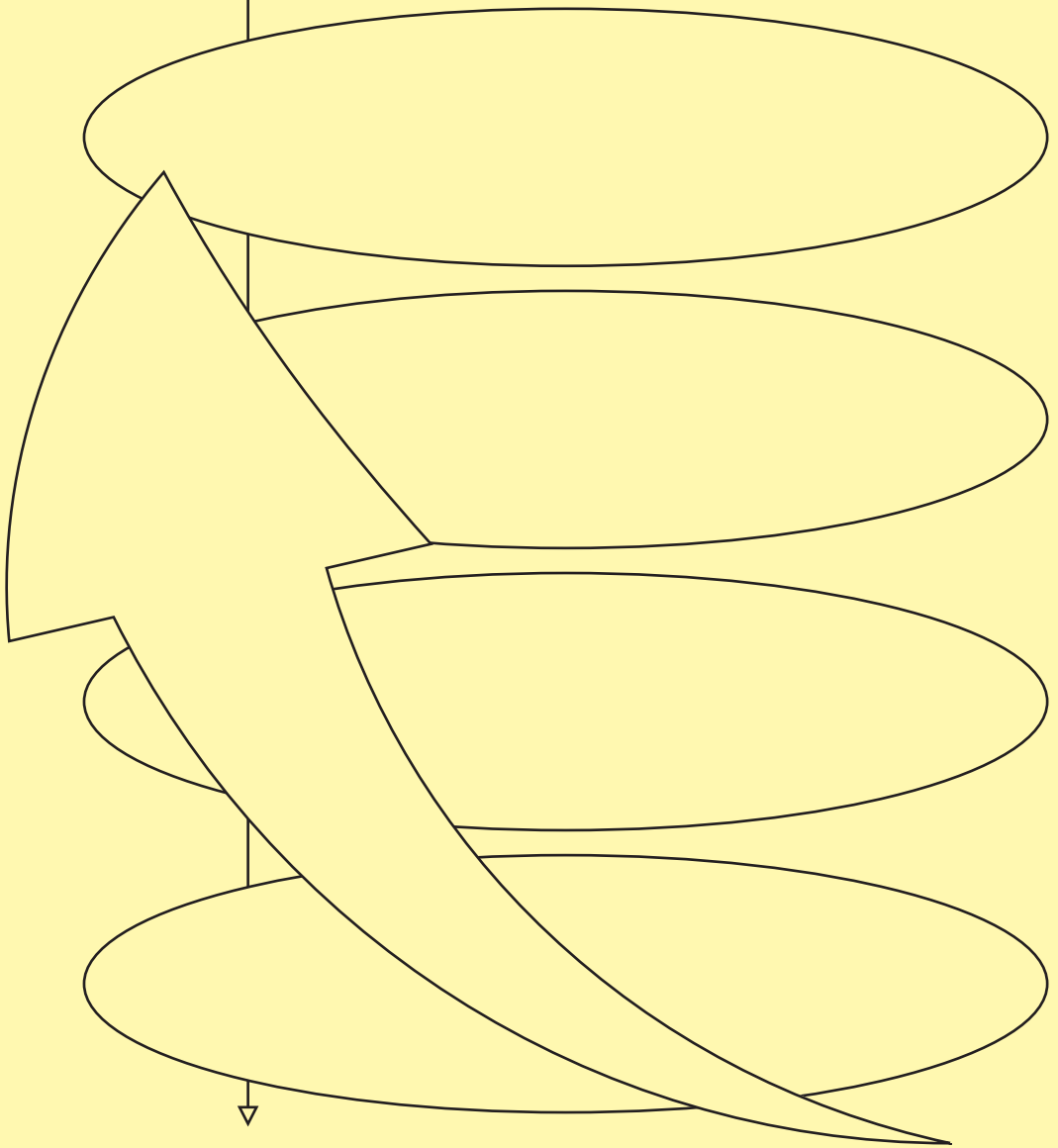
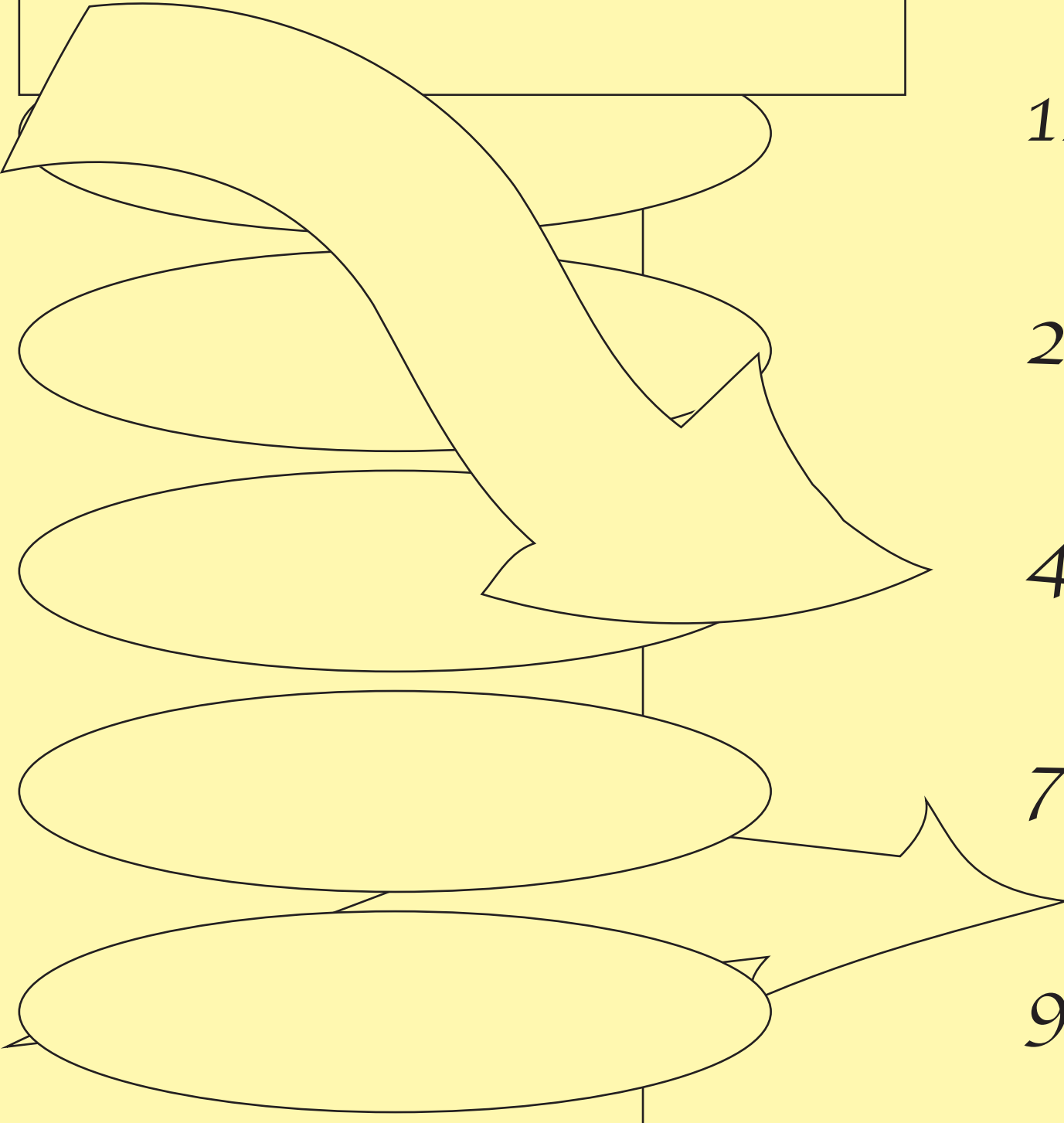


**Remapping
Collaborations
Working
Group**

Nieuwe Instituut



Index



4

Editor's Note
Delany Boutkan
Setareh Noorani

12

**Subverting Soft Power
Reflections on 'Out of Joint' at
2023 London Design Biennale**
Colin Keays

28

**Revolt on Community Noticeboards
Co-Conspiracy as Collaboration,
Plotting as Practice**
RESOLVE Collective

40

**Remapping Collaborations
Public Sessions**
Jack Eden

70

**The Dilemma
of Platforming Collaboration**
Yin Aiwen
Anja Groten

92

Colophon



Editor's Note

**Delany
Boutkan**

**Setareh
Noorani**

Researchers, Nieuwe Instituut

1) Biennales is used here to mean large-scale international events occurring at regular intervals, including triennales and other recurring global cultural events.

Biennales and other recurring global cultural events often promise to reflect a world in flux. Yet, for many of them, their rigid structures – national pavilions, territorial representation and cyclical rhythms – remain stubbornly fixed.¹ These frameworks, rooted in 19th-century geopolitical models, have become a mainstay within the international cultural landscape. They are particularly upheld for the predictability, recognisability and the economic stability they offer. But are they truly equipped to address today's fractured realities and shifting world orders?

As global crises deepen, the need for collaboration and actionable global solidarity has never been greater. Yet, biennales remain siloed in geographic and geopolitical terms, with limited to non-visible trans-geographical forms of collaboration. Against this backdrop, the Nieuwe Instituut sought to nudge an alternative constellation of partnerships

at the 2023 London Design Biennale under the theme of The Global Game: Remapping Collaborations. However, as members of the Remapping Collaborations Working Group caution, “collaboration” itself risks becoming another buzzword – platformed, sanitised and instrumentalised within the cultural lexicon.

This publication emerges from the context of the 2023 London Design Biennale, where the Nieuwe Instituut and its general and artistic director, Aric Chen, acted as both overall artistic director and commissioner of the Dutch pavilion and reframed the event through the lens of The Global Game: Remapping Collaborations theme. A web-based game created by Play the City design studio invited participants to co-create alternative geopolitical imaginaries, challenging the competitive nation-state model of biennales. The Global Game references both the World Game by designer and futurist R. Buckminster Fuller from the 1960s – which prompted players to collaboratively tackle the world’s problems –and, more ambivalently, the 19th-century Great Game and its imperialist power rivalries. It asks biennale participants not only to reflect on international collaboration but also to actively collaborate with the aid of a web-based game.

Meanwhile, the Remapping Collaborations Working Group – an international working group facilitated by Delany Boutkan and Setareh Noorani and programme manager Joyce Hanssen in collaboration with the Creative Industries Fund NL, the Dutch national cultural fund supporting projects, initiatives, research and experimentation in the fields in design, architecture and digital culture – confronted the intricate and often uncomfortable dynamics of collaboration itself. Through public sessions and intimate dialogues in London and Rotterdam, the working group examined the realities of collaboration and collectivity. Starting from the members’ personal experiences, the discussions delved into the interpersonal, institutional

and bureaucratic dynamics that either enable or hinder meaningful international collaboration.

In this publication, two transcripts from the working group’s public events in London (Demystifying Collaboration: Remapping Terms and Conditions for Collective Practices) and Rotterdam (Research Night: Remapping Collaborations) are collaged by editor and writer Jack Eden to share the conversations held. These transcripts present the voices of the working group’s members, including design theorist Yin Aiwen, curator and architect Ali T. As’ad, architect and researcher Nishat Awan, designer and researcher Anja Groten, curator and architect Colin Keays and Akil Scafe-Smith, Seth Scafe-Smith and Melissa Haniff of the RESOLVE Collective for interdisciplinary design.

The contributors’ essays push against the established frameworks of international cultural events, such as biennales, as well as the cultural industries’ prevailing approaches to collaboration, exploring ways to circumvent these systems or, in some cases, reject these types of events entirely. RESOLVE Collective (Melissa Haniff, Akil Scafe-Smith and Seth Scafe-Smith) propose co-conspiracy as an alternative to collaboration, drawing from histories of rebellion and grassroots resistance to disrupt institutional power structures. Yin Aiwen and Anja Groten critically assess the promise of digital platforms facilitating collaboration, revealing the socio-technical labour and asymmetries embedded within attempts to “automate” collectivity. Colin Keays reflects on Out of Joint, the intentionally fragmented Dutch pavilion at the 2023 London Design Biennale, which sought to dissolve boundaries between participants, provide shared-use infrastructure and interrogate the soft power of national representation.

Across the contributions and discussions, common questions arise, such as: How do we create conditions for genuine, equitable, messy and generative collaborations



1) The Global Game (design Play the City, Ekim Tan)



2) Demystifying Collaboration: Remapping Terms and Conditions for Collective Practices, London Design Biennale 2023, Photo: Adam Slama.

both nationally and internationally? Can international cultural events, such as biennales, embrace disorientation – as writer and scholar Sara Ahmed suggests – to forge “new directions” rather than reinforcing established ones? The working group’s explorations call for international cultural events that value the unpredictability of relationality over representation, opacity and critical transparency over spectacle, and discomfort over polished narratives.

In line with the working group’s thinking, this publication does not offer definitive answers. Instead, it presents tools, provocations and methodologies, inviting readers to reimagine collaboration not as a predetermined solution to current global crises but as an ongoing, fraught and necessary negotiation. In doing so, it challenges the biennale model itself by asking whether these events can evolve into sites of solidarity rather than being mere reflections of geopolitical competition. And if not, where is the possibility for genuine ongoing international collaboration then situated?

A heartfelt thank you to all members of the Remapping Collaborations Working Group – Ali T. As’ad, Anja Groten, Colin Keays, Yin Aiwen, Nishat Awan and RESOLVE Collective – for their important contributions and invaluable dedication to all public and internal working group sessions. Their input resonates throughout all the texts in this publication. A heartfelt thank you also to Mireille de Koning and Roxanne Minten of the Creative Industries Fund NL for their unwavering support and insightful discussions about international collaboration.



3) Demystifying Collaboration:
*Remapping Terms and Conditions
for Collective Practices*, London
Design Biennale 2023, Photo:
Adam Slama.

Subverting Soft Power

Colin Keays

Reflections on 'Out of Joint' at the 2023 London Design Biennale

There is something comforting about the temporal and geographical constancy of a biennale. Built on principles of national participation and occurring with a regular rhythm, biennales provide an opportunity for the art, architecture and design worlds to supposedly realign themselves to the new ideas that have emerged on a global stage over the past two years. While the content changes with each iteration, the biennale's format follows an incredibly linear existence, with very little room for deviation. Through this business-as-usual approach, a biennale can be understood as a form of orientation device, allowing the visiting public, commissioners and curators alike to assume a clear sense of direction for the next two years.

This clear and comforting sense of direction, however, is entirely at odds with the disorientating realities of the world today. While disorientation is a primarily spatial sensation

– losing awareness of how our body relates to a particular place – many of us have grown accustomed to a similar sense of unease in recent years as we navigate the shifting narratives, ideas and political values that arise with the ongoing global polycrisis. As feminist and scholar Sara Ahmed wrote in her 2009 text *Queer Phenomenology*, “Moments of disorientation are vital. [...] The point is what we do with such moments, as well as what such moments can do – whether they can offer us the hope of new directions, and whether new directions are reason enough for hope.”

