing the school. They are selected from our book *Sekolah Salah Didik: Uji Coba 1*. These tools resulted from the collective process that took place at the end of the school's *Turba* phase.

The School of Improper Education: Past Call for Participants (2016)

We are building a new school. The school is an experiment in sustainable economies (both material and immaterial) of organization. We want to test out the idea of school as a garden of ideas, a laboratory of affects, and a space where new ideas clash and coalesce. We are not yet sure about what can be learned in this school. But we are obviously sure that we do not want to start from premises that specify what needs to be learned and not learned. We want to study together, while interrogating the meaning of togetherness.

Our bodies are entrenched in histories and memories shaped by formal educational institutions—school buildings, respectable teachers, uniforms, flag ceremonies, wooden benches, libraries, high fences, narrow hallways, too many things to memorize, exams, grades, ranks, report cards, and strict school regulations.

We start from the question: what does an improper education mean? We want to interrogate the hierarchical relations between teacher and student and the homogenizing effects of pedagogical principles on the body and mind. We would like to vitiate the curricular emphasis on use value. Is it enough to describe a practice as an alternative education? How to operate an environment for study that doesn't turn knowledge into a commodity?

We seek to recreate the notion of the classroom, and we invite those who have been improperly educated to engage in this space as well as disrupt it. At the School of Improper Education, the meaning of authority in knowledge reproduction will be scrutinized. We are looking for those who are eager to perform experiments in learning and teaching—to become students and teachers at the same time as they oscillate between different educational models. This invitation is also addressed to those who are keen to blur the boundaries between formal education and everyday realities.

At the School of Improper Education, you can stay within and at the same time think outside of it. As a platform built on the principles of uncertainty and curiosity, the school's purpose is to study the meanings of studying and to develop ways to study these meanings.

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Kami sedang membangun sekolah baru. Sekolah ini adalah suatu eksperimen soal keberlanjutan ekonomi suatu organisasi, baik yang material maupun non-material. Kami ingin menguji sekolah sebagai taman gagasan, laboratorium afeksi, arena konflik, dan ruang persekutuan ide-ide baru. Di sekolah ini, kami belum tahu apa yang akan dipelajari, dan tidak ingin membangun asumsi tentang apa yang harus dan tidak harus dipelajari. Kami ingin belajar bersama, sembari menginterogasi arti kebersamaan itu sendiri.

Di tubuh kami tertanam sejarah dan kenangan yang dibentuk oleh pendidikan formal–gedung sekolah, guru yang mulia, seragam, upacara bendera, bangku-bangku kayu, perpustakaan, pagar yang tinggi, lorong-lorong sempit menuju ruang kelas, hapalan-hapalan, ujian-ujian, nilai-nilai, peringkat buku rapor, dan hukuman yang datang sesekali.

Sekolah kami sengaja berangkat dari pertanyaan: apa yang dimaksud dengan salah didik?

Hubungan guru-siswa yang hirarkis, kami persoalkan. Pedagogi yang menyeragamkan tubuh dan pikiran, kami pertanyakan. Kurikulum yang mengedepankan nilai guna, kami imajinasikan ulang. Apakah cukup untuk menyebut diri sebagai "alternatif" dari lembaga pendidikan formal? Bagaimana cara mengoperasikan sistem

belajar di luar sekolah tanpa mereproduksi bentuk-bentuk konsumsi pengetahuan khas pendidikan formal?

Kami ingin menata ulang apa yang dimaksud sebagai ruang kelas dan mengundang orang-orang salah didik untuk mengisi dan mengacaukannya. Di Sekolah Salah Didik, makna otoritas dalam pengetahuan akan diperiksa ulang. Yang kami cari adalah orang-orang yang berhasrat melakukan percobaan belajar-mengajar–menjadi guru dan murid sekaligus, berulang-alik dari satu model pendidikan ke model lainnya, serta mereka yang tertarik untuk menghapus batasan antara pendidikan dengan realitas sehari-hari.

Di ruang kelas Sekolah Salah Didik, Anda bisa berada di dalamnya, dan berpikir bahwa bisa saja Anda tidak berada di dalamnya. Sebagai prinsip-prinsip dasar, ruang ini menawarkan ketidakpastian dan keingintahuan. Dengan demikian kita bisa belajar apa makna belajar.

