Collaboration—All together now?

A special section of *Print* Guest edited and designed by Project Projects

TITLE TYPOGRAPHY: LL BROWN BOLD BY AURÈLE SACK
SECTION PHOTOGRAPHY: HENRIK KNUDSEN
ROUNDTABLE PHOTOGRAPHY: JOSH MELNICK

PROJECT PROJECTS is a design studio in New York focusing on print, exhibition, and interactive work, with an emphasis on independently produced curatorial and publishing projects. The studio was founded in 2004 by Prem Krishnamurthy and Adam Michaels; Rob Giampietro joined as a principal in 2010.

Recent projects include catalogs for the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Guggenheim Museum, identity programs for the Museo Tamayo in Mexico City and a new cultural institution in Istanbul, websites with Bernard Tschumi Architects and *Tablet Magazine*, editing and design for the Inventory Books series, as well as the design of exhibitions at the Canadian Centre for Architecture and BOZAR Brussels.

On one evening in October 2010, 13 people from different disciplines came together at Artists Space in New York City to discuss "collaboration" and its relationship to their respective practices. What ensued over the next two hours was a sprawling conversation that touched upon the practical, professional, theoretical, and personal aspects of the topic. This edited transcript, continued from the cover, attempts to capture both the content of that discussion as well as the lively engagement of its participants.

After a discussion about this special section on collaboration for *Print*, we were left at odds on how best to begin. While our day-to-day is spent working together on a wide variety of tasks at our studio practice, it's something else altogether to step back to talk about working, or talk about talking, or talk about talking about working. We considered a few focused directions. One approach could be definitional: Wikipedia's evolving multi-authored page on the subject indicates, as of a visit on 11/29/2010, that collaboration is "a recursive process when two or more people or organizations work together to realize shared goals." Another approach could be topical/pop-cultural: On the eve of the opening of the largest and, at $65 million, most costly musical in history, *Spider-Man: Turn Of the Dark*, director Julie Taymor mused on *60 Minutes*, "If you don't have fear, then you're not taking a chance. What I do have is a team. If your collaborators are there and they all are as impassioned as you are and believe in it, then your fear is mitigated." A third approach might be interrogative, starting with our own questions: What do we really mean when we speak of collaboration? Can we identify different modes and types of collaboration? What examples of collaborations are instructive to analyze? When does collaboration work, and when does it fail?

It was difficult to agree on restricting ourselves to just one of these modes. Instead, as is often the case in collaborative environments, we agreed to disagree. To adopt a more dismissive mood: "The celebration of collaboration as a technique or as a practice just generally strikes me as pointless." This quotation belongs not to us but to artist David Levine, who offered it by way of introduction at a roundtable discussion organized by Project Projects and *Print* in October 2010. (The transcript of this roundtable runs

continuously in red throughout this section.) At the start of this 48-page consideration of collaboration—with contributions from a diverse set of artists, designers, architects, photographers, typographers, printers, curators, editors, and writers who explore collaboration both past and present—we agreed it was worth injecting a healthy dose of skepticism into the conversation.

We wondered: Why is collaboration considered by so many to be inherently good or interesting? Projects in worlds of business, technology, fashion, art, and design are routinely labeled as collaborative to make them more appealing. This past November, New York taste-makers Opening Ceremony released a *Tron*-themed "collaboration"—the company's second foray into a fictional world after its collaboration with Warner Brothers' *Where the Wild Things Are* debuted last year. This collection features pieces that employ "high-tech aesthetics, neon, and laser cutting" along with a signature revival: a threeASFOUR × *Tron* × Opening Ceremony circle bag. Here is a fashion collective (threeASFOUR) collaborating with a second group (Opening Ceremony) on a revival (threeASFOUR's circle bag) for a collection inspired by the fictional universe of a film remake (*Tron*). Round and round we go, with each partnership in this collaboration connected by an "×"—a symbolic force multiplier that suggests to the buyer that many makers are surely better than just one. Maybe it's true. As Eagles frontman Don Henley has observed, "Mick Jagger can't even make a successful solo album, but the Stones are the biggest rock group that ever was."

What's so special, so extraordinary about collaboration? On the one hand, roundtable participant Angie Keefer notes that "it's difficult for me to talk about 'collaboration' because I can't think of anything that's truly possible to do as an individual." Perhaps there's actually nothing inherently special about collaboration—in the context of a mutually dependent society, every action is the product of an unfathomable collection of collaborative forces. We could consider any activity, even "dinner," a collaboration. But would that be useful, productive, or interesting?

We certainly were interested in an email we received from designer Michael Rock following the roundtable discussion that attempted to sum up the three types of collaboration we described. According to Rock, they are: "Prosthetic: partnering to fill a lack (as in a writer and art director team in an agency); Systematic: partnering to tackle extremely complex problems (as in architecture and film); and Distributive: partnering, often asynchronously, to take advantage of global distribution (as in outsourcing)."

Participants of the Project Projects and *Print* roundtable before the discussion at Artists Space, New York, October 2010. The roundtable included Alec Hanley Bemis, Rob Giampietro, Angie Keefer, Aaron Kenedi, Prem Krishnamurthy, Carin Kuoni, David Levine, Lin+ Lam, Tina Lutz, Michael Rock, Alice Twemlow, and Daniel van der Velden. For a complete list of issue contributors and biographies, see page 80.

PREM KRISHNAMURTHY: I thought that we could start with introductions and any thoughts on how collaboration relates to each of your practices. I'm one of the principals of Project Projects, and collaboration is of particular interest to me because the practice of design seems to be entirely about the negotiation and discussion of individual desires.

ROB GIAMPIETRO: I'm also a principal at Project Projects, and I've been a writer and teacher for more than eight years. Design is inherently collaborative, as is teaching: lately I feel that I learn almost as much from my students as I'm able to impart to them. So my role is both to facilitate and to guide.

DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN: I'm co-founder of a design studio in Amsterdam called Metahaven and a critic at the Yale School of Art. We thought a little bit about the theme of tonight's panel — everyone's confronted with the idea of collaboration, and they practice it all the time, so it's something that's omnipresent. But we're also interested in the idea of "coordination" as a set of agreements or standards or focal points that you establish before you can actually collaborate.

TINA LUTZ: I started a fashion company with my partner called Lutz & Patmos ten years ago. We started it out of my six-floor walk-up apartment with a little savings, and today, we're sold in over 200 stores in the world.

Given our limited budget, I was in charge of marketing. One of my ideas to enhance the profile of the brand was to invite a guest designer every season to design their dream garment. At the beginning, I invited mostly celebrities, Hollywood actresses, but I also included people like Richard Meier and Desmond Tutu, and one unknown person, a train conductor. These collaborations created a lot of press and interest in the company.

We also collaborated with big, established companies who could help us finance our growth, who wanted the cachet of working with a small, cool fashion brand to enhance their reputation and help our bank account.