When I was first tasked with curating the Dutch pavilion for the 2023 London Design Biennale, I chose to confront the seemingly linear (and somewhat conservative) format of biennales in general by dissecting the idea of the brief in particular. Embarking on this at several different levels allowed for speculation as to what a national pavilion could represent, questioning the relationship between an individual exhibition and its physical surroundings, as well as the wider systems that influence it. The resulting exhibition, *Out of Joint*, reconciled a process of both bodily and geopolitical disorientation through an installation composed of site-specific fragments. These fragments could either come together as a single scenography within the space of the Dutch pavilion or be loaned to other exhibitors and distributed throughout Somerset House, the exhibition’s impressive neoclassical venue. Once removed from the Dutch pavilion, the fragments took the form of useful modular furniture objects that could be deployed in multiple predetermined configurations, including lecterns for public addresses, seating arrangements for audiences and desks for pop-up workspaces, alongside more absurd elements such as foot massagers, magazine racks and umbrella stands.

Dissolving and exporting the Dutch pavilion in this way was, on the one hand, a disruptive provocation towards

1) Not all biennial events for art, architecture and design today are centred around national participation, but many still follow the nation-state model first set up at the 1895 Biennale Arte di Venezia. This text focuses on such events and can therefore also be applied to similar models, such as World Fairs or Expos, which also have a cultural component.

2) The political dimension of a biennale reached a critical moment at the 2024 Venice Art Biennale, when the Israeli pavilion decided not to open to the public amidst a successful months-long boycott campaign led by the Art Not Genocide Alliance. However, within days, the pavilion’s exhibiting artist was spotted giving private tours to the Italian minister for culture, exposing the inherent links to state power.

the territorial separation of a traditional biennale format, and, on the other, an attempt to create an archipelago of supportive infrastructures that could facilitate different moments of gathering and congregation for the visiting public. Implementing this concept was fundamentally a collaborative process, occurring across several different scales; at each stage – as with any design process – a form of briefing was necessary. To this end, *Out of Joint* can be understood not only as an exhibition but also as a methodology for interrogating and subverting certain relationships and models upon which a traditional biennale relies. Thinking beyond the final outcome, how might we reimagine the different types of briefing – between the nation state, the commissioner, the designer and the public?

Curator as diplomat

Each pavilion at an event like the London Design Biennale is typically spearheaded by an embassy, which writes a brief to commission participants who represent their country’s cultural scene internationally.¹ Geopolitical representation – outside of political institutions like the European Union or United Nations with their summits and assemblies – is rarely seen in such a concentrated form as at a biennale structured around national representation. An ecosystem of visiting ambassadors and government ministers makes such events an undeniable microcosm of political representation, and as such, the significance of culture in setting political agendas through soft power cannot be underestimated. This can be seen as a positive space for peacemaking and the exchange of ideas, or alternatively as a carefully designed theatre for state propaganda.² Acknowledging a biennale as a reflection of its geopolitical context is therefore an important step towards considering how a national pavilion has the potential to both interrogate and subvert some of these dynamics. In this sense, the curator effectively assumes the role of a diplomat, accepting



1) Out of Joint main installation
view. Photo: Adam Slama.

16

17



a brief to represent the cultural interests of their country in the context of another.

If we are to step outside of design to look at today's wider political context, it appears that intergovernmental cooperation is at its most fraught since the end of the Cold War. For much of the past century, a number of global systems have facilitated free trade, upheld international law, and promoted peace. However, trust in these systems now appears to be stretched to its limit. Those on the political right disregard the very charters and protocols once set up to facilitate cooperation and protect human rights, while those on the left are disillusioned that these systems and legal infrastructures only seem to protect the powers that be. These polarised viewpoints make it a dizzying and disorientating time to be alive, but despite widespread mistrust in 20th-century structures for international cooperation, new models are yet to be adopted. The so-called international community remains anchored and aligned around a series of charters, treaties and conventions, and either signing up to these or rejecting them altogether is a display of a nation's political allegiances.

With these existing diplomatic protocols in mind – each upheld by their own systems of bureaucracy and civil service – Out of Joint speculated on the infrastructure needed for national and territorial pavilions to cooperate at the scale of a biennale. In a tongue-in-cheek reference to the bureaucratic processes that facilitate this type of cooperation at an intergovernmental level, the very simple act of lending and borrowing items was made to seem performatively complex, requiring a series of analogue agreements and paperwork for each pavilion to sign in order to remove – or export – components from the Dutch pavilion.³ Accordingly, the space of the Dutch pavilion centred on a wooden desk holding 80 individual folders, each containing a set of instructions and briefings for each of the different exhibitors. The desk referenced the layered history

3) While the campaign for Britain to leave the European Union was framed as a way of cutting through EU “red tape”, the result is that facilitating trade between the EU and the UK is now far more bureaucratically complex than before. This also extends to sending the components of an exhibition, meaning the first post-Brexit London Design Biennale had its own bureaucratic hurdles, with the spectre of Brexit becoming a looming over each

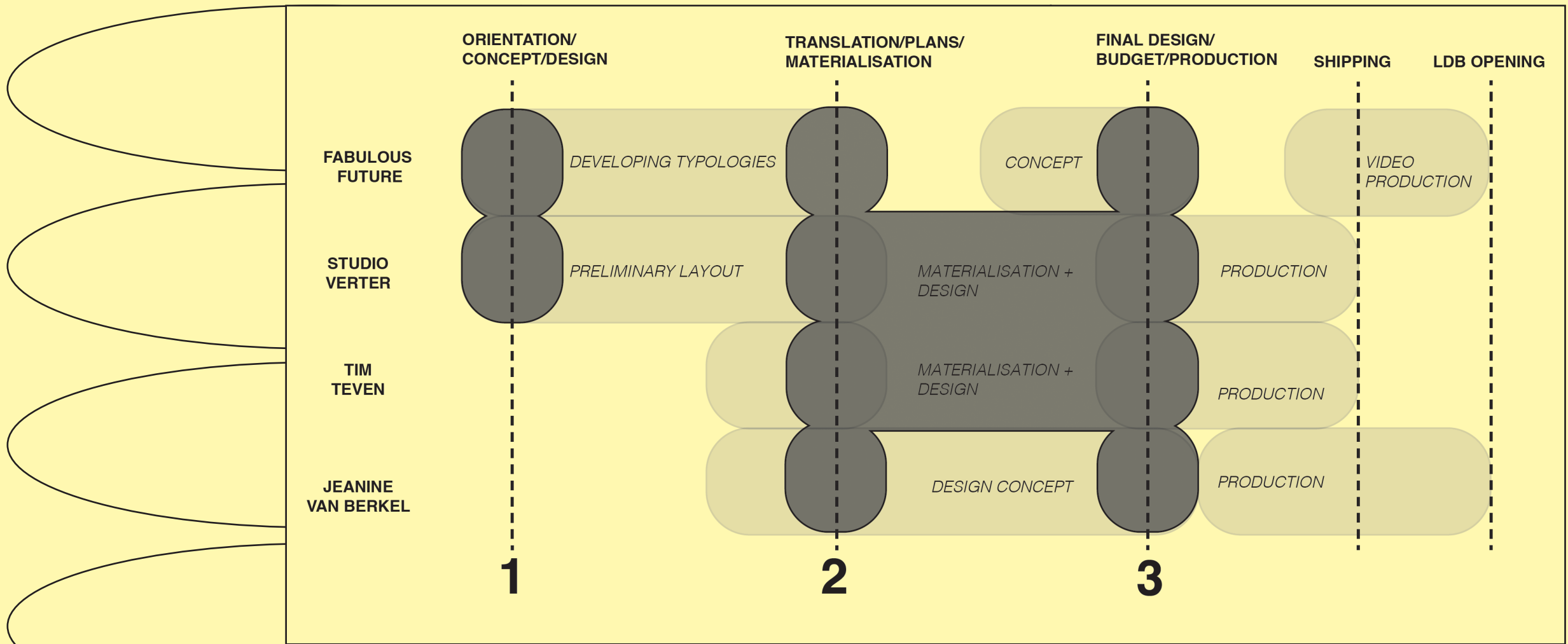
production team based in the EU. 4) Somerset House was home to the offices of several institutions alongside the Royal Navy, including the offices of the Inland Revenue and Customs and the General Register Office for births, deaths, marriages and wills. The desk was designed by Studio Verter specifically in reference to archival images of the latter.

of Somerset House, which itself stands as a testament to both the mundanity and violence of bureaucracy through its legacy as the former administrative headquarters of the Royal Navy at the height of British Imperialism.⁴

The Out of Joint system worked as follows: a representative from each national or territorial pavilion could borrow a predetermined package of furniture objects from the Dutch pavilion by signing and filling out an order form and placing a carbon copy of it in the respective folder, which would become an archive of the process throughout the course of the biennale. This system set the scene for collaboration at its broadest scale, at pavilion-to-pavilion – or *state-to-state* – level, with full transparency allowing the visiting public to browse through the paperwork to see which pavilions had collaborated.

Design brief as bureaucracy

Certain workflows are typically put in place to ensure the smooth commissioning process of a national pavilion at a biennale. One such workflow entails commissioning artists or practitioners to produce content while hiring a spatial designer and graphic designer in a supportive role to work independently on the exhibition architecture and communication respectively. While this model (typically followed by the Nieuwe Instituut) has indeed proven to work on many occasions, it is worth noting that the process is not always conducive to organic collaboration, given that the roles have been so clearly defined upfront. Often, it can lend itself to siloing people within their respective areas of expertise and occasionally leads to clashing egos when they do work together. In response to the 2023 London Design Biennale's theme of Remapping Collaborations, it quickly became clear that this process urgently needed to be disrupted, leading to the selection of a multidisciplinary design team, none of whom had worked together before.



2) Concept diagram outlining overlapping stages of the design process, centred around three workshop moments at Nieuwe Instituut.

Embarking on a collaborative design process raised several key questions. How can a curator and production team become facilitators of a design process? What conditions must be set to enable organic collaboration?⁵ What aspects of the outcome must be fixed, and which can be left to chance? Although assembling a design team (as opposed to commissioning separate parties) can be a conceptual decision to embed collaborative practices within the context of a biennale, acknowledging its pragmatic value is also important. In order to succeed, the Out of Joint installation needed to function in the space as a scenography, with its own narrative, and as standalone furniture pieces possessing distinct identities and signatures beyond the space. Additionally, a system for borrowing the pavilion's constituent components had to be designed, alongside an audiovisual work to contextualise the space. Needless to say, this would have granted a level of agency beyond the capacity of a single designer. The design team therefore consisted of Jeanine van Berkel, Tim Teven Studio, Studio Verter (Roxane van Hoof and Claudio Saccucci) and Fabulous Future (Mirko Podkowik, Naomi Credé and Elia Castino), each contributing complimentary skills and backgrounds to the process.

The design brief was therefore written to be malleable, open to the designers' insights and structured around a series of discussion prompts rather than specific goals. This approach required an element of transparency, setting the expectation that the physical design outputs would be decided collaboratively during three collective workshops. The first workshop (with Fabulous Future and Studio Verter) focused on the overall art direction of the space, developing an aesthetic language that aligned with the curatorial concept, as well as defining exactly what the components within the space would be. The second session (with the full design team) was geared towards materialisation, while the third focused on developing systems and strategies for executing the concept, along with finalising details before

the production phase. These open sessions respected each designer's expertise, avoiding the imposition of a predetermined outcome through an arbitrary brief given upfront. Refining the design took place in between these sessions as part of each designer's production time, during which the design was also shaped by production practicalities and its overall alignment with the curatorial concept.

As the process developed, it became difficult to disentangle exactly who was responsible for what. The designers were therefore credited collectively for the final installation rather than by their specific disciplines. The lectern perhaps best exemplifies the reasoning behind this approach because its construction, detailing and usage clearly bore each designer's signature style: Fabulous Future came up with the concept, Studio Verter developed the modular construction system, Tim Teven contributed the aluminium accents, and Jeanine van Berkel provided the graphic elements. While there was healthy scepticism about whether the other pavilions would collaborate by utilising the designed objects, the lectern ultimately transcended its initial function. As well as being a semiotically loaded cliché typically associated with important political addresses, it became a symbol of the collaborative practices that can take place within the scope of an individual pavilion.

The shadow biennale

Out of Joint offered a prototype – or even a brief – for how collaborative practices could disrupt the norms of a biennale format, using Somerset House as a testing ground to find new models of orientation. While it would be naive to claim that it was the first national pavilion at a biennale to attempt to disrupt the spatial distribution of national representation, in the future I'd like to see how some of these working principles could – over the long term – be

scaled and translated to the context of other international exhibitions. Rather than being a one-off exhibition focused on collaboration and disorientation as central themes, there is a pressing need for more disruptive collaborative practices to become integral to biennale programmes and established as long-term strategies. Achieving this would require distancing the idea of “collaboration” from being co-opted as merely another buzzword around which the worlds of art, architecture and design supposedly realign for the next two years. Equally, it is worth questioning whether this responsibility should lie with the overall biennale organisation and individual pavilions at all, or if it is something that should be left to participating artists and designers working against the system. Perhaps it is not the role of one official pavilion to initiate this, particularly one from a European country that already has a certain degree of access.

A year after the London Design Biennale, during the press opening week of the 60th Venice Art Biennale, I was moved and excited to discover moments of disruption to its long-established format in the form of various actions led by the Art Not Genocide Alliance (ANGA) campaign. One of these actions manifested as a “Palestinian pavilion” distributed throughout the biennale in the form of a printed manifesto, presented at and handed out by certain pavilions allied with the cause.⁶ Far from being led by external agitators, the ANGA campaign thrived due to a self-organised network of allyship among exhibiting artists, curators and visiting critics, each with a deep and realistic understanding of the structures of the Venice Biennale, allowing them to effectively intervene within them. This inherently collaborative endeavour leveraged the international exposure of the press opening week to maximise the campaign’s impact. While Out of Joint sought to soften the hard borders between exhibitors in London by dissolving the concept of a single, officially-sanctioned pavilion, the distributed manifesto from ANGA in Venice offered anchor



3) Fragments from Out of Joint installation being carried by members of the design team for reassembly in another location. Photo: Colin Keays.

4) Podium from Out of Joint being used for an opening speech by Deputy Ambassador of the Netherlands to the United Kingdom, Hanno Wurtzner. Photo: Adam Slama.