KUNCI STUDY FORUM & COLLECTIVE experiments with methods for producing and sharing knowledge through acts of studying together at the intersection of affective, manual, and intellectual labor. Since its founding in 1999 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, KUNCI has been continuously transforming its structure and its ways of working. Initially formed as a cultural-studies study group, KUNCI now seeks to collectivize study through space-making, discussion, libraries, research, publishing, and school organization. KUNCI traverses and connects institutional, disciplinary, and local boundaries. Our membership is based on friendship as well as on the principles of self-organization and collaboration. The members of KUNCI are Antariksa (founder), Brigitta Isabella, Ferdiansyah Thajib, Fiky Daulay, Gatari Surya Kusuma, Hayyu Al Qayyumi, Nuraini Juliastuti (founder), Rifki Akbar Pratama, Syafiatudina, and Verry Handayani.

FIGURE 1. School of Improper Education modular logo, designed by
Tuhantu Design Collective (Yogyakarta). Tuhantu responded to our call for a
logo design that resists a fixed formation of shapes. The logo configuration
signifies a condition that is embracing "trial and always error" practices.

FIGURE 2. At the time of writing, the School of Improper Education is at the latest stage of the *nyantrik* phase. Forty-three participants have taken part in the school. Some of these participants only attend the school on a casual basis. There is neither a strict contract nor an explicit "profit" (like a graduation certificate) that formally binds students to the school's collectivity.
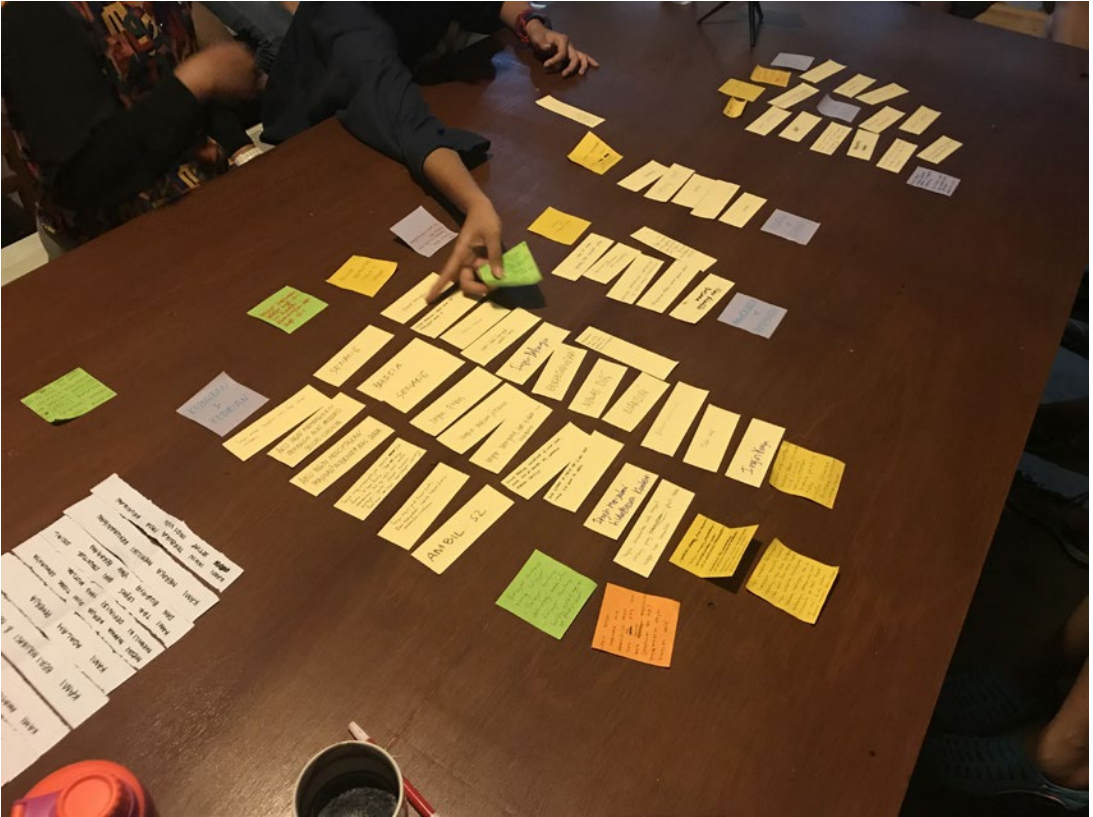
570

