1. Can you describe generally the system you have developed for collaborating over distance? It seems like a bit of a relay race, so are there any methods that you rely on to help the process of frequently handing off work or exchanging ideas?

Maybe it is important to say why and how this 'system' developed in the first place. Having come to the U.S. when I was almost 30, I've already had established practice and working relationships back in Europe. We moved to the Bay area for my wife's research work, not knowing we'll still be here today. Having that 'temporary' mindset for many years, I kept working with people I knew and continued long term collaborations. Not to mention up until a few months back, when we finally got our green cards, as a spouse of an H1B visa holder, I was not allowed to work in the U.S. I always wanted to engage locally and I did so whenever I could, but I couldn't engage in paid projects. So in that regard, it feels like I'm at square zero now, but I always felt that way anyway.

Working over distance was somehow present since I was a student. My alma mater is the Academy of Arts and Design in Prague. When I started in 1998, the master's program in graphic design was for 6 years, which is the same amount of time you need to study medicine. 6 years in a studio of about 20 students and one 'master' professor sounded unthinkable to me and I was lucky I could shape my study plan on my own and spent a significant part of it in the Netherlands and Switzerland. The longer I stayed away from home, the more I had to work over a distance too, because next to the assignments at the Rietveld Academy or Ecal, I still had to do all exams in Prague – the credit system wasn't working the way it does now. Towards the end of my studies, in 2003, Skype was introduced and it really felt like a breakthrough – I mean of course there were emails, FTPs, and instant messaging that simplified long-distance working before, but being able to call and see anyone in the world for free felt somewhat liberating, enabling.

Apologies for the detour. The way we operate now may look a bit like a relay race – because of the 9 hours time difference. The workday is about to end in Europe when the sun goes up here, so I'd get the latest files (Slack, Dropbox) and take over. Obviously, each project is different –

with regular ones, such as the newspaper that we do monthly, we know our tasks and pages and we don't need to discuss them live. Other times we'd talk whenever we need – we don't have any structure or Monday briefings. We've known each other long enough that it's somewhat organic. And that is the point why this has been possible all along – we are friends who discussed, argued, worked, traveled, partied, whatever in the physical space, too.

2. What are the limits/boundaries on collaborating? What is "mine, yours, ours"?

I don't know if there are any boundaries. We are not working on everything together – there are projects that we do individually or in two, but the majority is collaboration, and also with people out of our 'core' group. We credit people in alphabetical order because it is a simple rule to follow. I'm not sure I understand the question correctly – but the line between 'mine, yours' ours' is really blurry and we present our work as 'ours'. If you're asking about finances, we split the revenue (and sometimes costs :) evenly.

3. How much would describe the balance of individual and collective/collaborative work?

Again, please feel free to be more specific – maybe I partly answered above, but the majority of our work is collaborative. I do work on one individual project right now. With our individual projects, we usually don't discuss them among us and we only see them once they're finished. I think it's an important part of our collaboration – being able to do things aside. It often brings something new that reflects on another collaborative project later.

4. Is there anything you would classify as essentially individual and essentially collective?

As far as I could tell in our work, there is nothing essentially individual except our different personalities. Even when we do individual projects in graphic design, from my perspective, everything is a collaboration, everything is based on a dialogue with the subject. I consider graphic design an essentially collective activity.

I always felt that visiting and making exhibitions have been my extended university. My graduation project was an exhibition of other graphic designers I looked up to. I traveled around their studios, interviewed them, learned about their work from their perspective – knowing I'd also like to start on my own after school. I knew nothing about exhibition-making but I thought the work was so good I had to show it to others. I never considered myself a curator since my background is in graphic design, but I find exhibition-making such a rewarding way to practice graphic design thinking – to question, to edit, to relate to physical objects and space – to name the very least. That's why I'd love to have had an exhibition-making program you guys are doing – none of it existed at schools I went through. So yes, one definitely informs the other, in both directions, and while working on exhibitions is definitely different than, say, working on a book design, the way of thinking often overlaps.

To fully understand Hsin-Lei's music before determining the art direction, we discussed her pieces, and I presented my design blueprints with her feedback. Her style is heavily influenced by the classical European masters. Growing up and rooted in Chinese culture, most of her songs also relate to traditional Chinese literature and philosophies, lending her work a unique Asian flavor. Those conversations inspired me to create a multimedia website, which represents the essential spirits of her work, incorporating a calm color palette and stylish photography.

Visually, the site needed to be unique to reflect Hsin-Lei's offbeat style. Functionally, I wanted the site to archive her music rather than distract the visitor with promotions. I blended the classical tone with a touch of interactive animation — a piano-style button and soft light cast upon the keyboard to reinforce the composer's spirituality.