6) Italy does not recognise Palestine as a state; therefore, the Palestinian territories are ineligible to hold an officially sanctioned pavilion of their own.
 7) The concept of a “shadow biennale” was discussed at length during the sessions of the LDB Remapping Collaborations Working Group.

points for an alternative orientation system that challenged the competitiveness of the nation-state format from a more grassroots level.

Many criticise the idea of national pavilions, and walking around any biennale still structured in this way indeed feels crass and outdated – a spectacle clearly inherited from the 19th century. Somewhat paradoxically, though, I believe the nation-state model for international exhibitions will remain relevant for as long as the world is structured in this way. Whether this model for geopolitics is still relevant is a different story, but I’m intrigued by how such biennales hold a mirror to the potential opportunities, cracks and flaws in the global structures they claim to represent. The friction between the presence of the Israeli pavilion and the ANGA campaign in Venice confirmed this position: a biennale is not only a site for political propaganda and expressions of soft power; it is also a space where a subversive shadow biennale consisting of activism, resistance and solidarity can coexist.⁷ Attempts to codify this level of solidarity into a commissioning agreement or a design brief would inevitably fall short. Thankfully, these conditions will flourish anyway – regardless of whether there is a bureaucratic infrastructure in place to support them.



5) Benches being transported from Out of Joint installation for use in the Somerset House courtyard for Morgan Stanley Lates summer programme. Photo: Colin Keays.

26



6) Central desk in Out of Joint, used for signing out all packages of items for redistribution across London Design Biennale site. Image courtesy of LDB. Photo: Taran Wilkhu.

27

Revolt on Community Noticeboards

Co-Conspiracy as Collaboration, Plotting as Practice

**RESOLVE
Collective**

**Akil
Scafe-Smith**

Melissa Haniff

**Seth
Scafe-Smith**

During the London Design Biennale 2023, the Remapping Collaborations Working Group gathered at the Dutch pavilion to discuss strategies, tactics and manoeuvres for remapping international cultural collaboration in a biennale setting. In the midst of our conversation as RESOLVE Collective, we posited the critical inspection of this term “collaboration”. Might we instead consider more charged terminology – a word that not only implies shared aims and shared future worlds but also shared threats and shared secrets? “Co-conspiracy” binds us. It serves to describe a means by which workers and practitioners in the cultural field might work towards the upheaval of dominant, violent imaginations that marginalise so many of us whilst profiting from our thought, labour and language. It problematises institutional contexts themselves, using a shadowy array of tools and polyvalent systems – community noticeboards, the grapevine, undercommons, *the plot* – to afford both refusal and reimagination.

Below, we discuss the implications of this co-conspiracy, drawing on present and historical precedents from international histories of resistance in order to substantiate the position of the co-conspirator in the cultural field. Intersecting this conversation are references in the form of pages posted on are.na – an open-source thinking format that we have utilised to showcase our workings out alongside our words – intended to be enjoyed only with covert intentions.

Akil Scafe-Smith

We think about co-conspiracy more than collaboration because it’s a way of disordering power structures: to co-conspire, you must plot against, collaborate to overthrow something.

The slave rebellions of Caribbean colonial history are my first reference for this, not just the rebellions themselves – the Sam Sharpe Rebellion and the Tacky Rebellion in Jamaica^{1,2} or the Haitian Revolution³ – but also how they are taught. They have become fundamental nodes in a particular reconstruction of the history of abolition in the Caribbean. On the other hand, for us here in London, the imperial heartland, conspiracy and the plot become a kind of historical fringe activity. The revolters, who are the heroes of the Caribbean historical narrative, aren’t part of the “imperial story” of abolition, which is one of acquiescence. So, in the context of challenging dominant narratives, the act of co-conspiring and how we retell the conspiracy gains importance.

Melissa Haniff

I’m reading about the 1763 Berbice Rebellion in Guyana, where a statue of Cuffy, the rebellion’s leader, stands. I’ve also been reading about Phillip Moore, a self-taught sculptor from Guyana, who created the statue of Cuffy and defied people’s desire for a visually attractive depiction. In reality, Cuffy would have been a short, oddly shaped character –

- 1) <https://www.are.na/block/32412905>
- 2) <https://www.are.na/block/32413009>
- 3) <https://www.are.na/block/32413179>

- 4) <https://www.are.na/block/32413254>
- 5) <https://www.are.na/block/32413279>
- 6) <https://www.are.na/block/32413433>
- 7) <https://www.are.na/block/32413530>

“ugly” even – which Moore leans into. This is also what the rebellion itself would have looked like: fractious, misshapen, ugly. The statue received considerable criticism over its appearance. But rebellion is ugly and had to happen for our emancipation, so if we are going to celebrate it, let’s celebrate it in this true form.

Seth Scafe-Smith

I think there is still some tension between how those figures are immortalised and remembered and how they are taught. Slavery and colonialism give you obvious historiographic bases. So, educational systems are established with that backdrop; you can incorporate some of these characters in ways that preface their relevance without needing to do too much work into the principles that underpinned a lot of that participation in emancipatory struggle.

But then, thinking about the 1381 Peasants’ Revolt in England,⁵ led by Wat Tyler, what’s interesting is the question of what subsequent conditions and traditions make this type of frictional, disordering knowledge – the memory of uprising – irrelevant.

I once came across a Wat Tyler memorial while walking in East Anglia and it was almost like a community notice board. The point here is that this is one of the few times that you will see Wat Tyler’s legacy commemorated in the public sphere in England. There is something to be said about how that knowledge exists within an English and British context, which is that it is very much on the community noticeboards: it’s on the peripheries, or it’s channelled through bottom-up activity. Take the way that we understand the 1981 Uprisings, where Black communities in cities across England responded to systemic racist policing tactics, such as the “suspected person law” known as the “sus law”, and the legacy of community leader and British Black Panthers member Olive Morris.^{6,7} It is not through this country’s education system. We understand it through

the Brixton Pound, the Black Cultural Archives, if you were lucky enough to have a few posters in your house when you were younger. It's almost as if that *is* the community notice board and it develops and evolves a different current of knowledge.

Akil

How do we reveal and teach co-conspiracy? It's difficult to do in a very public way, perhaps by nature as co-conspiracy is often a shadowy, almost illicit activity. But maybe this ties into your point about how we re-teach slave rebellions and social uprisings: in post-revolt society, there seems to be a necessary flattening act as a means of then reconvening that history. That seems different to the way we are taught here in the UK, but there is still some epistemic indiscretion in this reconvening: once you bring that activity out of the shadows, it actually becomes *unconspiratorial*. Once you bring it into "Winner's History", it exists in tension.⁸ So, how do we, the conspirators, teach? How do we communicate?

Maybe we're also looking too far away. Perhaps we should think of how even *near history* constitutes co-conspiratorial moments for us today. I want to bring in events that have been formative for where we are currently speaking now – Croydon, South London – specifically, the 2011 London Riots and young people's use of BBM [Blackberry Messenger] was real modern conspiracy stuff.^{9, 10} Yes, there was an aspect that was arguably self-destructive, but it raises a key sticking point concerning how we bring conspiracy to light.

Melissa

I've been thinking about the Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM) and the Palestinian solidarity marches across the UK in response to Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza.¹¹ I'm intrigued to see how this will be reported in the years to come, given its urgency, relevance and how current it is today. Growing up, it felt like so many of us navigated a

8) <https://www.are.na/block/32413504>
9) <https://www.are.na/block/32413663>
10) <https://www.are.na/block/32413648>
11) <https://www.are.na/block/32413754>

12) <https://www.are.na/block/32413777>
13) <https://www.are.na/block/32413807>
14) <https://www.are.na/block/32413845>

much dimmer landscape of truth and lies. Today, because of the various tools and technologies that bring us closer to the truth, and because of how much truth is available to us now, I think many younger generations are unable to even entertain "the lie". So, for me, it doesn't even seem like co-conspiring when it's so obvious and in your face. What may have once been read as a "conspiracy against" will now, for many, be read as the "facts of".

So, regarding the PYM: will it be retold in the future as co-conspiracy? In my heart of hearts, I believe that the truth will soon be so evident that the PYM will just be regarded as truth-tellers. They were spreading facts. They were doing what needed to be done at the time. For me, then, the question is: when conspiracy comes out of the shadows, does it acquire a new name?

Akil

What happens to a covert word once it is in the light is something I think we have yet to find out. It's not just about co-conspiracy; this especially applies to our vocabulary straying into buzzword territory. For co-conspiracy, it's not about the truth or a lie, but the necessity of the shadows – reclaiming the idea of working in the shadows.

There is something co-conspiratorial about even those who think publicly, and I'm specifically referring to people in our ecology, such as Civic Square,¹² MAIA and Material Cultures.¹³ They've made their thinking – not just their labour – publicly available, and yet the deeper dreams, desires and visions of worldbuilding that they harbour aren't necessarily always as explicit, just like us.

Melissa

That's a nice way to think about it as well because the outcome of Nurturing Ecologies,¹⁴ our peer-to-peer knowledge exchange residency in Sheffield in 2023 that brought together Black, POC and marginalised group-

led, community-focused creative practices, couldn't have happened entirely publicly. It had to happen privately or, as our colleague Jana Dardouk puts it in the Nurturing Ecologies publication, "turning our tools inwards".

We have to consider that the super private moments are just as important as the public ones where we're sharing and networking. For Nurturing Ecologies, we can be public with it now because we had that week in private, *kicking back* – striving to facilitate communities that have been purposefully deprived of this care and attention.

 Seth

I guess there is something around co-conspiracy that implies a threat.

This is not necessarily concerned with its translation to an activity, because you can conspire in public or in private. Conspiracy can mean "plotting" and "planning" in your studio with other conspirators, like what we've been doing this year with the likes of urbanist and author of *Privatise The Mandem*,¹⁵ Nabil Al-Kinani, visual artist, writer and researcher Nathaniel Télémaque,¹⁶ and curator and archivist at the Bantu Archive Programme in Sheffield, Ella Barrett.¹⁷ But it also takes the form of public forums and debates, such as the opening event for Material Store,¹⁸ our community-focused "factory floor" for the collection, storage, reuse and redistribution of salvaged materials from cultural institutions across London. This took place in public in the Material Store space at the Camberwell Space gallery of the University of the Arts London with George Massoud of Material Culture,¹⁹ Tayyibah Aziz of We Can Make,²⁰ Seetal Solanki of Ma-tt-er,²¹ and George Kafka and Rebecca Gremmo of the Design Museum.^{22, 23}

The recognition of a threat is what makes something conspiratorial. That threat can be the status quo, the current system and sometimes, in more specific terms, the

15) <https://www.are.na/block/32414115>
16) <https://www.are.na/block/32414128>
17) <https://www.are.na/block/32414136>
18) <https://www.are.na/block/32414192>

19) <https://www.are.na/block/32414162>
20) <https://www.are.na/block/32414304>
21) <https://www.are.na/block/32414317>
22) <https://www.are.na/block/32414338>

environmental crisis. In the terms of our practice's birth, gentrification in Brixton was the threat we were all speaking to. Even if we were doing it in super public forums.

I guess there is also a protectionist angle to that example as well. I think everyone within our wider ecology of creative practice feels a need to protect their craft. There's a desire to be protective over the things that we're holding because you don't know what other people are going to do with those things or who is working on behalf of what threatens you.

 Akil

To build on that, whenever you hear the term conspiracy in a legal sense, it's always "conspiracy to commit" not "conspiracy" as the thing. The legal definition I have here is that "conspiracy occurs when two or more people [so there is already a degree of collectivity to it] agree to commit an illegal act and take it some step forward into its completion." The definition goes on to say, "conspiracy is an inchoate crime because it does not require that the illegal act has actually been completed."²⁴ And that is demonstrative of the threat not merely being the action. The threat isn't just the subversion of a dominant order, but the very idea that it could be. So, with conspiracy, there's an element that always seems to revolve around collectivity and the threat to the dominant imagination.

 Seth

So, a collection of essays edited by Thomas Abercromby, Rosie Roberts and Phil Crocket Thomas, titled *The Moon Spins the Dead Prison: An Anthology of Abolition*,²⁵ talks about abolition bringing us to a world of new ideas. I think being able to talk about these practices as ones of radical imagination helps us concretise the possibilities that can come from this type of thinking. Rather than just communicate what we stand against. Which speaks to what you said about the Palestinian Youth Movement, right? One of the things that I think has become really apparent today

is that people have been collecting and gathering not just around things that they're opposed to. But they are then using that as an excuse to start to talk about how they want to see the world.

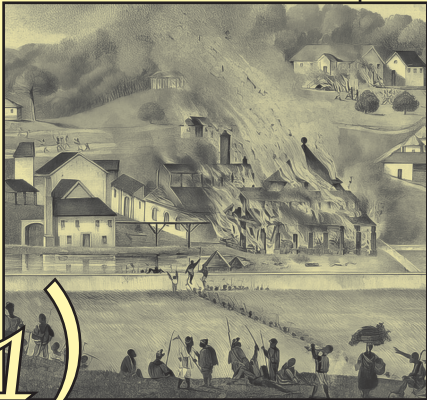
Akil

Definitely. Maybe that's a good place to round it off. Something that seems inherent in co-conspiracy, as suggested by this conversation, is that there is another world that a collective believes in – one that isn't yet there. In the broader sense of conspiracy, that can be good and bad ...

Melissa

... But then to not co-conspire is a threat to the collective imagination.