FIGURE 3. The school schedule is never fixed. Instead it depends on the availability of the group, which consists of people from different professional backgrounds, ranging from housewives to biology students, creative freelancers, community activists, architects, university lecturers, and others. This has challenged us to think about the accessibility of our school's schedule. After all, the school seeks not only to organize study together, but also to interrogate the meanings, forms, and power of togetherness.

FIGURE 4. Each phase of our school's work started with specific pedagogical principles and with a specific set of themes, topics, and locations. However, as the phases progress, the learning-together process brings forward a series of new themes and perspectives. For example, the *Turba* method led us into discussions about the relationship between precariousness, productive time, and non-productive time. It also led us to consider different mechanisms for shaping subjectivities, and how to allow various kinds of non-knowledge to inform our perspectives. Our collective studying processes so far have led us to attend to the struggle of coastal farmers against the government's developmentalist agenda; the precarious labor of online service ride-hailing drivers; and the economic tactics of urban community organizations led by poor women who live in wastelands, among other questions. The school sustains "the alternative" by continuously questioning its reasons for existing and asking how we exist together. Our school has emerged as a site where we learn various vernacular vocabularies for studying together. At the same time, it has become a place that opens possibilities for engaging in social environments using different approaches. The school serves as a platform for developing a discourse around it.

FIGURE 5. Cover of *Sekolah Salah Didik: Uji Coba 1* (*School of Improper Education: The First Trial*), Yogyakarta: Kunci Publication, 2019. Cover by Hayyi Al Qayyumi. The book comprises texts and reflections written by the participants in the school. This publication also serves as a kind of student progress report.

572

The School Tools Series
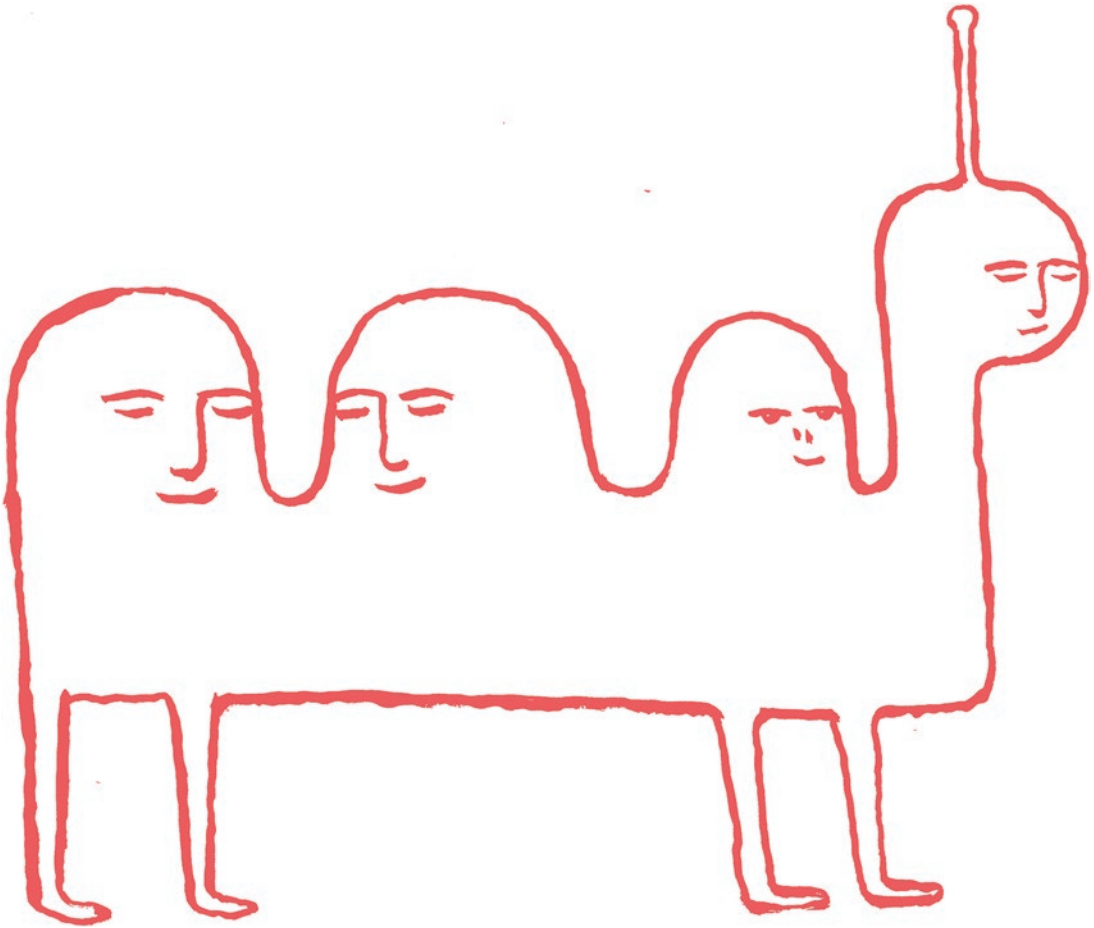
DRAWINGS BY HAYYI AL QAYYUMI