ANGIE KEEFER: I do a number of activities, almost exclusively in collaboration with others. I've never thought of "collaboration" as a separate topic, per se, until I was invited to come here, because it's so much a part of what I do that it doesn't occur to me to not to collaborate.

In our own professional circle, designers euphemistically call both clients and employees collaborators to underplay hierarchical distinctions. And beyond the workplace and labor practices, there are many examples—especially from political history—that demonstrate the implications of collaboration to be cautionary, if not sinister: Designer Daniel van der Velden asked, "What about the Coalition of the Willing, the people who wanted to invade Iraq? Is that collaboration?" Many decades earlier, Vichy France's "collaboration" with Nazi Germany was a dangerously unequal partnership masquerading as an equal one. Mark Lamster addresses this very subject in a *Print* magazine review from 2009 on Nicholas Fox Weber's biography of Le Corbusier: "Somehow, Weber resists what must have been a considerable moralizing impulse, even when the hero of his story willingly aligns himself with the Nazi's puppet regime in Vichy." Lamster then quotes Weber, who writes, "Le Corbusier believed that collaboration could lead to good things."

Indeed, our perspective is considerably more fragmented than that of Le Corbusier. Collaboration could lead to good things, though it could also lead to countless other, possibly less beneficial, outcomes. Our hope is that the characters and contents collected in this issue will provide a rich basis for further consideration. Carin Kuoni, director of the Vera List Center for Art and Politics, noted during our roundtable that, whatever its ends may be, "a commitment to this shared space, this shared time—that is very, very valuable." We look forward to sharing time and space in these pages with you.

—Project Projects

Whether Fluxus or flax, language or legumes, artist Alison Knowles has spent a lifetime working in dialogue.

A Menu of Chance

TEXT: PRUDENCE PEIFFER
TITLE TYPOGRAPHY: SIMPLON MONO REGULAR BY EMMANUEL REY
PHOTOGRAPHY: HENRIK KNUDSEN

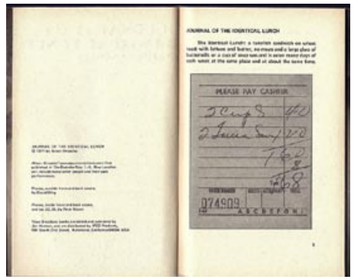
Alison Knowles has used collaboration to demystify art since the 1960s. Whether working with preeminent artists, poets, and musicians (including Nam June Paik, Emmett Williams, and John Cage) or an anonymous audience, Knowles builds art from deceptively simple activities that anyone can do and from ingredients that anyone can find. These include describing footwear ("Shoes of Your Choice," 1962), eating the same tuna fish sandwich at the same time each day ("The Identical Lunch," first performed in 1968 and most recently this January at MoMA's cafe), or discovering an object in the street and passing it on ("Giveaway Construction," circa 1963). Her most famous event score from 1962 prescribes making a salad. Yet some of Knowles's most innovative collaborations as a founding member of the experimental avant-garde group Fluxus presciently engaged technology, too; she used a computer as early as 1967 in "House of Dust," a digital poem of scrolling chance permutations printed as quatrains that she produced with the composer James Tenney and IBM's Formula Translator (FORTRAN).

For Knowles, art becomes a menu of chances that happen, or are taken. She starts with fundamental actions like dressing, walking, reading, and eating. Often at least two are referenced unexpectedly in a single piece, as when Knowles baked paper in loaf pans for a sculpture, or in her seminal 1967 installation "The Big Book," which imagined a Borgesian book-as-home that one walked and climbed through,

CARIN KUONI: I'm the director of the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School; I have also collaborated with and was the co-founder of a group of artists called REPOhistory. We began after seeing a lecture organized by Group Material; about 10 or 20 of us came together around our desire to repossess history and organize public events in public spaces. We did this for about 8 or 10 years, connecting informally in people's homes, sometimes having painful discussions about what projects to do next.

At The New School, which houses the Vera List Center, I collaborate with faculty across different divisions of the university — fashion, political science, anthropology, and others. The most productive collaborations come out of a common shared interest in the public.

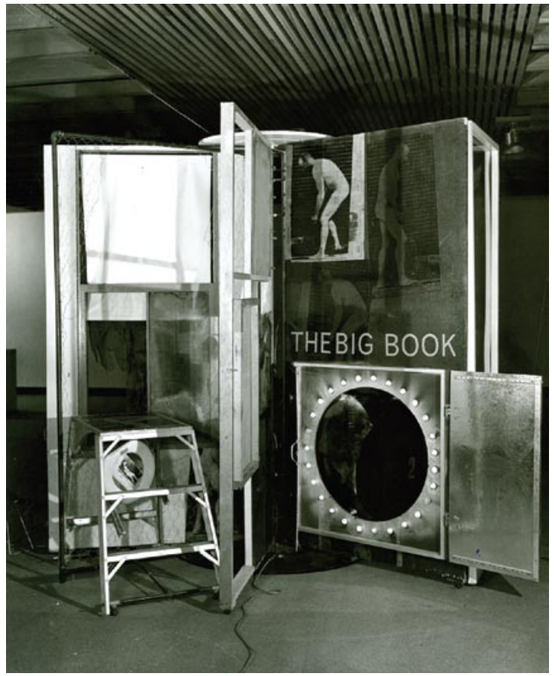
Above and next page, left: Knowles in her studio, 2010, pictured with new works that add string and azuki beans to pulp, which warps and welds the surfaces to produce sculptural "pages" that conjure abstract canvasses, Grecian robes, and Chinese scrolls. Photos by Henrik Knudsen.



Above, top: Photograph of "Identical Lunch," first performed in 1967. Bottom: Alison Knowles, *Journal of the Identical Lunch*, Nova Broadcast Press, San Francisco, California (1971). Courtesy of the artist.

DAVID LEVINE: I'm an artist. I began in theater, where I was a director. One reason that I am now an artist and have moved away from theater, is because theater exalts this ideal of collaboration — which in my general experience leads to something pretty nasty. So I left because I actually don't like collaboration, really. The celebration of collaboration as a technique or as a practice just generally strikes me as pointless.

MICHAEL ROCK: I'm a principal of the design studio 2x4 in New York. I think in the course of this discussion we should determine what exactly "collaboration" is, because the definition has become so broad that any activity involving two people is called "collaborative." When I think about the things I do, some of them are highly collaborative, and some are not collaborative at all; I move in and out of these different relationships. I would say writing is an intensely personal activity that involves almost no collaboration. In other cases, you abandon any self and become part of this bigger team. "Collaboration" does not have a steady definition. It's something that you move in and out of and define constantly across your day — even in terms of how much you're open or closed to it.