23) <https://www.are.na/block/32414362>
24) <https://www.are.na/block/32413925>
25) <https://www.are.na/block/32414155>



1)

The Revolt That Ended British Slavery



2)

Tacky's Revolt

Revolutions:
4.01- Saint-Domingue

3)



4)

Berbice Slave Uprising

BBC Radio 4 -
In Our Time, The
Peasants' Revolt

5)

S1/E5 Jimi Jagne
& the Toxteth
uprisings (part 1)

6)



7)

Olive Morris



8)

Imran Perretta,
a Riot in Three Acts



9)

Stirring the Pot of
Haitian History

Palestinian Youth Movement



10)

Imran Perretta's
Requiem for the Dispossessed



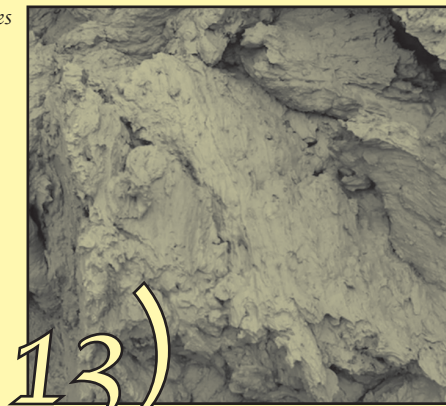
11)



12)

CIVIC Square
Birmingham CIC

Material Cultures



13)

Privatise The Mandem



14)

Nurturing Ecologies



15)

Ellä Barrett



16)

Pesovisuals



17)

Material Cultures

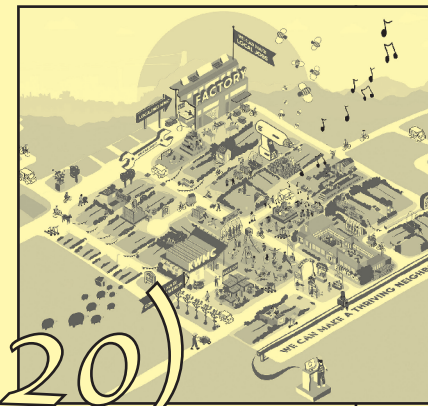


18)

Material Store



19)



20)

WeCanMake



21)

Ma-tt-er



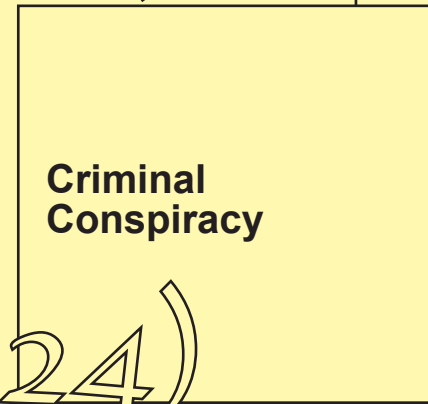
22)

George Kafka



23)

Rebecca Gremmo



24)



25)

The Moon Spins
the Dead Prison

[www.are.na/
akil-scafe-smith/
revolt-on-com-
munity-notice-
boards-co-conspi-
racy-as-colla-
boration-plot-
ting-as-practice](http://www.are.na/akil-scafe-smith/revolt-on-community-notice-boards-co-conspiracy-as-collaboration-plotting-as-practice)



Remapping Collaborations Public Sessions

Jack Eden

“Things can be a bit experimental, a bit messy, a bit less rigid than maybe you’re used to...” From the Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam, Delany Boutkan and Setareh Noorani introduce the first of two roundtable discussions on new forms of international collaboration through the context of the 2023 London Design Biennale. “Our aim is to explore the possibilities of transforming the biennale’s national and territorial pavilions into an alternative geopolitical landscape,” explains Delany. Eight practitioners and a small audience gather to explore experiences, methods and platforms aiming to feed into the creative industry’s funding and practices – “including the Nieuwe Instituut’s. We’re really trying to put our money where our mouth is,” says Setareh. “We start by setting terms to contextualise what we mean by ‘collaboration’ before we look at platforms specifically designed to facilitate it.”

Colin Keays is a designer, editor and writer, “But I’m here as the curator of the Dutch pavilion at the biennale. I approached

the theme through a lens of disorientation, something that can be a constructive starting point for new collaborations, and how you can disrupt infrastructures and ingrained ideas of a national pavilion. I wanted to use disruption to foster new connections between people, and the pavilion itself is intended to be distributed throughout the biennale. We have a space, but we're engaging with The Global Game online infrastructure to foster new collaborations. Basically, everything that's in the Dutch pavilion can be used to support the other pavilions around it. It's an experiment – any other representative of another space can, in theory, borrow objects to support their own programmes.”

“I did a lot of research on collaboration, commoning and collectivity in contemporary art, what these terms mean and the unspoken pain in collaboration.” Responding to Colin is designer, artist and cultural strategist Yin Aiwen. “My concern with the biennale, and the increasing awareness of collaboration, is how this kind of terminology becomes fetishised or performative. What does collaboration mean in the biennale where this conversation increasingly just becomes a talk show? Why is this fetishism happening, and what can we critically engage with to steer collaboration into meaningful work and change the system in an engaging way?”

Nodding along is Melissa Haniff from the interdisciplinary designer group RESOLVE Collective: “It's the methodology, not the output. It's about making visible the process and making that collaboration the main output.” Melissa is joined by the collective's Akil Scafe-Smith and Seth Scafe-Smith, who introduce their practice. “We work across architecture, engineering, art and technology to address social issues. We're focusing on community-centred design, working with people or groups who don't particularly have agency in the design process. We are not chained to a particular discipline, which means we have to work collaboratively. That means accepting all its conflicts but also accepting its opportunities as well.” Melissa continues, “I'm just thinking about the

installation we recently did at the Barbican. It's making visible all the invisible processes that went behind it, making sure everybody knows all the back-end work that's happening so that it's not this big surprise. It allows people to engage in a very different way.”

“My research is also about how collaborations happen and how we can make them more visible,” Aiwen replies. “When you think about the mutual care being received in a collective setting, it's increasingly important to realise that giving access to that is essentially enabling people to engage with the work. In the creative economy, and frankly our economy in general, maintenance labour is something to hide, but that hurts the collective. Well-functioning collectivity is when people are good at voicing what back-end work they've been doing and then allowing other people to access that so that there's an opportunity to build a more enduring relationship beyond the show business of the art world.”

Setareh adds, “I was thinking about the publication Toolkit for Cooperative, Collective, & Collaborative Cultural Work, published by Press Press, and it strikes me how often there is so little space for tools mediating conflict or complaint, even within these processes. Conflict and complaint are part of this work; it's also part of maintenance and care work and the growth that you're going through as a collective. In relation to cleaning up and sanitising the labour, I was also thinking about how complaint and conflict are seen as, at the very least, unhelpful or even endangering to the process. If you give visibility to that, you also create a different type of proximity to your audience and make the work more relatable.”

“I'm currently pursuing my doctoral research exploring Palestinian museum and exhibition practices from the early 20th century to the 21st century. I spent 10 years in the architecture industry, but then slowly my work became more research-focused and less driven towards architecture as a physical construct. One of the imperatives I pursued

within that was to not necessarily develop collaborations in themselves but to trace and document various collaborations happening across the Middle East and North Africa.” Architect, curator and researcher Ali T. As’ad reflects on how these concerns relate to being in a curatorial collective. “We tend to all sanitise our work. We fetishise and romanticise the idea of collaboration as this kind of seamless, beautiful marriage that has no hiccups, no speed bumps, but in reality, conflicts and challenges sometimes generate exciting collaboration, even establishing the true objective of collaboration, which is to appreciate a synthesis that extends beyond two or more individual practices to create something new.”

Colin suggests that institutions often use terms like “collaboration” to mask inaction. “These buzzwords are thrown around – everyone’s either queering or decolonising, which is completely valid, and these are very urgent topics. What’s interesting is when that goes beyond talking. Melissa, what you said about making the process visible as an output in itself is really interesting. But there’s a massive risk involved in that, right? Moving beyond talking about something to actually doing it is a lot more exciting, but you also start to come up against conflicts. What does it mean to put something into practice? What’s stopping you from doing that?”

“I recently completed a PhD in artistic research on the relationship between design and collectivity, including collectivity as a symptom of precarious work conditions in the cultural field.” Anja Groten is a designer, researcher and head of the Sandberg Instituut’s design department, and she is curious about how the biennale’s approach to collaboration is reflected in its economic strategy. “When you invite a collective over, you have to pay for, say, three tickets, but you don’t get three times as much in the economic sense. It’s talked about as added value, whereas it will probably cost you more time and more money. I love to work collectively, but people often don’t realise what it takes to invite, host and facilitate collectives. I also get invitations to come on behalf of a collective just

because it’s cheaper, and that feels like cheating. How do you deal with that in very practical terms, like fees? Another thing I observe is that when it’s about collectivity, people want that charisma of collectivity that I often see in very young makers and researchers. These are very enthusiastic people, so maybe they’re more willing to self-exploit – I’m curious how you’re dealing with that.”

“It’s a really relevant question,” replies Colin. “Thankfully, I have an answer! For the Dutch pavilion, we had a team of four parties, some working collectively, some as individuals, and everybody was valued equally in the ideas stage. They received a fee based on their participation in these sessions, and there was no expectation of output for that. We were just checking that everyone was on the same page regarding the overall direction of the pavilion – specifically, how these concepts were going to be materialised. The teams were able to give input and feedback on one another’s work over several hours together at the Nieuwe Instituut, but then people went off individually and the production was separated. So, even though the design work was done collectively, we acknowledged that people were having different individual processes.”

Delany highlights the friction for individuals attached to institutions that fetishise collectivity, asking what platforms are needed to support more sustainable practices. Seth suggests we should be asking a broader question: how do we define success? “If you’re shoehorning these terms into a trajectory of success then you’re going to have similar outcomes. Collaboration can result in failure, and we need to accept that. Then you can start to pay attention to these different relationships that exist within this sphere of collaboration.”

“I agree with you,” Ali begins, “but despite the fact that we’re talking about collaboration as a form of working with one another, as practitioners we’re working with a precarious set of conditions in a fickle landscape that tends to be very

results-oriented and focused on this perception of success. It's something inherently ingrained in the way we practice, the way we apply for grants, the way we apply for anything, really. There's always this process of reporting."

Seth was writing a funding report on the way here about a collaboration that "didn't work – but we were collaborative when we did it. There are hopefully vehicles within institutions that can start to recognise that space between conception and the finality of project reporting, and accept some of those interesting moments." Akil from RESOLVE Collective also expands on the conflict inherent to collaboration. "I like the tone that Anja set because this obsession with collaboration can often lead us to forgetting about the possible terms and conditions associated with this word and practice. Collaboration often gets sold as a broad church in which everyone's welcome and included, and I wonder what could come of constraining the word. There's also 'co-conspiring' (we use that word a lot), which is linked to collaboration in the sense of togetherness, but you're not necessarily doing it in the same way."

"How do we resolve that within our existing relationships – this burning tension that no one wants to talk about? That brings me back to my point about fetishised collectivity in this economy. All these questions can't be processed as part of that relationship. Rather, it's something we actively need to repress because there is a bigger enemy." Aiwen suggests that collaboration means splitting limited resources, resulting in more tension and an increase in self-exploitation, encouraging us to "not present any failure or tension within the collective because we can't afford to. The weight of this question needs to shift, and we need to create new narratives around collaboration, collectivity and even art in general."

A member of the audience draws on a concern for accountability. "If you want to create, you also have to think about your responsibility, especially with collaboration. When



1) and 2) Demystifying Collaboration: Remapping Terms and Conditions for Collective Practices, London Design Biennale 2023, Photo: Adam Slama.

you collaborate, you have to see it as funding your creation. Ensure it's visible in a digital or physical way – not only for professionals but for the public. I believe in making it visible 'for the streets', so people talk about it and know what you've done. People are tired of collaboration and participation because they can't find their own input, but if we make sure it's visible, people will take it more seriously."

"That's brilliant because public visibility is one of the reasons to start platforming collaboration." Setareh brings us back to The Global Game, a platform built to serve collaborators. "In this case, it's for curators to easily find each other and start these unconventional collaborations instead of fixating on a particular pavilion. They can start collaborations across the board and, more literally, start to remap. There are already collaborative pavilions like Automorph Network and Inner Peace but also countries who started to collaborate with each other."

First to present a collaborative platform is Nishat Awan, an architect and researcher exploring undocumented migration. "I was wondering why I'm in this group in the sense that I don't necessarily think of my practice as collaborative. Maybe my work is a kind of clandestine collaboration – it's there in the background, but it's also very much about the individual researcher. The platform I'm showing is part of a large five-or-six-year research project working with undocumented migrants, so a community that is not static. How do you work in a more long-term way with these communities? We've been working in areas of the world that are in conflict, like building local collaborations at the Pakistan-Iran border, for example, where you can't spend more than two weeks. What collaboration looks like in these very difficult circumstances is something we have been thinking about – how do you work in an ethical way with people you can't spend a lot of time with?"

"There have been many failures along the way. We haven't managed to make a platform that undocumented migrants

can use, but Topological Atlas is a collaborative platform for the team of project researchers across various continents. It's essentially an archive of our research as a way for researchers to collaborate and produce meaning together across the digital artefacts by making threads of connections through it. The platform is about producing meaning across these fragments, inspired by a map of electoral boundaries in Pakistan, one of the places where we're working. What's interesting is that electoral boundaries aren't set beforehand; every time there's a local election, the officials work together and reset the boundaries. It highlights negotiation, but also the fact that in order to collaborate, you have to stop and congeal things for a moment, even if it's on an artificial common ground. We're trying to work against the visualisation of collaborations as friction-free and easy communities made around nodes of interest. It's messy and it doesn't always overlap in beautiful ways."

Akil introduces RESOLVE Collective's platform as "Work we did with the Nieuwe Instituut during the Covid-19 lockdown, so we weren't actually here. We were conducting tonnes of interviews online, and we had access to a vast digital archive as well as the stories and collective narratives and experiences of others. We were thinking about the practice of topology, the idea of folds, and how you could re-imagine an institution and recreate infrastructural relationships by folding different parts of it. So, the institution not as a homogenous thing but a collective and collaborative entity with lots of different teams, contracts, aspirations and individuals. What does it mean to fold those relationships? How do you fold them, not tear or break them, and place them within proximity of different actors? We were fortunate in discovering the Nieuwe Instituut was itself a fold, coming together with other institutions folding into one, so we took that as a launching point.

"We wanted to try to articulate this place that we'd never been in, and we did so using a Bitsy engine, an open-source game creation tool. We used interviews and archival research to create

different worlds within the Nieuwe Instituut that focused on the narratives of different characters. Some were non-human, like the ducks in the pond, some were archival documents and some were real characters. It's a very disorientating game – it's difficult to get your head around what's going on at any point. This is obviously not an active platform for collaboration, but we were interested in collaborative behaviour, and we didn't want to show that to be something neat. It was something that could only be experienced through disorientation; so, this was more a celebration of that."

"I see platforms as a tool for convergence, a place to hang out." Created by the Hackers and Designers collective, Anja presents a platform as "an experiment in self-organisation, trying to redistribute our financing. A lot of decision-making was happening while writing funding applications in very rushed situations, and there was a desire to make these processes more transparent. It totally failed because a collective is a constantly changing ecosystem, and writing things into smart contracts that you can never change was not a good way of going about it. Platforms also tend to evolve through processes we don't anticipate. It's a long-term investment and it's something we want to continue doing collaboratively and, in that way, a platform is never for collaboration; it's with collaboration. It's part of our fabric as a collective."

Nishat reflects on how we can embrace the limitations of these platforms and continue to work within a process that is never seamless. "Topological Atlas highlights the differences in meaning that we have. We're a huge group of researchers from different geographies and cultural backgrounds, and we're working across multiple languages. The platform malfunctions sometimes – meaning is not always carried through, and that's part of the folded nature of it. It was interesting to hear RESOLVE Collective talk about the characters within their platform because our initial idea was that you would take on the persona of somebody passing through borders without papers or the persona of the border official or agent. In the

end, we didn't do it, because we felt we couldn't make it work with the delicacy of the material."