FIGURE 6. Rotating roles in managing discussion (*Penugasan bergilir atau berbagi peran dalam mengelola diskusi*). Instructions for use: In every meeting, each individual can take up the role of moderator, *notulen*, timekeeper, and attention-keeper. The group dynamics also make it possible to encourage a certain individual to take up a certain role. This is especially the case if they have not yet played that role. Usefulness: To evenly distribute responsibilities for managing the discussion's flow. Dominating the discussion is discouraged.
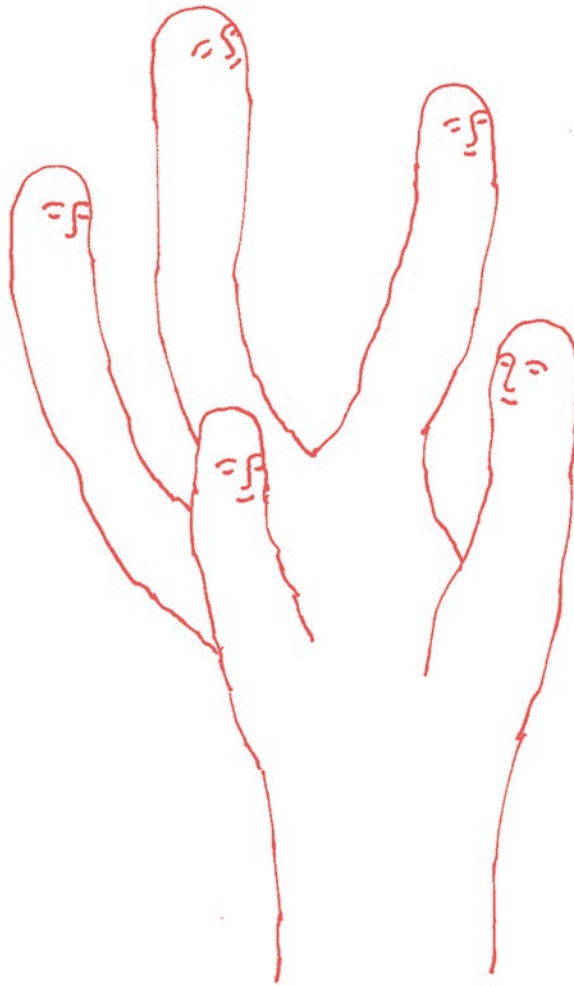
573