Above, top: Installation view and detail of Knowles's seminal work "The Big Book" (1967), which imagined the book as a home that could be inhabited, slept, and cooked in. Installation view courtesy of the artist. Bottom: Detail view courtesy of the artist and Peter Moore.

slept, and cooked in. Found texts, graphics, logos, onomatopoeic letters, and international headlines turn into artist's books, screenprints, and wearable sculpture. She coaxes endless effects out of ordinary stuff: along with the book, and thereby paper, one of her favorite materials throughout five decades of art-making has remained the bean. What John Cage was to fungi knowledge she is now to legumes. They appear in Knowles's oeuvre as instruments of sound encased in paper, as haptic color and pattern, and as organic microchips of history. Beans are cheap, universal, multiple, and diverse; they mirror Knowles's approach to art as an ordinary, democratic tool that feeds and surprises us. (Knowles says she tries to eat beans at least once a week in gratitude for all that they have given her.)

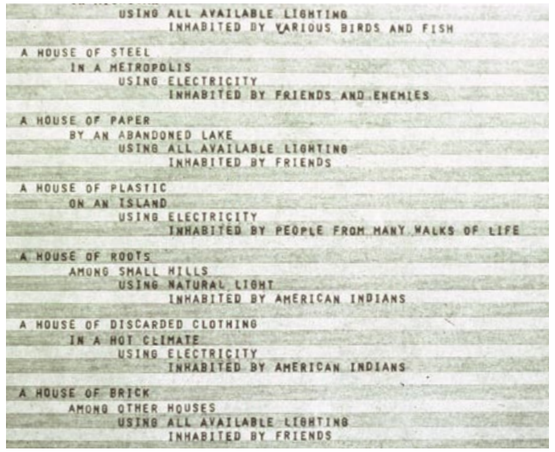
Knowles does not so much use as *encourage* materials—be they beans, flax, muslin, onion, newspaper, string, text, or found "street pickings"—to find their own inner voice. This introduces a suggestive verb: "to sound" a piece is to experience it, to amplify the collaboration at work. From late January through March 2009 during the Guggenheim exhibition *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860–1989,* Knowles performed every week with her "Giant Beanturner," a sound sculpture of hundreds of beans encased in a stiff paper pod delivering an impressive acoustic rush as it is tilted. Walking through the exhibition, she sounded the beanturner like a breaking wave spiraling down the rotunda past viewers and other art. Once, a corner of the paper broke open and Knowles trailed a wake of beans. People collected them to give back, walking with her and listening the entire way—this too, became part of the performance. A year later, I saw Knowles perform "Loose Pages" (1983) at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, carefully dressing her collaborator (in this performance, her daughter, also an artist) in clothing segments made from abaca, flax, and cotton paper, until she stood wholly covered. Then Knowles gently guided this "book with a human being in it" through the room, the paper shuffling, crinkling, and sighing softly.

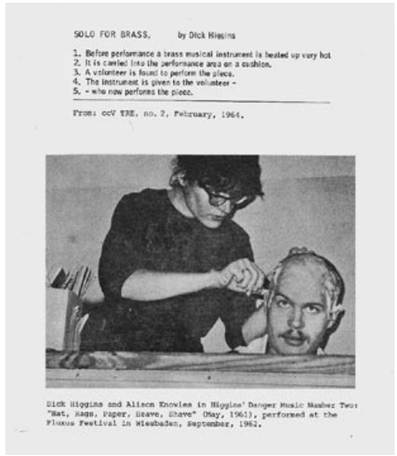
Through scores and sculptures, one person or 100 help realize a piece. "I think of myself and the audience as one thing, and we're addressing the work that we're trying to do as another thing," Knowles explains. She makes things in order to collaborate: "I don't make them in order to exhibit them and go back to the studio and work. I make them so that people can use them like a tool." Through her involvement with Fluxus along with her late husband, Dick Higgins (who also founded the influential Something Else Press which published many Fluxus multiples), Knowles's

work has always been "intermedia" (Higgins' term) and interdependent. A crucial early mentor and collaborator for the group was John Cage, who helped Knowles determine that she didn't have to be a painter in a city saturated with abstract expressionism. Instead, through an exchange with material and audience, Knowles's work disarms standard categories, as if it is itself passing through the computational possibilities of "House of Dust."

In *Notations,* her 1968 editorial collaboration with Cage, the two invited composers to submit a score and complete a questionnaire for publication. The resulting archive of musical notations was assembled according to "I-Ching chance operations," as Cage explained in its introduction, which determined the words, layout, and even typography in order to break down divisions between text and illustration on the page. This ceding of art's preciousness is underscored by Knowles's delight that someone once went to the trouble of stealing a page from an exhibited work, "The Finger Book"—"I love that!" she says. "I just would love to interview that man." She insists that an artist not control every aspect of a piece. "They can't tell you that rain means it's bad weather and you should stay inside. Or tell you that the performance is not solely dependent on the quality of the tuna fish."

Most recently, working with several papermakers, Knowles added string and azuki beans to pulp at different stages, which then warps and welds the surface as it dries, producing large sculptural "pages" that conjure abstract canvases, Grecian robes, Chinese scrolls. Last fall, when contemplating one of these pieces, "Cave Wall," which hangs in her New York City home, Knowles seemed a little worried about its relative stillness, even when accompanied by the "cave dwellers," found sculptural objects mounted in paper casings that include eucalyptus leaf wings and a baseball. Perhaps when exhibited this spring, she mused, "Cave Wall" could be taken down and sounded. Collaboration is never done, only dormant; when asked how she feels about an object like "Giant Beanturner" when it is not in use, Knowles immediately answered, "The same way that I feel about someone sleeping." ●





Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles in Higgins' Danger Music Number Two: "Hat, Rags, Paper, Heave, Shave" (May, 1961), performed at the Fluxus Festival in Wiesbaden, September, 1962.

Above, top: Page from "House of Dust" (1967), described as quite possibly the "first computerized poem," which Knowles produced with composer James Tenney following his seminar on computers in the arts, which was held at her home with husband Dick Higgins. Courtesy of the artist.

Above, bottom: Knowles shaving the head of her husband, Dick Higgins, as part of his piece, "Hat, Rags, Paper, Heave, Shave" (1961). Original image featured in Harry Ruhé's *Fluxus, the Most Radical and Experimental Art Movement of the Sixties*, Amsterdam, (1979). Courtesy of the artist.

Opposite, left: Photo of the event score, "Make A Salad," performed in 1962 (top) and at the Baltimore Museum of Art's "Work Ethic" exhibition (2004). Top photo by Bruce Fleming, courtesy of the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, Detroit. Bottom photo by Harry Stevens, courtesy of Paradox Photography.

ALICE TWEMLOW: I have three relationships to collaboration. Being a writer is a lonely position; however, when I write about design, one thread in my work has been looking at collaborations between designers and users of design. As a student, I'm a Ph.D. candidate in design history at the Royal College of Art in London and I'm looking at the history of design criticism. In this role, I'm interested in the response to design criticism, if there is any at all, and the place where the critic and the designer meet intellectually. As an educator and the head of SVA's Design Criticism program, I deal with designing curricula. Design criticism creates a dialogue with other genres and modes of criticism. I'm not sure if the relationship is parasitical or collaborative, but it's certainly quite interesting.