Setareh poses the question: "How do these platforms relate to particular social conditions of work, like forms of precarity or economic relations?" Anja answers: "They very much reflect precarious cultural work. On the one hand, we have an interest and curiosity in experimenting with tools and challenging habitual tools and dominant platforms to find other ways of collaborating online. However, on the other hand, it shouldn't be on us cultural workers to develop. This rephrasing of what success means is interesting – we constantly rethink, redefine and challenge what 'usability' and 'efficiency' mean in a fragmented work-life situation. I can only see these projects through the lens of precarity, but we do it because it's fun and we enjoy it."

"To answer the question is to reflect on the moment our platform came about. We were in the early years of our practice, but our relationships with institutions had been prefaced by the constrained conditions of how we work," says Seth. "Then, during the Covid-19 pandemic, there was no pressure to force ourselves into certain boxes or certain spaces, and we could pay attention to what it meant to operate within the cultural field, what it meant to think about institutions and infrastructures. You often have to build your own mechanisms and ways of exploring these otherwise constrained environments. I think it was precarity, but it was also time; that pause allowed us to reflect in a certain way."

"So many platforms were developed during the pandemic," replies Colin, "because it came from necessity. You couldn't do a physical exhibition, so everyone made something online, and I think it's a valid and interesting way of reaching new audiences. But I'm wondering, how can you ensure a platform's longevity, how can you ensure people come back to it – and is that important? Maybe sometimes it's just a capsule of a certain time? Anja, you've provided so many great examples,



3) and 4) Demystifying Collaboration: Remapping Terms and Conditions for Collective Practices, London Design Biennale 2023, Photo: Adam Slama.

and I was wondering how they could become active tools that people keep returning to. Can you engage a new audience with them? Do you have to adapt? Are they in this ephemeral state in the same way as an exhibition?"

"It's interesting," Anja says, "because we made our own livestream platform and it was very rushed, but we got a lot of requests from cultural institutions – including the Nieuwe Instituut – wanting their own, but they all wanted their own banner on top. I'm always a bit surprised by how obsessed institutions are with this idea of wanting their own custom-made platform – what's this obsession with recreating Facebook? The tools that work the longest are the ones that we use daily, that are easy and accessible, but I would always try to see what's already there. Platforms crash and you end up calling someone or WhatsApping them – so, maybe, just do that."

"The platform has to serve a majority in order to survive," adds Aiwen. "You're building a platform to further stimulate your existing collective relationship, and that's a very different sense of platforming. Essentially, it's our relationships that get platformed, and what Anja has shown us is a different type of model where the relationship can flourish. I find it super inspiring."

Inside the Dutch pavilion at the 2023 London Design Biennale, the second Remapping Collaborations discussion opens with Anja's reflection on the previous conversation. "One thing that stayed with me is this idea of what comes before and after the biennale, challenging this notion of novelty and producing new work."

"Some of the answers can be quite simple," Seth responds. "We're obsessed with this centralised model of valuing work and thinking that everything revolves around an event that's a month long. I think there are so many ways that you can

distribute some of the funding to groups that might have a much messier way of working – don't encourage them to produce anything, but encourage them to further their projects. We're talking about depth of relationships rather than scale. This approach creates a structure that's much more expansive and no longer wedded to these old colonial ideas of what an 'expo' exhibition might be."

"We have this structure because the entire art economy lives off attention – let's face it, no art event has any model other than that of show business," says Aiwen. "The bigger reality is: who wants to invest in an alternative? Can we reroute and reconceptualise? It requires massive coordination to work together to figure it out. Documenta is asking how they can make things more accessible, but then people just drop in, grasp the concepts and walk away..."

"It's great to increase accessibility to cultural production," says Ali. "It's about the democratisation of culture, which is a really necessary thing. I agree with Aiwen that it has its limitations, but if it were as easy as setting up a more participatory horizontal structure for these international exhibitions, then more of them would be doing it. There is a certain element of mess that's involved and a certain element of conflict that these institutions try to veer away from. Maybe our conversation – and many of the conversations increasingly happening across the world – will help show institutions that those conflicts are something they can ultimately learn from, potentially leading to a more interesting and inclusive space for art and cultural production. It is about transparency but also about recognising multiple authors."

"We're going up in scale and pointing towards problematic and abstract infrastructures, but it's important to remember the small acts of resistance that are already happening." Delany then highlights one such important act of resistance and solidarity: "We'd like to express our solidarity with RESOLVE Collective's decision to close the Them's the Breaks exhibition



5) and 6) Demystifying Collaboration: Remapping Terms and Conditions for Collective Practices, London Design Biennale 2023, Photo: Adam Slama.

at the Barbican in response to recent actions curtailing a free Palestine discussion. We say this is in light of today's conversation about how such actions shed a more critical light on the role of institutional spaces and the importance of international collaboration rooted in solidarity."

"One thing we haven't spoken about explicitly is this idea of the nation-state being the fundamental bedrock upon which everything is built," says Nishat. "At the 2023 Venice Biennale of Architecture, there was talk of having a stateless pavilion, but when the money ran out, that was the first thing that didn't happen. Thinking about where I'm from, a Pakistani pavilion makes no sense – I'm sure it's the same for many nations. I wonder why we're still tied to this idea – why can't we have regional pavilions?"

An audience member draws us back to the friction inherent to collaboration: "How do you avoid the risk of collaborating with the same people just because they're safe, you like them, and you want to give them opportunities? Approaching people you don't know, knowing you both want to get something out of it, feels like a big risk with collaboration." Aiwen replies, "The question goes back to whether we're talking about collaboration itself or about funding – funding brings a different set of concerns."

"I think that's only really true if there isn't an institutional context at play," responds Nishat. "In which case, these kinds of very long-term relationships can be very productive, but they are also exclusive for others coming in. That's where things congeal and become nepotistic; it happens all the time. But outside of institutional structures, absolutely, I would agree with you."

"Talking about the longevity of collaborations and their outcomes, I think it's the clarity of aims and objectives that are important." Another audience member suggests that there is no right answer for the length of a collaboration. "It depends

on what we're talking about, like urban renewal or behavioural changes – they'll all have very different timeframes. To see something to fruition, you might need different collaboration and support. Maybe you could have different collaborations at the same time within the same programme – that could be quite exciting.”

“There are formal and informal economies relating to the longevity of collaboration within a biennale format. Some international exhibitions, like Manifesta, have a huge impact on the cityscape,” says Setareh. Delany highlights RESOLVE Collective’s experiences of collaborative longevity and concern for the afterlife of exhibitions and spaces. Seth answers, “Organisations know that it’s very sexy to talk about circularity, but when you’re building your own projects in abandoned spaces, it makes sense to continue the afterlife of that project, that material, that conversation. That’s how you build up the foundations of a practice. It allows you to evaluate the longevity of something differently.”

Another audience member relates the question to what we ask for in the initial stages of a process: “I work for a branding design agency, and I’m currently trying to write briefs that create opportunities for artists to tell the stories of different regions. We’re trying to think how we can create these briefs in a way that is reciprocal, not one-way, to make sure it’s a value exchange. I wonder if there are ideas around tools or ways to build those things into briefs that ask artists and designers to prioritise equality?”

“It’s a nice thing to understand people’s motivations, and whether they have a track record of these kinds of things – doing something reciprocal,” answers Colin. “At the same time, you don’t want to exclude people who are under-experienced, so it comes down to an element of trust. How do you create an infrastructure that allows for dialogue? These frictions arise around questions about labour, especially if it’s something collaborative. How are people evenly distributing

their own resources and time within a particular project? That’s not something set in stone – a brief doesn’t have to be fixed from the outset. It can be a constant process of negotiation throughout an entire process. Maybe a brief can be something more fluid.”

Ali returns to the concern that “collaboration” is often used as a buzzword. “Within the structure of a brief, it shouldn’t just be encouraged but incentivised. Collective agreement is a necessary tool for collective action – I cannot overstate how valuable that is and how valuable it is to renegotiate and see it as this living, organic manifestation of collaboration. I operate as part of a research collective, but I also live as part of a housing collective, and in both of those spaces, a constant re-evaluation of how we work or live with one another is a very necessary tool.”

In response to a question from Setareh about tools for remapping collaborations, Akil says, “A lot of our work is based around looking at tools in two different contexts. One is the tools of dissent, misuse and sabotage. A lot of that work is taking place in Birmingham, where we’re part of a commission looking at community work, and we’re thinking about tools as instruments which both shape the world and ourselves. On the flip side, we’ve been looking at tools of solidarity for an exhibition with youth centres across the UK and three schools in Palestine. We tried to delve into these micro-occasions of trust, empathy and the shared or un-shared goals they experience in their daily lives and use them to reflect and build together.”

“I’m a curator,” says an audience member, “and my understanding of collaboration is that the centre is held in place by multiple parts. A concrete example of this, which has been able to translate collaborative working in a really effective way, is Arts Collaboratory. It consists of 25 arts organisations worldwide connected by a shared social or activist element. A Dutch funding organisation provides a collective pot of

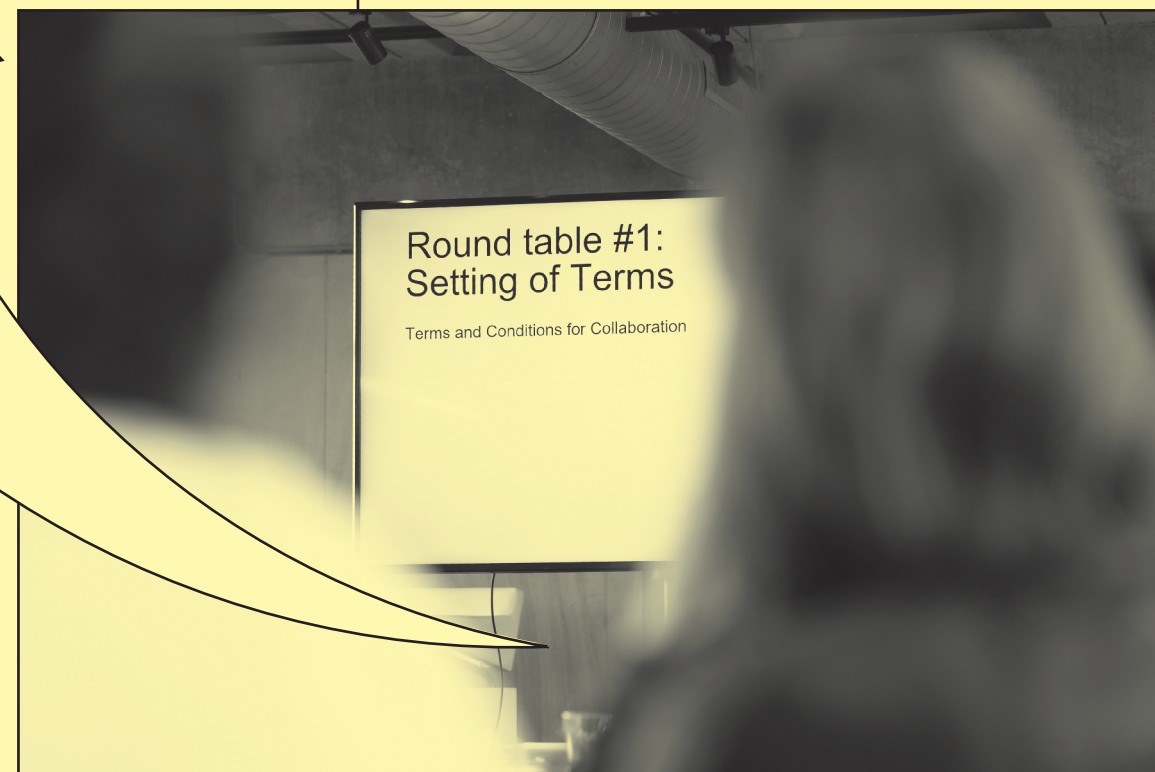
money, then the organisations come together and decide how to distribute it. While there are tangible collaborative methods across different industries and spaces, there is also a lot of emotional labour.”

“That’s a great reference,” replies Setareh. “At the Nieuwe Instituut, we’ve also piloted different methods for distributing money. When you transfer funds to another country, it takes a lot of time, but the recipient needs the money ASAP to conduct the programme they’ve promised.” Ali adds, “It is about funds, it is about money, but the thing you can learn from an institution like Arts Collaboratory is that it’s trans-local. It creates opportunities for institutions in the Global South that operate beyond the structures that ultimately dictate how international exhibitions and channels of exchange should operate. To go back to Nishat’s point about the stateless pavilion, the Venice Biennale is renowned for being this stage for nation-states. Pavilions are established along national lines and funded through national budgets, and within that there’s so much exclusion. This system prevents territories, spaces and countless communities around the world from being represented. When space is afforded to those groups, the systemic institutional approach often marginalises their contributions by relegating them to collateral events. Those examples reveal how it is about opportunity and, to go back to Delany’s term, resistance, and this form of action that reclaims the right to those spaces, to recognition, and to spaces with an international community.”

“Arts Collaboratory is a very interesting model,” Aiwen agrees, noting that it is funded by the state-run lottery in the UK, “so they don’t need to respond to taxpayers, but it’s a fragile system – you’re relying on a single consensus. It’s not really collaboration but philanthropy. I constantly try to look at the fear funders generate, because artists and institutions think the funder is the sole power-holder. We’re constantly attacking them, but they’re also very afraid of funding the

wrong projects. People just hate them! When we’re trying to collaborate, let’s recognise power structures that are not necessarily comfortable. Let’s be frank and talk about how we can reorganise this so that we’re in a better position for each other.”

Addressing Aiwen, the audience member concludes: “You should be part of Arts Collaboratory; that criticality is exactly what it needs. My biggest takeaway here is that if you’re collaborating, be accepting of a pace changing. It’s never right or wrong, because it’s not failure; it’s time. It’s not failure; it’s refinement. If we both accept that, fundamentally, we want to understand each other, then there is no failure.”



7) Research Night: Remapping Collaborations, Nieuwe Instituut, 2023, Photo: Tomas Mutsaers.



58



8), 9), 10) and 11) *Research Night: Remapping Collaborations*, Nieuwe Instituut, 2023, Photo: Tomas Mutsaers.

59









66

18) Research Night: Remapping
Collaborations, Nieuwe Instituut,
2023, Photo: Tomas Mutsaers.

67



The Dilemma of Platforming Collaboration

Yin Aiwen

Anja Groten

*An exchange
between*

Setting the scene

This co-authored essay emerged from an ongoing exchange between Yin Aiwen and Anja Groten, culminating in a recorded and edited conversation held in July 2024. Both Aiwen and Anja are designers researching the boundaries of collectivity within the realm of cultural work.