FIGURE 7. Dialectics (*Dialektika*). Instructions for use: Create a new concept; test it out (individually or collectively); revise it or create a more mature version of it based on the previous work of others. Usefulness: To emphasize the importance of the open-ended elaboration of new ideas and concepts.
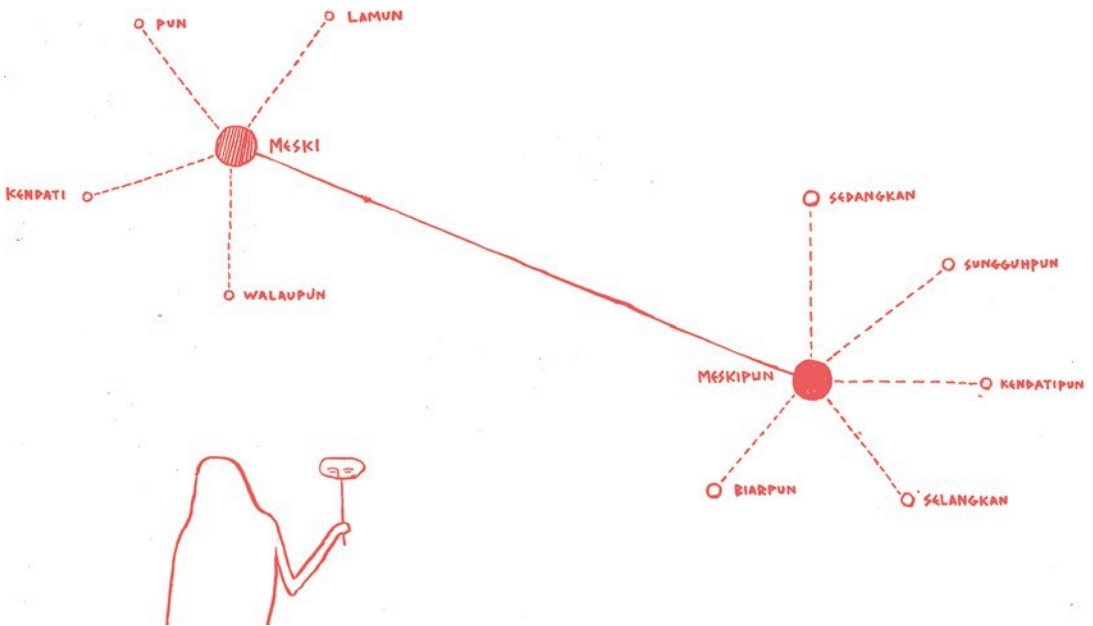
FIGURE 8. Map of concepts (*Peta konsep*). Instructions for use: Assemble, categorize, create the flows and concepts for our learning process. Usefulness: To unify our horizon, to level the frequency of our thoughts, and to make it possible for us to start from the same point.