Right: Knowles gathers materials and inspiration on a collecting trip to Dead Horse Bay, Brooklyn, 2010. Photos by Henrik Knudsen.

The design collective, Athletics, including Samuel Rhodes, Jason Gnewikow, David Ceraso, Matt Owens, David Ahuja, James Ellis, Wes Duvall, on the rooftop of their studio in Brooklyn, 2010. Photo by Henrik Knudsen.

Athletics is a Brooklyn design studio that's putting a new twist on an old business model.

FIVE MAN BAND

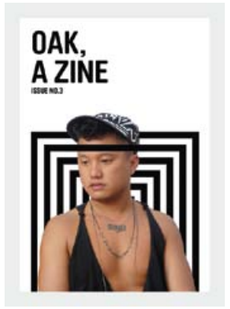
TEXT: ISAAC GERTMAN
TITLE TYPOGRAPHY: BARO HEAVY BY CHESTER JENKINS & JEREMY MICKEL
PHOTOGRAPHY: HENRIK KNUDSEN

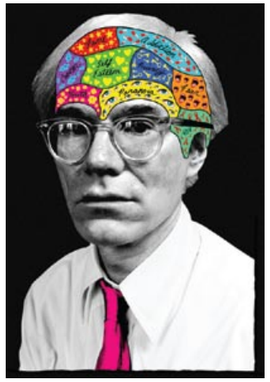
"We're all grown-ups here," says Matt Owens, partner of the Brooklyn-based design collective Athletics. In contrast to a young design group that might form out of relative inexperience, the five partners, Matt Owens, Jason Gnewikow, James Ellis, Wes Duvall, and David Ahuja came together in 2004 with a wealth of experience and trust that evolved over years of working together and hiring one another for projects of different scales. Forming a creative collective was a way for them to pursue greater professional opportunities.

Together they have the shared infrastructure of a mid-sized studio, pooling their individual specialties into a collective skill set that includes motion graphics, branding, web development, video direction, custom typography, print design, and illustration, while at the same time allowing them the flexibility to maintain their individual professional practices. Defining the balance between the two depends on the individual partner.

The flat hierarchy of their business model is the core component of the collective. "For lack of a better term, what we have in place is a kind of bastard Pentagram model," says Gnewikow. Each partner is responsible for securing work and managing their own finances and accounting. When a project is brought into the studio, it is

ALEC HANLEY BEMIS: In 2001, I started a label called Brassland with a couple members of a band, The National, and we were all doing it half-heartedly. I was working primarily as an art and music critic for The New York Times, the LA Times, LA Weekly, and a bunch of other papers. Actually, my first job in New York was producing websites at a design firm. In 2005, I veered towards working only in music and that's where I am today. I still own the label but I also manage bands like Dirty Projectors and !!!, also known as Chk-Chk-Chk. As the artists I've worked with have become more popular, I've seen what happens when an artist's personality begins to overtake the collaboration. Music is an inherently collaborative thing and people have to deal with each other — they have no choice.





discussed among the partners, and a team is formed based on interest and availability. The partners involved draft a proposal together. Budgets are allocated, and in a sense, they "hire" one another. A single partner is established as the project lead; this person becomes responsible for managing the project and being the point of contact with the client.

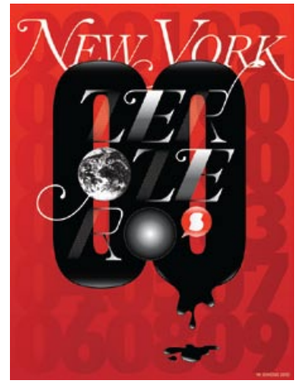
Beyond the financials, part of what defines Athletics' collaboration is the members' past involvement in the punk rock scene in one capacity or another, whether playing in a band or running a record label. The partners approach working together as equals, with a certain cooperative humbleness that makes parsing out who-did-what in each project irrelevant. As duties are split up and hierarchies emerge in a project, it is not unusual for one partner to direct another. "Our model demands a certain level of maturity and professionalism," Owens says. "Through the course of any project we favor the collective goals over personal ego, no matter how mundane the task." "We're all beholden to each other, and you have to put out what you need back," adds Gnewikow. "It's like being in a band," quips Owens. "The music and the album are what really matters. Your individual part is important, but everyone has to be a good player."

Owens believes that Athletics' small size, diverse capabilities, and ability to collaborate—with one another and with clients—gives them an advantage. "You can hire a large company,

Above, left to right: Canvas for AOL's artist series. Designer: Jason Gnewikow. Brooklyn Hardcore T-shirt, Jason Nevikov Apparel. Designer: Jason Gnewikow. Cover of *Oakazine*, the seasonal in-house magazine for Oak clothing store. Designer: Jason Gnewikow. Photo illustration for *The Wall Street Journal*. Art director: Forest Evashevski; designer: Wes Duvall. Illustrations for Mark Halperin's weekly column in *Time*. Art director: Ryan Moore; designer: Wes Duvall.

LAN THAO LAM: I'm part of Lin + Lam, a 10-year collaboration. My first experience with collaboration was actually on a refugee island in Malaysia, where I witnessed Vietnamese refugees escaping from the war. In the aftermath of the war, after 1975, they had to create a new community from scratch. They had to use resources on the island and materials brought to them by UNICEF. My family stayed in a little shack in the camp and my father would help with translation.

As an artist, I have been very skeptical of collaboration. Sometimes, with certain projects, the question becomes who will take on the work, who will lead — and it becomes such a group effort that individuality gets lost. So for [Lana] Lin and I to come together requires collaboration — we really insist on it. It is an additive and subtractive process. A lot of editing, a lot of back and forth, a lot of ruptures.



LANA LIN: I'm the other half of Lin + Lam. As an individual, I'm an artist, a filmmaker, a teacher, and a student. My work is and has been informed by the filmmaking process, which, as Alec said about music, is something people claim is inherently collaborative. But I always felt like with filmmaking I took the role of "leader" or "director," so I don't really regard those situations as collaborative — that's the part of "collaboration" that I'm skeptical of.

But on the other side, I think Lan Thao described what I value in the collaborative process — the productive antagonism that has challenged me and pushed me further as an artist and thinker for the last 10 years. Lan Thao brought up the subject of community and I was also thinking of Roberto Esposito's book, Communitas, in which he defines community as a void, a kind of debt to the other. So rather than a utopian idea, a community can be an antagonistic debt to the volatility of yourself and the people with whom you collaborate.

ROB: So to follow up on the idea of community as opposed to collaboration, I'm wondering if the word has an intrinsic upper bound in terms of the number of people who can collaborate — how many people is a collaboration and when does it become something else?

DANIEL: There's a great economist named Thomas Schelling who wrote a piece about how people coordinate together. His research shows that if you arrange a meeting in New York, and you don't have a time or place, you're most likely to meet inside Grand Central, on the Main Concourse at 12 noon. He called such a thing a focal point.