Anja's research focuses on the collective entanglements of design and publishing tools and infrastructures as they evolve within self-organised groups such as the Hackers & Designers (H&D) collective and the Feminist Search Tools work group. In her work, Anja attempts to make counter propositions to stable and idealised views on collectivity, paying attention to the inefficient and convoluted approaches to organising and designing. Her view of collective design engages with issues such as the fragmentation and

flexibility of cultural work, as well as the commercialisation of art and design education.

Aiwen's work explores alternative techno-institutional practices that support communal care and collective changes, from welfare systems for chosen families to the art economy for socially engaged art. Since 2021, Aiwen has been conducting ethnographic research and theorisation of collectivity and communal practices, with her collaborator Yiren Zhao, as well as like-minded friends, as part of her broader research and design inquiry into alternative funding strategies and institutionalism in the arts.

The initial exchange between Anja and Aiwen was sparked during several work sessions held within the context of the Remapping Collaboration Working Group, a research group commissioned by the Nieuwe Instituut for the 2023 London Design Biennale.¹ The group was invited to reflect on the Global Game,² an online platform developed by Play the City.³ This platform utilises game mechanics to support and highlight the Biennale's collaborative theme of stimulating collaboration between the participating countries of the Biennale. The Global Game platform asked participating countries and regions to shape and visualise new forms of international cooperation and participation in joint activities and projects.

Drawing from personal experiences of designing online and offline collaborative spaces with different communities, Aiwen and Anja (hereafter referred to as "we") approached the proposition of platformed collaboration with a critical curiosity and initiated a discussion about the promises and fallacies of designing ambitious digital infrastructures for globally dispersed collaborators – groups that are more and less formalised and situated within diverging geopolitical and socioeconomic realities.

- 1) <https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/projects/london-design-biennale-23/working-group>
- 2) <https://nieuweinstituut.nl/en/projects/london-design-biennale-23/the-global-game>
- 3) <https://www.playthecity.eu/>

- 4) <https://hackersanddesigners.nl/open-call-hdsc2024-unruly-currents-everyday-piracy.html>

At the time of writing this essay, approximately one and a half years have passed since the co-authors were first introduced to the London Design Biennale's theme and the Global Game project. In revisiting the topic of imagining and designing for collaboration, they offer a renewed perspective informed by recent experiences.

Dynamics and collective conditions of the H&D Summer Camp

▴ Anja

Just before our call, I had returned from the Hackers & Designers Summer Camp, an intensive two-week workshop programme.⁴ The camp took place at a remote location in the south of the Netherlands. Emerging from this intensive experience stirred up some fundamental questions about the continuous effort involved in designing spaces for rigorous collective experimentation that aim to circumnavigate tech-solutionist tropes, including the pressures to produce anything marketable. The H&D Summer Camp annually attempts to rethink how we do things together on this damaged planet. We set up a temporary village of tents and huts with a group of technophiles, designers and artists to work, tinker, learn and live together and to ask the question: How can we take seriously the very activity of coexistence and use the annual camp as a potent prompt for co-designing truly egalitarian techno-futures that are socially and environmentally conscious?

While the experience of co-organising and participating in the H&D Summer Camp has been tremendously rewarding, the exhaustion following its conclusion is undeniable. Having facilitated summer camps and alternative learning spaces since 2015, H&D, as a grassroots self-organised collective, has continually redefined both itself and the formats and methodologies for collaboration in accordance with the communities it engages with. This iterative and permeable practice of designing collaborative spaces has become a

communal effort much larger than the core organising group of H&D. Yet, what sometimes seems to be forgotten when we speak about these types of emergent collaborations and collectivities – those that derive from shared urgencies and convictions – is that they go against the grain. As rewarding, caring and stimulating as such environments can be, *going against the grain* also costs energy. Undoing paradigms of efficient, progress-oriented and outcome-driven modes of production while committing to practices of collective care is a constant struggle. Breaking paradigms of efficiency means constantly questioning who is not present in the spaces we create and inhabit. It also requires embracing the effort it takes to accommodate participants across differences, such as age, race, gender and ability, while also being prepared to care for those who we invite into this space.

Take, as an example, the practice of collectively writing, reading and editing a Code of Conduct (CoC), a document that clarifies the values and atmosphere we aim to foster and facilitate as collectives. A CoC can serve as a guideline for collaboration and as a point of reference for acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in shared spaces. At H&D, reading, discussing and potentially rewriting this code has become a ritual at every gathering. It is a necessary practice because it establishes the collective conditions for reciprocal and respectful ways of being together, particularly when sharing the intimacy of a co-living space.

However, I began to wonder whether this process risks becoming a routine, repeating the same lines every time a new person arrives. There is certainly beauty in this repetition; it becomes a collective practice in which everybody is onboarded with sufficient time, care and attention, ensuring no one is left behind. It is a slow and important reflective process. Yet, for those who have engaged in this process for a long time, questions arise about how to confront impatience or the impulse to think

“Here we go again.” The challenge is to stay with this discomfort and consciously resist the urge to rush ahead or skip a step. Any new collision of people and the experiences they bring should be encountered as an opportunity to learn and grow for everyone involved.

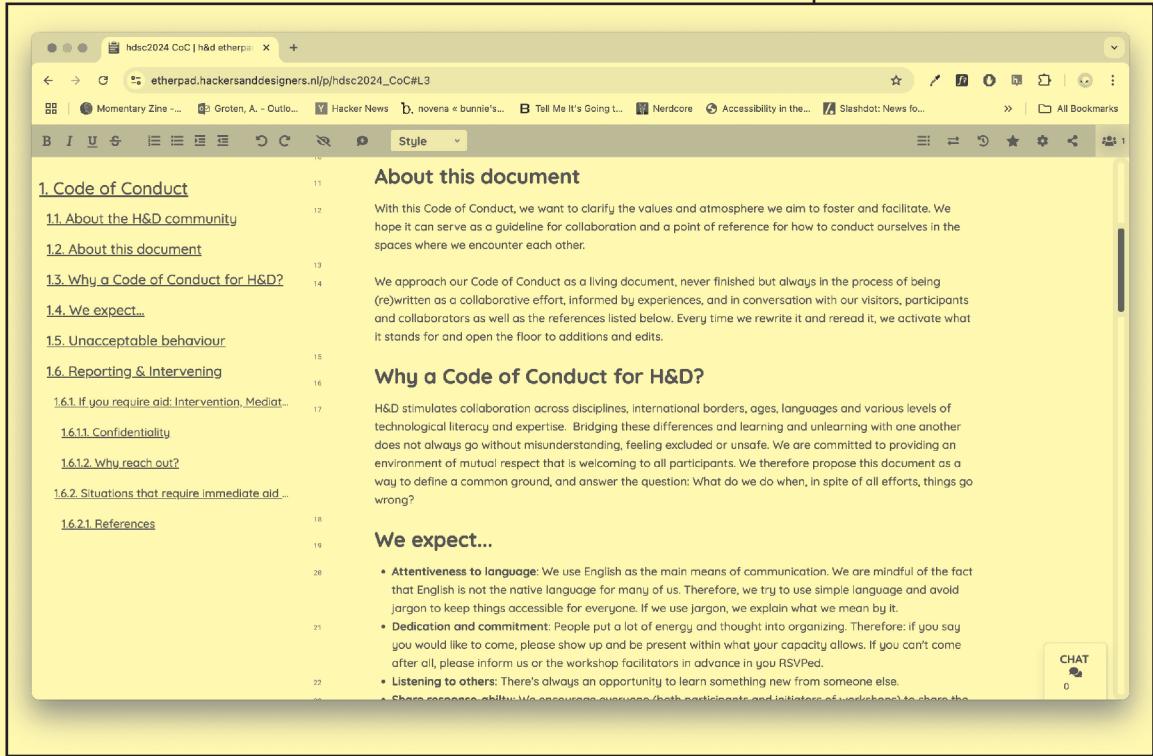
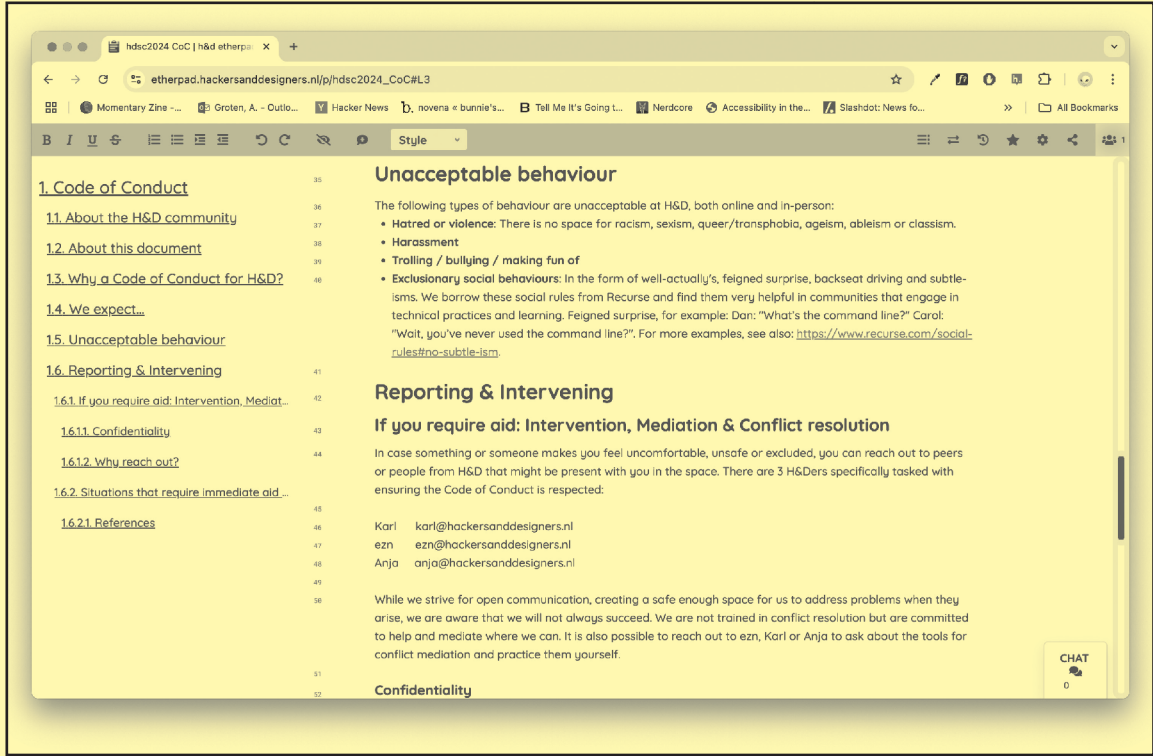
We all bring different experiences to these spaces, some of which may be traumas from previous collaborations. Everyone enters the space with different baggage. It is this act of repetition that we must commit to, stay with and embrace. This is what collaboration – doing and making across differences – requires. You must explain yourself, your intentions and your assumptions, over and over. Part of this *effort* is acknowledging it as such: an *effort*. It can be exhausting, and it is hard work to create safer spaces for collaboration.

Contextualising the ontology of community

▶ **Aiwen**

Between the first working group meeting and our call now, Yiren Zhao and I developed a situated framework called “the ontology of community”. The framework is an observational model designed to map the current status of a community and describe its normative journey. We propose an ideal pathway for a group of people to effectively become an intentional community.

We regard the first stage of an intentional community as the “self-organisation” phase, where people learn how to cultivate a Safe Space through supportive, trustworthy relationships (Internal Relationships) by actively taking care of each other (Maintenance Labour). This process leads to meaningful conversations about resource distribution and how the community recognises values among the group (Communal Economy). This phase offers a collective experience in which the group can get to know one another as people and understand what it means to live and work together, thus



76

1) and 2) Excerpt from H&D Code of Conduct, 2024.

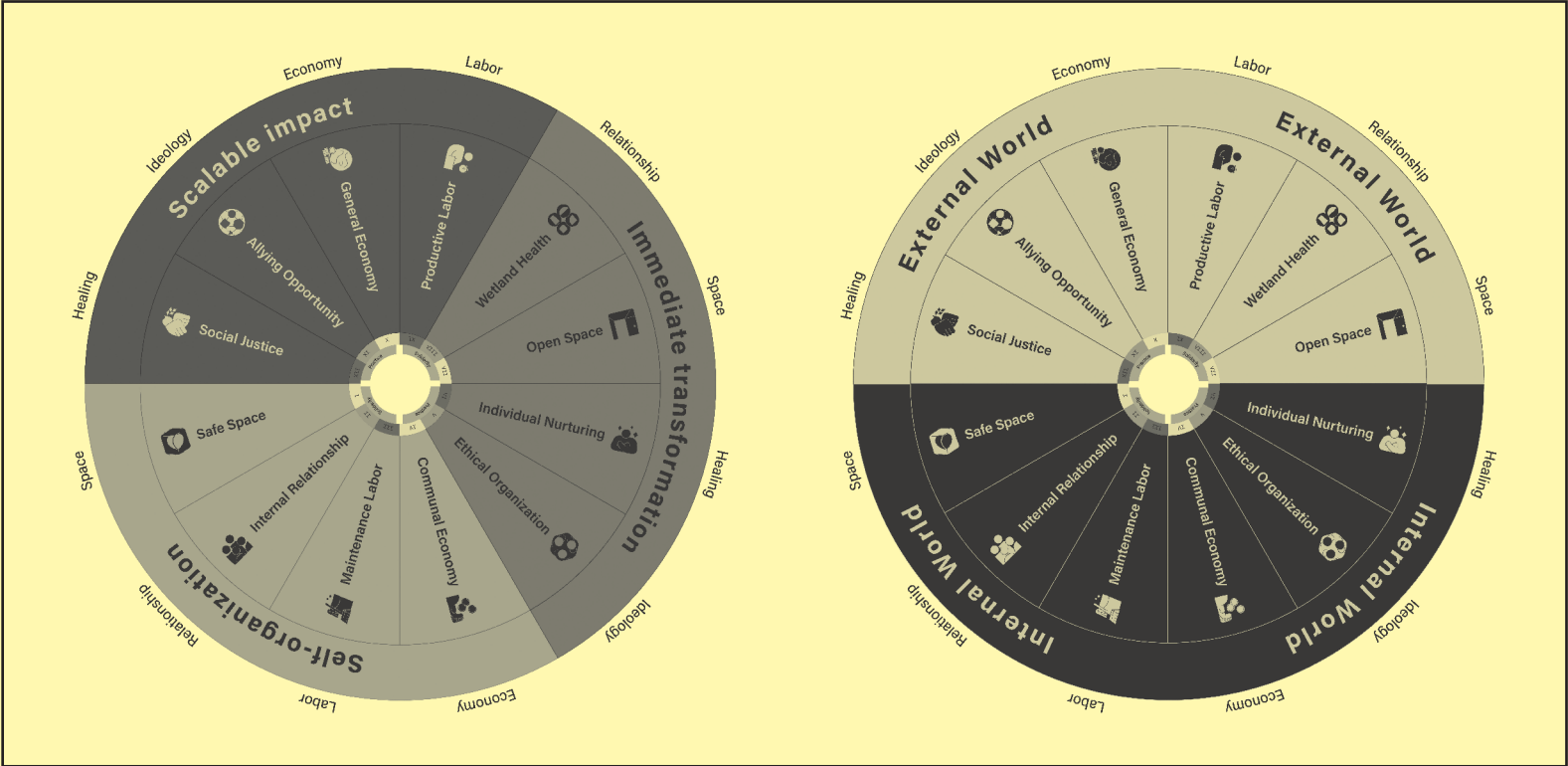
77

making the next phase, immediate transformation, possible. The “immediate transformation” phase prioritises transforming how the group organises itself (Ethical Organisation). Translating their self-organising experience into a stabilising infrastructure for the group’s foreseeable future fosters a sense of safety and belonging for individuals within the community (Individual Nurturing). With this foundational sense of safety and belonging, the group can become open to a wider public (Open Space) and cultivate nurturing connections with those outside the group (Wetland Health).