FIGURE 9. Keywords (*Kata-kata Kunci*). Instructions for use: Name one word that represents an idea. Write it down on a post-it, then paste it onto the wall or a whiteboard. Usefulness: To map the ideas developed during discussion. The keywords can also be collected before the discussion to allow participants to learn about one another's aspirations for the activity.
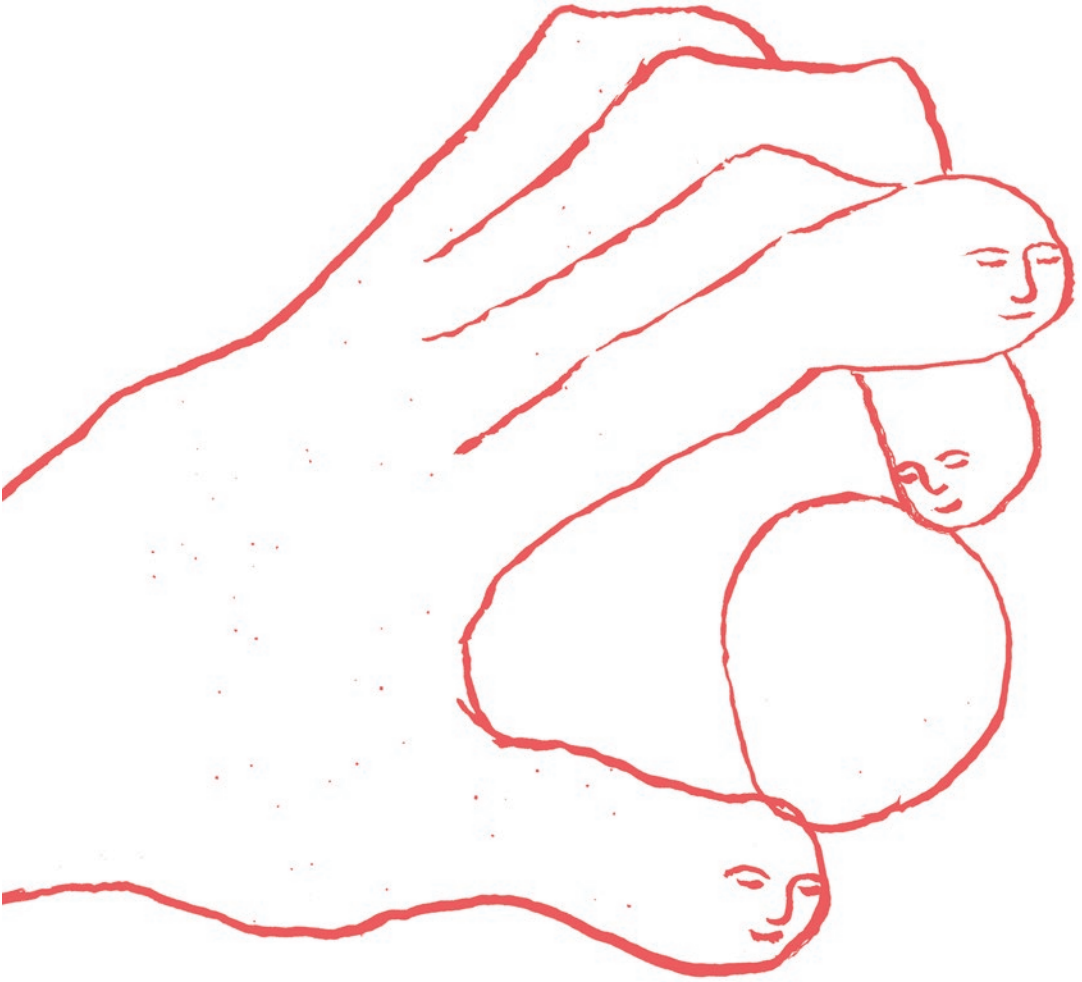
576

FIGURE 10. Eating together (*Makan bersama*). Instructions for use: Enjoy something that can be eaten together. Usefulness: To develop a sense of familiarity with each other. In addition we can learn about one another's preferred tastes and allergies, and what not to eat.
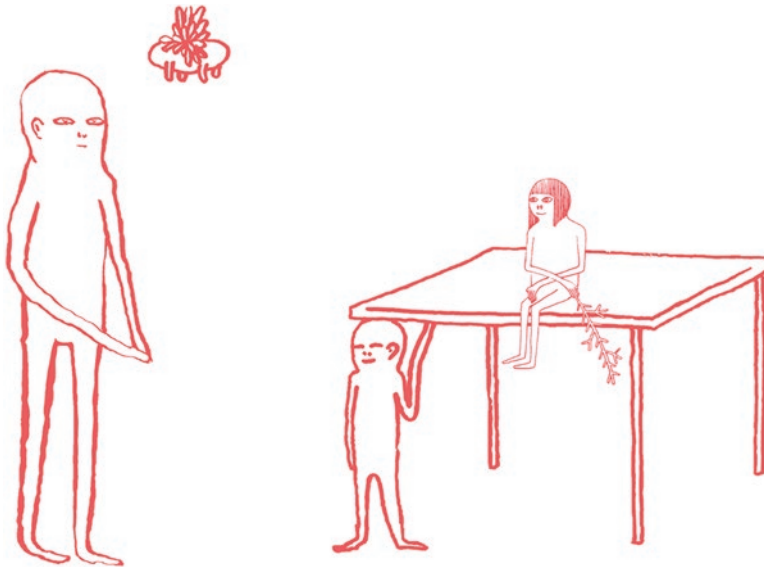
FIGURE 11. Silence (*Diam*). Instructions for use: If the discussion is starting to get stuck, have faith in the silence. Create a situation where silence will not be regarded as an awkward thing or a form of detachment. Usefulness: To treat silence as a tool for slowing down the fast pace of the discussion, providing some room for more reflection.

578