Above, left to right: A series of promotional spots for Nick at Nite highlighting dif er-ent figures in African-American history. Design and art direction: Wes Duvall, David Ahuja, and Matt Owens for Athletics. "The Three-Trillion-Dollar War," an infographic for *Good* magazine. Designer: Matt Owens. The "Zero Zero" cover of *New York* commemorating the end of the decade from 2000-09. Designer: Matt Owens. One of six skateboards created for Zoo York's artist series. The boards encompass New York's "Urbane Jungle." Designers: Matt Owens, Mark Owens.

or you can hire a studio like ours that doesn't have as much machinery, but can see how the parts of a project should exist across different media," he says. "In the end, it's all about people and knowledge. We've gathered minds with a broad range of expertise, from traditional graphic design and illustration to web and broadcast, and we're interested in the ways these interrelate." For example, Duvall's illustration work, which is largely editorial, served as the springboard for a series of promo spots for Nick at Nite that Owens and Ahuja designed and animated. Similarly, an information-graphics spread for *Good* magazine, "The Hidden Cost of War," also existed as a motion-graphics piece online that has fed back into subsequent motion and graphic work for other clients. "That mix is what we're after," Owens says, adding, "There's a lot to be said for sticking around and doing good work."

Their approach evidently appeals to clients, and, Ellis says, often attracts repeat business. In 2009, Athletics collaborated with Lewis D'Vorkin and Andrea Spiegel at True/Slant, a start-up website that established a blogging platform for "entrepreneurial journalists." Ellis was the central partner in the project and developed the user interface. Owens worked on naming and branding with Gnewikow, and all contributed to the overall design of the site. Athletics worked with the True/Slant team so closely, Ellis says, "We arrived at a shared vision for the product with the True/Slant team and developed a good

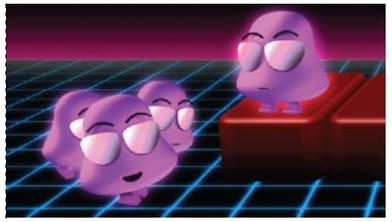
Above, left to right: Cover of *Forbes*. Design and art direction: Jason Gnewikow and Matt Owens for Athletics. Redesign of Forbes 400. UI, design, and development: Athletics; project lead: James Ellis. Screenshot from trueslant.com. Naming, UI, design, and development: Athletics; project lead: James Ellis; naming/brand development: Jason Gnewikow, Matt Owens.

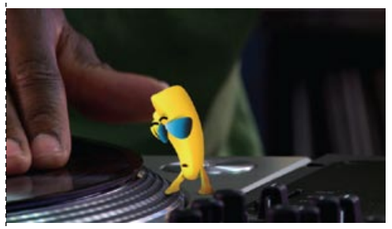
rhythm. We made decisions quickly, and as a result we managed to launch a successful product in roughly seven months." When True/Slant was acquired by Forbes Media in May 2010, D'Vorkin accepted the role of chief product officer and the task of overhauling Forbes' print and online products. He once again called on Athletics for the redesign of the Forbes 400, Forbes' annual list of the wealthiest Americans. "Over a 12-week timeline we redesigned the magazine, using the 400 issue as a new aesthetic starting point. At the same time, we were rapidly redesigning Forbes' online list product for the launch of the 400." Ellis continues, "They needed to move very quickly and didn't have time to start from scratch with a new team. With us they could hit the ground running. The existing relationship is what made us the right fit. That's how we landed the job."

Adapting their collaborative working model from the True/Slant launch, Athletics was able to immediately take on conceptual and design-related aspects of the Forbes project: They were involved in discussions ranging from advertising models to branding and design, editorial strategies, content recommendations, photo illustrations, and information graphics. They developed an aesthetic voice and syntax that Forbes could own—a sort of "*Fantastic Man* meets 1960s *Esquire*," says Owens, "timeless and conservative"—that would allow the pages of the magazine to complement the living organism that the website would become. "Projects like

DAVID: A social network is not, per se, a collaboration, at least not in the non-political sense or the cultural production sense. It's not task-oriented, like when you collaborate on a project or a nation collaborates with an invading power.

DANIEL: Well, let's say a group collaborates mainly through a social network — you have "weak ties" and your collaborative structure doesn't resemble a studio, an office, or a home — it's something else. In our practice, we sometimes receive invitations to participate in projects that involve a whole social network of artists. For example, a curator invites a group of highly interesting people whom you vaguely know to collaborate on a project. And you think: Okay, these people are so interesting, we'll have to do it. You don't even know the curator, but you say yes. Later, you find out there are really two curators, they don't know each other, and they've never actually discussed the project. So, I hear you when you say you don't like collaboration — though as a corollary, I think you need to treat your weak ties well.





CARIN: In a high-power academic environment, it can be very productive to have never met your collaborator, to be from very different backgrounds. It gives you a certain license to take liberties that you wouldn't take if you were working with people from your own area of expertise. We've done it a few times at The New School and it's been rather liberating for many of the participants. It's allowed them to go much further than they would have gone if they had worked with a group of people they knew.

DANIEL: Yes, if you collaborate with 20 of your best friends, that also isn't guaranteed to produce something very interesting because it's missing the antagonistic element.

ALEC: Using the word "antagonism" is interesting because most music scenes are formed by people who want to rise to the top and beat out other people. Dave Hickey said that a 20th century movement involves people gathering in a bar and forming a "scene," which metastasizes a movement and becomes art history. I think in many disciplines, that's the way things work. You build your own context, line by line. If you don't build your own context, it's going to be very hard to make something last. There's too much media, too many things vying for attention these days. I will never work with a musician who does not come from a larger community, and hopefully I'm picking out those that are doing better than a lot of other artists in their community.

Above, left to right: Stills from two of four short films commissioned by Sesame Street to broadcast during its 39th season. Design and animation: David Ahuja; additional 3-D modeling and animation: Matt Semel, Nayoun K. Charoenchai, The Napoleon Group Screenshot from Actual Objects, a web startup of ering high-production-value design assets. Concept, design, and development: James Ellis and Matt Owens for Athletics. Commercial for *Super Street Fighter IV*. Art direction and design: Matt Owens and David Ahuja; editing/animation: David Ahuja for Athletics; client: Ammirati/Capcom.

these are not always easy, but because we have that level of dialogue established, it works."

"Our model has allowed us to grow and work in a way that's unusual—to keep combining and separating to tackle different projects in parallel," says Ellis. For the partners, the continued appeal of their collaboration is the shared control they have over their destiny, and, Ellis says, the fact that they are able to keep learning new things together. "As I've gotten older, I'm more and more interested in projects I've never done before, where I'm learning something in the process. Over the last seven years, my day to day has changed dramatically as our studio has evolved."

Beyond the studio, all of the partners are involved in outside projects: Gnewikow operates a clothing line called Jason Nevikov, Duvall pursues art projects through his Colorwheel studio, Ahuja records electronic music under the name Jacob 2-2, and Ellis and Owens operate actualobjects.com, a design-asset licensing company.