Through this lens, I see what H&D have done for each temporal intentional community (let’s say each new summer school group) as both necessary and, for lack of a better word, accurate. The CoC ritual you describe is essentially a compression of the self-organisation phase. H&D aims to provide a safe space where each person feels “entitled” to speak openly about their baggage and concerns, collectively transforming these into a code of conduct.

However, I wonder how many of these conversations are conceptual or speaking from experience. In the art and design world, discussions can easily prioritise conceptual urgency over practical and personal needs. Yet, when it comes to forming tangible solidarity within a group, conceptual discussions without shared needs or shared experiences can lead to feelings of estrangement. I wonder how the CoC process in the H&D Summer Camp would handle these nuances.

On the other hand, I think the organisational fatigue you describe can be unpacked in several ways. Firstly, it makes me think about how multiple timelines co-exist in a community. Everyone has their personal timeline, both as individuals and as a member of the community. What feels like a new adventure to one person may be an annual cycle for another, which keeps undoing what they have



3) Left: the three phases of a community; Right: the internal world and the external world of a community; courtesy Yin Aiwen.

built in the past. Asymmetrical emotional experiences of the same event within a community are common phenomena but can easily produce anxiety and frustration in the group. This dynamic is not limited to communities that commit to openness and regularly welcoming new members but also exists in relatively stationary communities. Each person follows a different growth trajectory as their life within communities evolve and their changing needs seldom coincide.

This reality means that communities are always “in trouble” in a productive sense. However, I would argue this is not evidence that a community is a lost cause. Rather, it reflects the very nature of an active community, and any shifting paradigm for working together must first accept this reality.

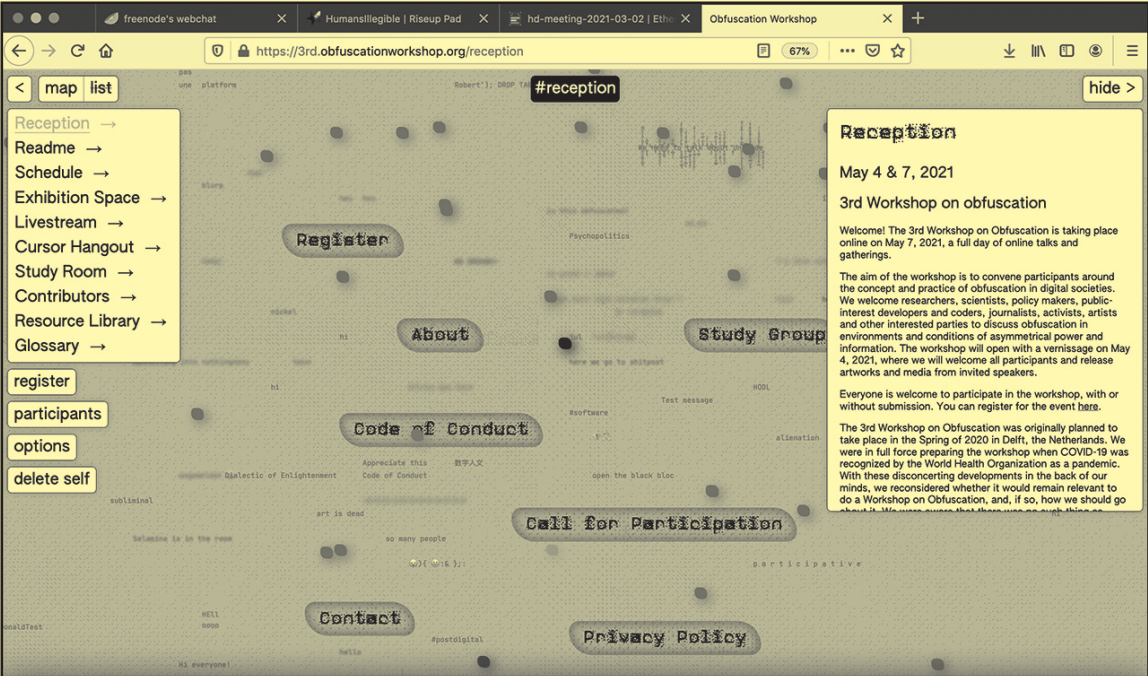
From another perspective, I am interested in the rupture between the “staff” and the “community” in an incubation context. In recent years, many art institutions have become interested in cultivating collectives, and the staff of the institution – who shoulder most of the heavy lifting and maintenance work – always stand at a peculiar edge. Our working group is a convenient example: we are “incubated” by the Creative Industries Fund NL and the research team of the Nieuwe Instituut because they brought us together and are invested in achieving a generative outcome. Delany and Setareh have been undoubtedly crucial for keeping us together, but their contributions to the working group collective are categorically different from ours because their work is tied to the institution that employs them. In contrast, everyone within a self-organised community shares a similar level of responsibility for their collective’s success. This is not the case for an institutionally incubated collective, where the dynamics differ significantly.

As the co-founder and one of the main organisers of H&D, you are more than just a community member; you are part of the “infrastructures” that host and hold each new

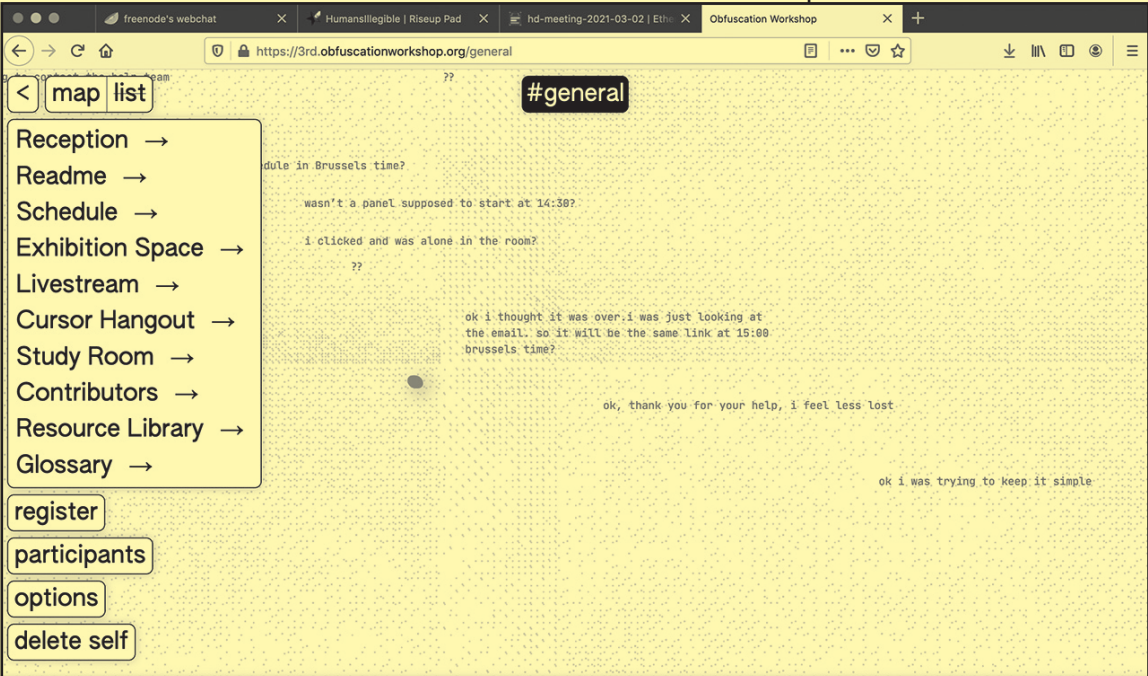
group. Within a neoliberal context, even though the H&D community (or communities) has little interest in, or indeed operates counter to, the typical relationship between the provider of a service and its receiver. The dynamic between organisers and participants of each summer school often mirrors this structure. This means you must endure the ongoing maintenance labour, take accountability for the initiative’s success, and carry a heavier burden managing participants’ personal baggage and facilitating supportive conversations than the participants themselves.

In a perfectly horizontal self-organised community, all accountabilities, responsibilities and maintenance work should be evenly distributed among the group. Most self-organised communities are not perfectly horizontal, but their non-horizontality is typically negotiated and subject to minimisation. In the incubation context, however, the asymmetrical distribution of responsibility is accepted without challenge. In our previous text *The Solidarity Trinity*,⁵ my collaborator and I observed that incubated collectives often dissolve once the institutional support ends – precisely because they were not required to practise maintaining their collective existence during the incubation period.

The fatigue you describe exposes the other side of the story, particularly as it relates to the struggle of productively unlearning productivity. This is a difficult challenge: the very nature of a summer camp event is to learn and create, making productivity an inherent expectation. If one argues for unlearning productivity – that is, externalising the desire to create – it likely implies a collective inner work aimed at contemplating and finding a different perspective to re-engage boredom, fatigue and the processing of each other’s baggage. In essence, unlearning is not about adopting new methods of working to create differently; instead, it is about changing how we perceive and feel about what we consider detestable, particularly through the lens of productivity.



Watch the livestream: "Friction". Watch the livestream: "Friction". Watch the livestream: "Friction". Watch the livestream: "Friction".



Watch the livestream: "Friction". Watch the livestream: "Friction". Watch the livestream: "Friction". Watch the livestream: "Friction".

82



Watch the livestream: "Friction". Watch the livestream: "Friction". Watch the livestream: "Friction". Watch the livestream: "Friction".

4), 5) and 6) Platframe.png
"Platframe", developed by
H&D for the 3rd Workshop on
Obfuscation, in collaboration
with Jara Rocha, Seda Gürses
and Ero Balsa, 2021. See also
Platframe Postscript by Anja
Groten and Karl Moubarak,
2022: https://firstthenrepeat.hackersanddesigners.nl/#Platframe_Postscript

83

AG

We have been talking about digital platforms designed to accommodate collaboration and perhaps even to replace or automate some of the tedious and laborious tasks involved in community organisation. Having been commissioned to design such digital platforms and tools for collaboration for various communities, I have become interested in how digital tools and platforms still tend to be conceptualised as separate from those people who engage with them. In fact, many scholars (Latour, Barad, Graham) argue that any tool, apparatus or instrument – digital or otherwise – always participates in a network of forces and meaning and can be understood only in relation to the contexts within which it is active. Whether a digital platform is considered useful depends on the culture and context in which it evolves and is active.

In my readings on digital platforms and the platform economy, I encountered many boundary concepts. Terms like “edges”, “contours”, “separations” and “confinements” play a key role in understanding and describing platforms and their impact on technical, social and economic realms. These boundaries manifest through intellectual property law, source code licensing, restricted access or technical dependencies, determining who or what is included or excluded. These terminologies also shape how we perceive and experience technical infrastructure.

The platform commissions I have encountered often imply boundaries and distances. A platform designer designs the platform for others to use; the platform then brings participants together, despite their physical distance, as if magically attracting a community of users who will engage with it. I have begun to wonder whether we can conceptualise collaborative platforms not as preconceived environments that enable collaboration but rather as

temporary convergences of tools, software, hardware, server infrastructures and socio-technical practices that come together so that we can explore their resonances without any preconceived purpose.

We built a platform with H&D to facilitate an online workshop for about 150 participants who were in different places. People would gather on a large online canvas where different interfaces were spatially arranged, enabling different forms of real-time interaction. Participants could join a video call, chat, browse, create topical bibliographies and follow livestreams – all while leaving messages on the canvas in the proximity of other users’ cursors. I found it interesting to collaborate horizontally with a diverse group of researchers, artists, designers, developers and system administrators. Everyone involved shared a clear understanding that we were not aiming to replicate the BIG-tech paradigm of seamless interaction. Instead, we aimed to use our resources to explore open-source, privacy-sensitive alternatives. Throughout the process, everyone developed a shared vocabulary that helped us navigate the oddities of this tool convergence: the platform. Without much judgment, we developed a shared awareness and spatiality around its possibilities and limitations.

We also started referring to the platform as a “platframe”, a rephrasing that highlights how the creation of a digital environment can, to some degree, maintain a critical awareness of its evolving “edges”. While imagining, building and activating the digital infrastructure, the edgy term “platframe” served as a reminder that the online environment we were collectively constructing contained elements that didn’t always seamlessly blend or create a unified experience.

An important point to consider when commissioning, designing and envisioning digital platforms for collaboration is that we should avoid the neo-liberal, progress-oriented

notion that platforms can simply “automate” collaboration. Labour is a key factor that must be acknowledged – not only in the conceptualisation and building of the platform but also in the ongoing work required to maintain and engage with it. Whoever agrees to become part of the platform and work with it must have the opportunity to consent to the work the platform asks of them. Building new infrastructure for collaboration must consider the particular socio-technical infrastructures already in place within the kinds of social and cultural environments that the platform ought to breach. Technical affinities are shaped by the particular collective conditions of groups. Understanding, foregrounding and articulating these particular socio-technical infrastructures may need to be the first endeavour.

A vectoralised institutionalism

▶ YA

I would like to respond to your points in reverse by bringing McKenzie Wark into our conversation. Her groundbreaking 2004 book, *A Hacker Manifesto*, introduces two new concepts that update Marxism in the age of communicative capitalism: the hacker and the vectoralist. According to Wark, hackers are creative people who create new ideas by hacking the existing codes of things and beings. Hackers are not only programmers who synthesise raw data and generate new programs, perceptions and interactions – namely new information – but also researchers, artists, scientists, philosophers and so on. On the other hand, vectoralists are those who possess the resources to organise and produce information at an industrial scale, as well as the means to distribute it.