While there are no plans to grow bigger, the next step for Athletics is seeing how they can expand their model and explore the creative opportunities that come from larger-scale collaborations. "We're interested in pushing ourselves further," says Owens. "And always looking to leverage our model in new and interesting ways." ●

Art collective Group Material's seminal work from the 1980s and 1990s continues to challenge the relationship between art, politics, and design.

Collective Collections

TEXT: SARAH HROMACK
TITLE TYPOGRAPHY: PLATFORM BOLD BY BERTON HASEBE

More than 30 years have passed since the fall of 1979, when the newly formed Group Material first convened on Manhattan's Lower East Side as a collective of young artists, designers, educators, and writers; some were recent graduates of the School of Visual Arts, classmates and friends of friends joined by the same socio-academic ties that still bind New York City's downtown art scene. Eleven members strong at its founding, Group Material experienced a series of compositional shifts over the next 15-odd years: Its changing cast featured Julie Ault, Tim Rollins, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Doug Ashford, among many others, all practitioners whose work lent a strong sense of individuality to their collaborative efforts. Group Material was not a faceless entity, after all. It was a cross-disciplinary force whose forays into art, politics, exhibition-making, and museum culture remain highly influential.

Setting up shop in a storefront space on East 13th Street in Manhattan (the cost of which was split equally at $45 per month, per member), Group Material's distinctly Marxist political leanings were manifested in projects that functioned as evidence-based social commentaries. Money was tight, but the sense of urgency was palpable, and so the group did what it could with what it had. Highly self-aware of its relationship to the still-developing Lower East Side, Group Material remained mindful of its neighbors while developing *Inaugural Exhibition*. "[Our] first show will determine our initial outreach, make clear who we see as our audience, and to what kind of public we are committed," claim notes on the project from August 1980, excerpted in *Show and Tell:*

AARON: But collaboration is not just people having dinner or a drink, is it? I think of it as being about a task.

ANGIE: Is it, really? Perhaps that's why it's difficult for me to talk about "collaboration" because I can't think of anything that's truly possible to do as an individual.

In art or cultural production, there's an economic imperative to operate as if you're an individual because the evaluation of the product is based on an identity. Whereas in a commercial environment, the opposite is true. Products are not tied to individual producers — they're always produced by teams of people.

Left: Group Material members, 1980. Photo by Donna Cortese. Above: View of "Democracy: Education," Dia Art Foundation, New York, 1988, which was, as Doug Ashford writes, "a quartet of practices: private meetings, exhibitions, public assemblies, and then a book collecting together records of our organizational events with a series of texts that informed them." Courtesy Group Material; Four Corners Books.

A Chronicle of Group Material, a visual and textual account of the group's earliest days, edited by Ault and published last Spring by Four Corners Books. In "Budgets," a particularly sharp piece from the exhibit, graphic designer Liliana Dones posted on the gallery walls ten pieces of paper enumerating the personal budgets of her fellow members—a humorous, yet pointed gesture. Within a year, the space had been abandoned for a more itinerant practice that engaged various sites throughout the city and beyond.

Printed ephemera played various roles in Group Material's history. In order to meet the guidelines for incorporation in New York State, an act that would enable the group to apply for sorely needed government funding, its members were forced to prove their collective existence by creating and preserving a paper trail of procedures, proposals, budgets, and other bureaucratic minutiae. Maintaining such rigid organizational boundaries, if only in writing, seemed counter-intuitive to their shared commitment to open structures and dispersed labor within the group. Yet, in doing so, they formed an uncommonly precise record of their earliest forays—a set of documents that has become indispensable to those seeking to reconstruct that history and understand the group's internal dynamics.

A very specific visual language emerged from this obsessive documentation, part of a larger graphic sensibility that formed the public face of Group Material. As a cohort of conscientious young people committed to engaging with their marginalized neighborhood, Group Material meant serious business. By appropriating the look, feel, and even material means of the very bureaucratic apparatuses they grappled with, the group forged a graphic identity now readily associated with socially and politically engaged art practices. Some of this couldn't be helped: The manual typewriter used to record minutes during the group's first meetings lent a particular sense of gravity to the most banal accounts. Equally serviceable, the Xerox machine and bulk-mailing system sufficed as the means for reproducing and disseminating text-heavy exhibition announcements, event invitations, and press releases.

The group confronted these material constraints with conviction. Notes from a meeting in July 1980 recount a heated debate over what color to paint the gallery space, with members' various positions carefully recorded; minutes from the following month recall the insistence that didactic materials be placed in the gallery as a means of contextualizing the first exhibition for a general audience. Other conflicts are recounted more vividly: A debate over the use of an image of a woman deemed sexist by some members for

WHO IS GROUP MATERIAL ? WHO ARE THEIR AUDIENCES ? GROUP MATERIAL IS 5 GRAPHIC DESIGNERS, 2 TEACHERS, A WAITRESS, A CARTOGRAPHER, TWO TEXTILE DESIGNERS, A TELEPHONE OPERATOR, A DANCER, A COMPUTER ANALYST AND AN ELECTRICIAN. GROUP MATERIAL IS ALSO AN INDEPENDENT COLLECTIVE OF YOUNG ARTISTS AND WRITERS WITH A VARIETY OF ARTISTIC AND POLITICAL THEORIES AND PRACTICES. GROUP MATERIAL IS COMMITTED TO THE CREATION, ORGANIZATION AND PROMOTION OF AN ART DEDICATED TO SOCIAL COMMUNICATION AND POLITICAL CHANGE. GROUP MATERIAL SEEKS A NUMBER OF AUDIENCES :

WORKING PEOPLE - PEOPLE WHO REALIZE THAT THE FINE ART THEY SEE IN MOST GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS BEARS LITTLE RELEVANCE TO THE EVERYDAY INTERESTS AND STRUGGLES THAT CHARACTERIZE THEIR LIVES

NON-ART PROFESSIONALS - HISTORIANS, ANTHROPOLOGISTS, BUSINESSPEOPLE, TEACHERS, SOCIOLOGISTS, JOURNALISTS, ETC. ; PEOPLE WHO WOULD LIKE TO LEARN HOW DIFFICULT SOCIAL ISSUES CAN BE CLEARLY INVESTIGATED AND PRESENTED THROUGH ARTISTIC MEANS

ARTISTS, STUDENTS, ORGANIZATIONS - PEOPLE WHOSE WORK IS, DUE TO ITS SEXUAL, ETHNIC, POLITICAL OR COLLOQUIAL NATURE, USUALLY EXCLUDED OR UNDER-REPRESENTED IN THE OFFICIAL WORLDS OF ART AND ACADEMIA

OUR IMMEDIATE COMMUNITY - THE PEOPLE OF MANHATTAN'S LOWER EAST SIDE, THE PEOPLE ON THE BLOCK, THE PEOPLE WHO WILL PASS BY OUR STOREFRONT ON THEIR WAY TO SOME EVERYDAY ACTIVITY

WHAT IS GROUP MATERIAL'S PROJECT ? IN OUR FIRST YEAR, GROUP MATERIAL WILL EXHIBIT THE ART OF GROUP MEMBERS, COMMUNITY ARTISTS, NON-ARTISTS, FAMOUS ARTISTS. THE SHOWS WILL INITIATE A FORUM FOR A VARIETY OF CONTROVERSIAL THEMES : THE AESTHETICS OF CONSUMPTION, THE 1980 PRESIDENTAL ELECTIONS, THE IMAGERY OF ALIENATION, GENDER, THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FOOD, AUTHORITY AND HIGH FASHION, POLITICAL ART BY CHILDREN OF N.Y. TO NAME SOME EXAMPLES. RELEVANT FILMS, LECTURES, PANELS, LITERATURE, AND PERFORMANCES WILL ACCOMPANY EACH EXHIBITION.