In the art and cultural field, the division between the vectoralist class and the hacker class is less defined and visible given the field itself has a hard time scaling its social impact. However, it seems the vectoralist mindset has become embedded in many institutions and organisations,

even in artist collectives when they begin to imagine building a platform. There is always a desire to create something all-encompassing, a totalising “platform” capable of capturing everything. At the discursive level, people can easily subscribe to the idea that a platform is about breaking down barriers to public participation, especially in the art context where practitioners can easily feel guilty about their economic and cultural privileges (Graeber, 2004). However, when it comes to the brief stage of designing the platform, the vision invariably results in a totalising system that controls the flow of information and captures the exchange value of its users.

I began to wonder how much this contributes to the concept of a totalising platform, which has become a dominant vision for digital public space, an idea Silicon Valley perpetuates to disguise its monopoly game. It seems that this vision becomes a convenient justification for cultural spaces to anxiously prove their social relevance, even though they don’t necessarily understand the costs involved in creating and maintaining a functioning platform.

What is more nuanced in this complex, however, is the mirrored relationship between the pairings of hacker/vectoralist and artist/institution. I suspect that your commissioners may unintentionally adopt the vectoralist mindset, which is essentially enabled by their position. Institutions and organisations are positioned to allocate resources for the production and distribution of ideas, regardless of their capacity to scale. From this vantage point, imagining a totalising platform is the next logical step after commissioning, communicating and marketing and distributing the outcomes.

This totalising notion creates an obsessive illusion that if every aspect of collaboration can be captured by the platform, algorithms should be able to compute for the best possible match and ensure a smooth collaboration. What



7) H&D Summer Camp 2024.

may seem like a logical conclusion from cybernetic impulses all too often ends up as the digital ruins of groundless ideas. I do not say this as an affront to your commissioners, and the well-intended organisations that I have been working with, who make counter attempts for creating alternative platforms. Rather it is a personal judgement based on all the tragic attempts since Facebook that assume human interactions are a matter of clicks and buttons. Cultural institutions are as powerless as any individual in the post-Facebook era to imagine a platform that functions in any way other than reducing individuals and resources to a list of profiles and “algorithmising” them to make a match.

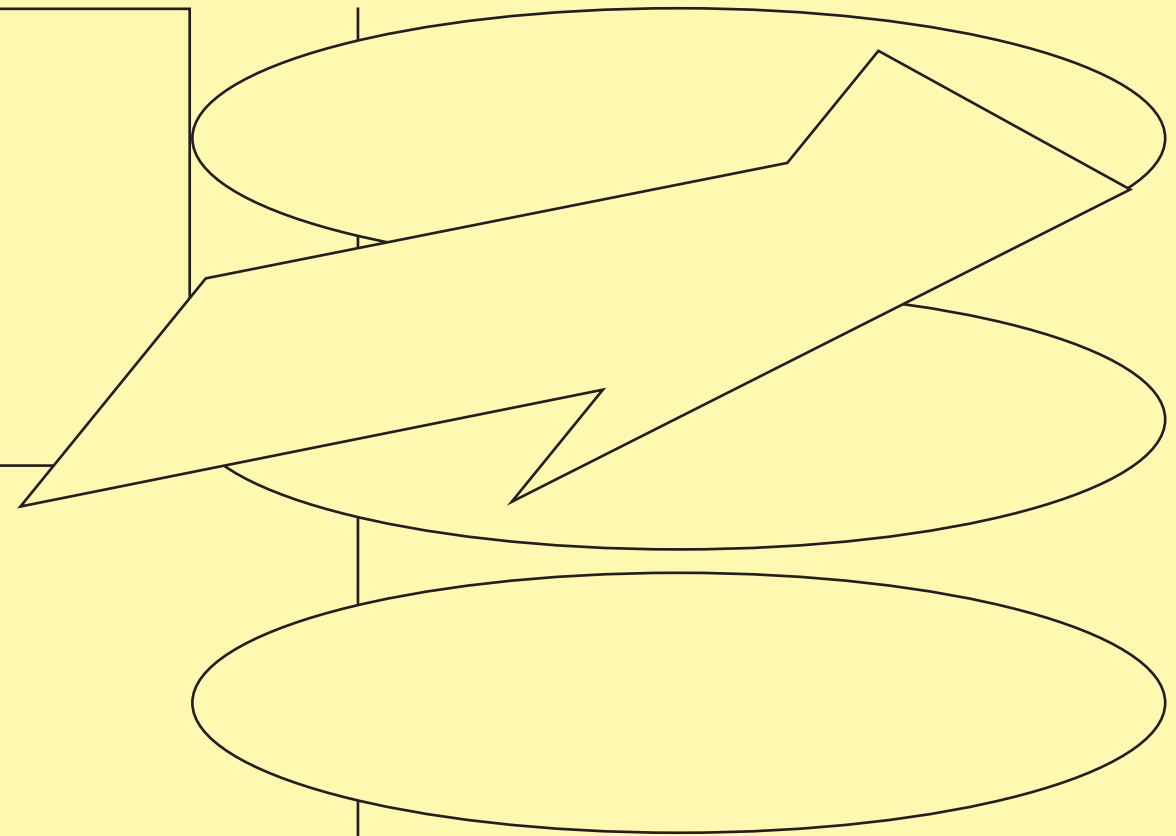
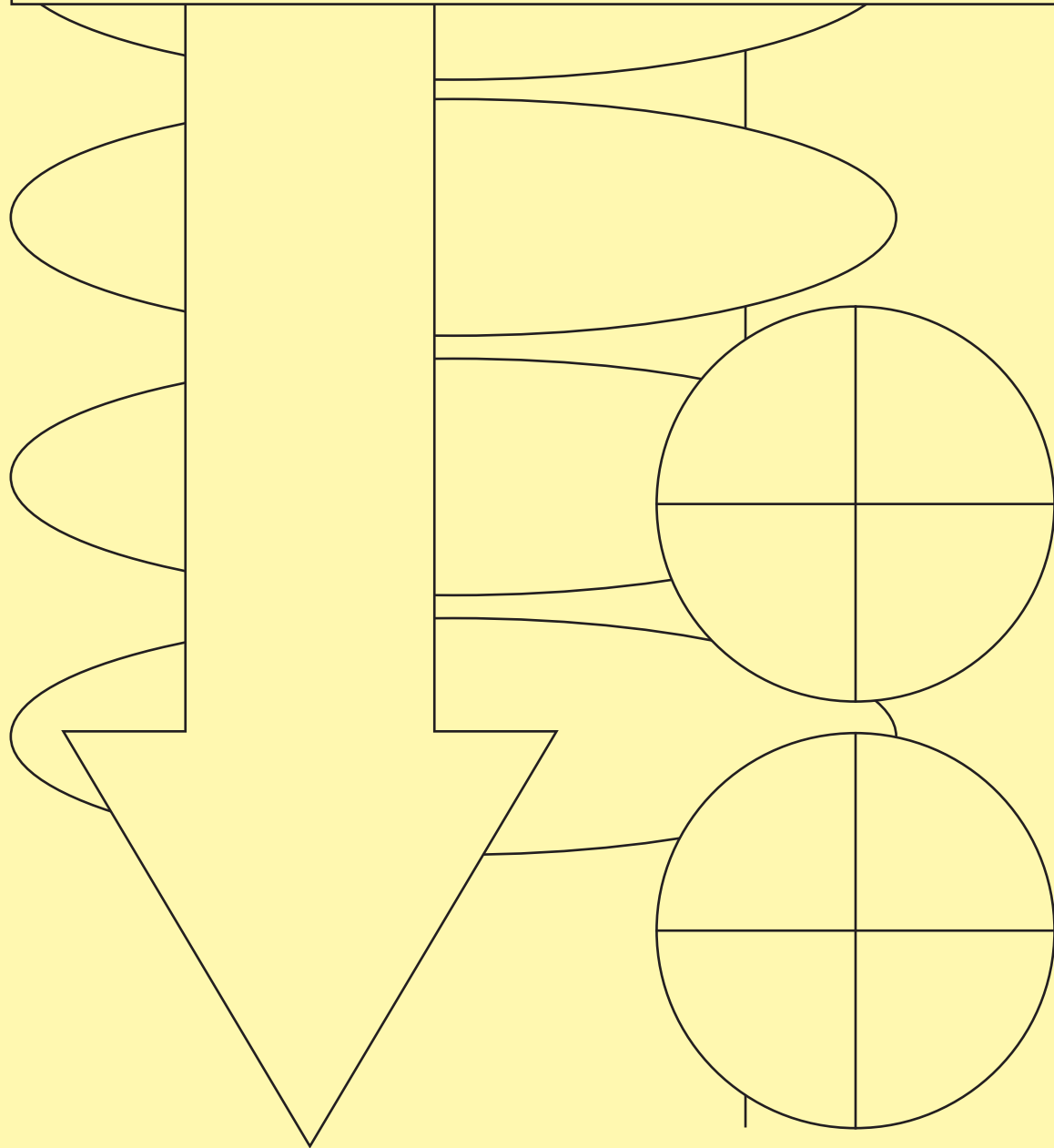
However, we can find answers when we look away from our screens. When we formulate a collaboration beyond these glowing rectangles, we see a more nuanced process that involves human efforts outside of behavioural and biological data. When people assemble – not only with their positionality, intelligence, needs and resources but also with their temperament, personalities, personal baggage and histories – they meet and sense any possibilities and necessities for collaboration. Then they approach each other, and if circumstances allow, exchange ideas. They gauge each other’s positionality and offerings, formulate possible ideas, deliberate on the consequences and impacts of collaborating, and finally, if everything aligns, allocate resources and consolidate a collaboration. Beyond the visible, “datafiable” stuff on the table, much of the practical, emotional and communicative labour and resources have little to do with matching and must be grounded in institutional and personal realities.

The speculative automation that platforms can offer is, at best, contributing to the stage of sensing and the first approach. However, this contribution is essentially meaningless in the age of information overload and social fatigue. Even at the surface level, the need is no longer about meeting (the right) people but about having a quality

connection by having quality time together. We can see this shift by looking at how dating apps have pivoted since Tinder: they either gather people with niche interests or make their users fill in long self-evaluation forms to find their perfect match. Yet, of course, this approach barely addresses the underlying issue. Essentially, they adhere to the same logic: if there is enough data, the platform can find anything you need.

That is why I believe your work poses an important proposition for altering this trajectory. If I understand correctly, “platform” abandons the obsession with fully capturing all experiences and ensuring a seamless process. Instead, it functions as a kind of “gas station”, maintaining and supporting the free movement of exchanges and creations. Furthermore, I really enjoyed the working process you shared about the H&D platforms and tools during one of our working group events. It struck me as presenting a new relationship between the hacker/user and the platform: one that is not a relationship of producing and being produced, or use and utility, which is distant, external and therefore power-inducing. Instead, the platform emerges as a generative outcome of an evolving collaborative relationship. You, your collaborators and the platforms you create together all become part of an interdependent ecology.

Colophon



This publication is part of the Nieuwe Instituut's ongoing Remapping Collaborations project, which investigates the dynamics, challenges and possibilities of international cultural collaboration. Each edition critically examines how international cultural events, such as biennales, shape and are shaped by the frameworks of collective practice. By engaging with practitioners, researchers and working groups, this series offers tools, reflections and provocations that challenge traditional structures and aim to rethink the methodologies and formats underpinning large-scale cultural events.

Remapping Collaborations Working Group

Yin Aiwen
Ali T. As'ad
Nishat Awan
Delany Boutkan
Anja Groten
Colin Keays
Setareh Noorani
RESOLVE Collective (*Akil Scafe-Smith, Seth Scafe-Smith, Melissa Haniff*)

Editors

Delany Boutkan (*Researcher, Nieuwe Instituut*)
Setareh Noorani (*Researcher, Nieuwe Instituut*)

Editorial Coordinator

Joyce Hanssen (*Programme Manager Agency, Nieuwe Instituut*)

Copy Editor

Jason Coburn

Graphic Designer

Jeanine van Berkel

Event Transcription Writer

Jack Eden

Commissioners

Syb Groeneveld (*Director, Creative Industries Fund NL*)
Mireille de Koning (*Head of Internationalisation, Creative Industries Fund NL*)
Aric Chen (*General and Artistic Director, Nieuwe Instituut*)
Francien van Westrenen (*Head of Agency, Nieuwe Instituut*)

Event Photographers

Tomas Mutsaers (*Photographer, Research Night: Remapping Collaborations, Nieuwe Instituut*)
Adam Slama (*Photographer, Demystifying Collaboration: Remapping Terms and Conditions for Collective Practices, London Design Biennale*)

Publisher

Nieuwe Instituut

Printer and Binder

Drukkerij Raddraaier

Special thanks to

London Design Biennale, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the United Kingdom, Tugba Bahçeci (*Producer, Nieuwe Instituut*), Silna Brunt (*Producer, Nieuwe Instituut*), Aric Chen (*General and Artistic Director, Nieuwe Instituut*), Robin van Essel (*Marketing and Communications Advisor, Nieuwe Instituut*), Fabulous Future (*Designers Dutch Pavilion: Elia Castino, Naomi Credé, Mirko Podkowik*), Lara Ippolito (*Intern Agency, Nieuwe Instituut*), Leonard van Hout (*Marketing and Communications Advisor, Nieuwe Instituut*), Nohely Koeyers (*Marketing and Communications Advisor, Nieuwe Instituut*), Mireille de Koning (*Head of Internationalisation, Creative Industries Fund NL*), Roxanne Minten (*Grants Officer, Creative Industries Fund NL*), Maureen Mooren (*Art Director, Nieuwe Instituut*), Nieuwe Instituut Research team (*Ramon Amaro, Benjamin Earl, Anya Naumova, Federica Notari, Klaas Kuitenbrouwer, Manuela Zammit*), Reineke Otten (*Producer Dutch Pavilion, Nieuwe Instituut*), Moetoesingi Schmidt (*Marketing and Communications Advisor, Nieuwe Instituut*), Ekim Tan (*Founder/Director Play the City*), Tim Teven (*Designer Dutch Pavilion*), Arianne van der Veen (*Programme Manager, Nieuwe Instituut*), Studio Verter (*Designers Dutch Pavilion: Roxane van Hoof, Claudio Saccucci*), Francien van Westrenen (*Head of Agency, Nieuwe Instituut*)

ISBN 9789083301129

@ 2025 Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without the prior permission of the publisher.

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permissions for the use of copyrighted material. In case of any errors or omissions please notify the publisher so that corrections can be incorporated into future editions of this publication.

**Nieuwe
Instituut** **creative
industries
fund NL**