WHERE IS GROUP MATERIAL LOCATED AND WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT ? GROUP MATERIAL IS LOCATED AT 244 EAST 13th ST. BETWEEN SECOND AND THIRD AVENUES IN N.Y.C. OUR LOCATION IS AT ONCE PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL. BESIDES OUR ART EXHIBITIONS, GROUP MATERIAL WILL BE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE LIFE OF OUR NEIGHBORHOOD. PART OF G.M.'S WORKING RESPONSIBILITY IS TO THE IMMEDIATE LOCAL PROBLEMS THAT SHAPE THE SPECIAL CHARACTER OF THIS PLACE. HOUSING, EDUCATION, SANITATION, COMMUNITY ORGANIZING, RECREATION : THESE ARE THE CONCRETE AREAS OF PRACTICE THAT GIVE OUR ARTISTIS AND THEORETICAL WORK SUSTENANCE AND MEANING. THAT OUR ADDRESS MIGHT SEEM TO BE AN UNLIKELY SITE FOR AN ART GALLERY MAKES IT ALL THE MORE IMPORTANT THAT WE BEGIN TO RETHINK THE PURPOSE OF ART AND THE ORIENTATION OF ITS INSTITUTIONS. GROUP MATERIAL WANTS TO EXPLODE THE ASSUMPTIONS THAT DICTATE WHAT ART IS, WHO ART IS FOR AND WHAT AN ART EXHIBITION CAN BE.

WHEN IS GROUP MATERIAL OPEN ? AN INDEPENDENT ART DEPENDS ON ITS NOT BEING A BUSINESS. SINCE G.M. IS ORIENTED TOWARD PEOPLE WHO MUST WORK, WE ARE OPEN 5 P.M. TO 10 P.M. ON WEEKDAYS, NOON TO 10 P.M. ON SATURDAYS AND SUNDAYS. THERE WILL BE SPECIAL HOURS FOR SPECIAL EVENTS.

WHY WAS GROUP MATERIAL ORGANIZED ? GROUP MATERIAL WAS FOUNDED AS A CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSE TO THE UNSATISFACTORY WAYS IN WHICH ART HAS BEEN CONCEIVED, PRODUCED, DISTRIBUTED AND TAUGHT IN NEW YORK CITY, IN AMERICAN SOCIETY. GROUP MATERIAL IS AN ARTIST-INITIATED PROJECT. WE ARE DESPERATELY TIRED AND CRITICAL OF THE DRAWN-OUT TRADITIONS OF FORMALISM, CONSERVATISM AND PSEUDO AVANT-GARDISM THAT DOMINATE THE OFFICIAL ART WORLD. AS ARTISTS AND WORKERS WE WANT TO MAINTAIN CONTROL OVER OUR WORK, DIRECTING OUR ENERGIES TO THE DEMANDS OF SOCIAL CONDITIONS AS OPPOSED TO THE DEMANDS OF THE ART MARKET. WHILE MOST ART INSTITUTIONS SEPARATE ART FROM THE WORLD, NEUTRALIZING ANY ABRASIVE FORMS AND CONTENTS, GROUP MATERIAL ACCENTUATES THE CUTTING EDGE OF ART. WE WANT OUR WORK AND THE WORK OF OTHERS TO TAKE A ROLE IN A BROADER CULTURAL ACTIVISM.

HOW DOES GROUP MATERIAL PLAN TO IMPLEMENT ITS WORK ? GROUP MATERIAL RESEARCHES WORK FROM ARTISTS, NON-ARTISTS , THE MEDIA, THE STREETS-FROM ANYONE INTERESTED IN PRESENTING SOCIALLY CRITICAL INFORMATION IN A COMMUNICATIVE AND INFORMAL CONTEXT. WHILE OUR DIRECT APPROACH IS ORIENTED TOWARD PEOPLE NOT WELL ACQUAINTED WITH THE SPECIALIZED LANGUAGES OF FINE ART, WE EXPECT THAT OUR SHOWS WILL BE VERY REFRESHING FOR AN AUDIENCE THAT HAS A LONG-STANDING INTEREST IN QUESTIONS OF ART THEORY AND PRACTICE. IN OUR EXHIBITIONS, GROUP MATERIAL REVEALS THE MULTIPLICITY OF MEANINGS THAT SURROUND ANY VITAL SOCIAL ISSUE SO THAT PEOPLE ARE INTRODUCED TO A SUBJECT, MAKING EVALUATIONS AND FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS ON THEIR OWN.

OUR PROJECT IS CLEAR. WE INVITE EVERYONE TO QUESTION THE ENTIRE CULTURE WE HAVE TAKEN FOR GRANTED.

C A L E N D A R 1 9 8 0 - 1 9 8 1

OCT. 4 - OCT. 27 : **GROUP MATERIAL OPENS**

OUR FIRST SHOW WILL BE A SURVEY OF THE NEW CULTURAL MILITANCY EMERGENT IN THE WORK OF ARTISTS, COLLECTIVES, AND NON-ARTISTS IN THE U.S. AND ABROAD.

OPENING : 12 NOON - 5:30 P.M.
RECEPTION : 5:30 - 8:30 P.M.
DANCE PARTY : 8:30 - 12 MIDNIGHT

NOV. 16 : AN OPEN CALL TO ALL ARTISTS !!!

GROUP MATERIAL WILL ACCEPT FOR EXHIBITION ANY AND ALL ARTWORKS CONCERNING THE 1980 ELECTIONS. GROUP MATERIAL WILL BEGIN ACCEPTING WORKS ON OCTOBER 11, 1980. ENTRIES WILL BE ACCEPTED UNTIL OUR EXHIBITION SPACE IS EXHAUSTED - FIRST COME COME, FIRST SERVED.

ELECTION NIGHT OPENING, NOV. 4TH AT 8:00 !
WATCH THE RETURNS WITH GROUP MATERIAL !!!!

NOV. 21 - DEC. 21 : **A L I E N A T I O N**

AN EXHIBITION THAT DESCRIBES AND EXPLAINS THE MODERN BREAK-UP OF REALITY ; OUR SEPARATIONS FROM EACH OTHER, OUR ART, OUR PRODUCTION, OUR NATURE, OUR SELVES.

IN DECEMBER ! **REVOLTING MUSIC !**

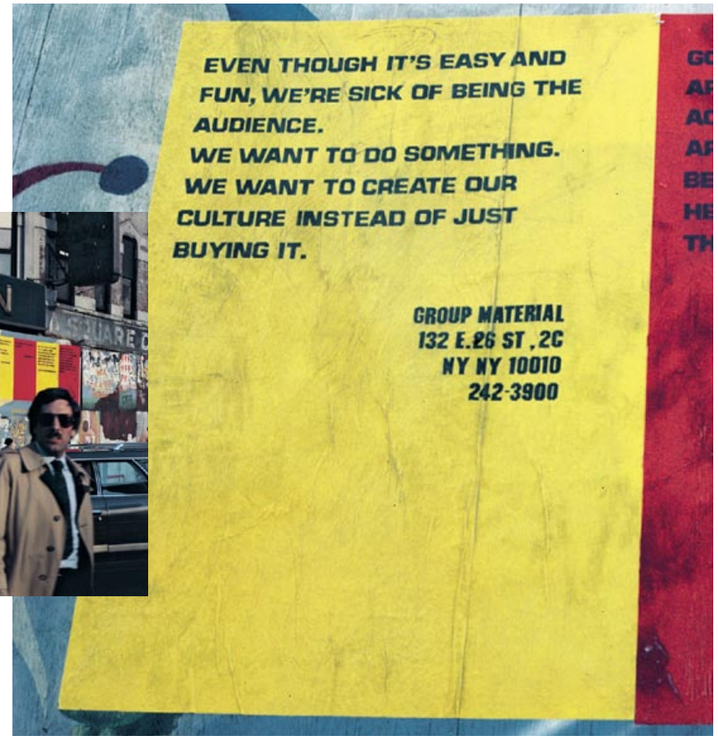
AN EXHIBITION OF MUSIC IN THE FORM OF A WILD DANCE PARTY!!!

FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY, GROUP MATERIAL WILL D.J. THE REVOLUTIONARY HITS OF THE PAST THREE DECADES : RECORDS THAT ARE OVERT AND COVERT DEMONSTRATIONS OF CLASS, SEXUAL AND RACIAL CONSCIOUSNESS.

PLUS SLIDES & FILMS OF WESTERN INSURRECTIONS !!

JAN. 9 - FEB. 2 : **THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE**

ON NEW YEAR'S DAY, 1981, GROUP MATERIAL WILL VISIT THEIR NEIGHBORS ON EAST 13TH STREET, ASKING EACH HOUSEHOLD TO LEND US THEIR FAVORITE ART POSSESSION FOR EXHIBITION DURING THE MONTH OF JANUARY.



DANIEL: So why isn't collaboration simply working together? The word seems to claim to be adding a social and political valence to something that's already happening.

MICHAEL: That's because it talks about the elimination of hierarchy. When you talk about collaboration, you assume there's an equal exchange of ideas. You can "collaborate" with your boss, but in a way you're still working for him. So I think there's a utopian quality to the word.

PREM: On one hand, when a graphic designer works with a client and they say, "The client is my collaborator"—that's clearly a euphemism used to mask a power relationship. One person is paying and one person is not. But on the other hand, there's the possibility that articulating the terms differently can shift the power relationship a bit. One person makes, the other directs, yet something else is also exchanged.

MICHAEL: Are we saying that, when there's some kind of financial relationship, collaboration is impossible? Because that was your supposition in a way: Because somebody's paying you, you can't collaborate. But it's a much more complex relationship because the financial and economic relationship between the designer and the client is more complex than a direct payment situation — often you're working with somebody who's ultimately being paid by somebody else, and distributing that cash to a whole bunch of people to help them do a project.

Opposite: Handout distributed during "The Inaugural Exhibition," on October 4, 1980, at Group Material's space at 244 East 13th Street that outlined their program for the first year. Above: *Da Zi Baos*, Union Square, New York, 1982. Photo by Andres Serrano. Courtesy Group Material; Four Corners Books.

the announcement card for *Facere/Fascis* (May 2 through June 4, 1981) resulted in Hannah Alderfer, who usually designed most of the group's printed ephemera, refusing to work on the project altogether. Dones stepped in, rendering the image into a mock magazine cover by spinning the show's themes—fashion, class, Fascist discourse—into media-friendly headlines emblazoned across a searing red background.

Soon enough, Group Material began working on a larger-scale public installation, where its graphic sensibility informed message-driven projects such as *Da Zi Baos* (1982), a series of posters based on the Chinese "Big Character posters," or Dazibaos, which are used to espouse political positions and are posted on "democracy walls" as a means of publicizing social issues and engendering debate. The group polled passersby in Union Square on current events and posted their candid comments in a series of handmade posters. Public grants allowed for more elaborate interventions such as "Subculture" (1983), a series of placards on the New York City subway, and "Inserts" (1988), an advertising supplement to *The New York Times*; both enlisted the work of other artists in initiatives whose themes, at times overtly political in nature, forced heated discussion.

Group Material's most powerful projects employed an innate understanding of the way information functions in the public realm, forming incisive critiques of various institutions while operating from the gallery space. "AIDS Timeline," installed at the Berkeley Art Museum MATRIX Gallery at the University of California, Berkeley in 1989 (and chronicled at length in *Show and Tell* by Sabrina Locks) was, and remains, a tactical masterpiece. Displaying artworks alongside a trove of research into the various industries whose policies and procedures impacted the then-ten-year epidemic, members Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Karen Ramspacher, along with the art historian Richard Meyer, then a graduate student in Berkeley's art history department, merged political activism and art-making to form a loose and associative, yet literal, taxonomy of a disease that galvanized the political landscape. The piece was recreated at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford (1990) and again at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, for the 1991 Whitney Biennial, where its inclusion marked a newfound willingness on the part of American art institutions to engage with the epidemic.

By claiming the gallery, the printed page, and the street as sites where art and politics are translated through a distinctly graphic language, Group Material engaged the culture industry—and one another—in rigorous intellectual debate. To this very day, nearly 15 years after the group disbanded in 1996, its former members exhibit a sense of inclusiveness about their work. During the question-and-answer session at a symposium on Group Material held last October at New York City's

ALICE: There's a parallel in education, where the power relationship is about grading. When you're working in groups and one person isn't working as hard, or something's not working, how do you evaluate that kind of activity?

TINA: I think collaborations are the most successful when there's no hierarchy — when people from different backgrounds come together with a goal to create a project. One of the artists I've collaborated with is Sarah Morris. She wanted to make a sweater based on one of her paintings, in the shape of her favorite sweatshirt. The painting had over 17 different colors, which was interesting to me as a designer — I would never design anything like this myself because it's a complete production nightmare. But when you collaborate with someone who is not restricted by knowledge of the technical difficulties, you are pushed to do things you never would have done otherwise. In the end, we found this one little factory in Scotland who was willing to make a limited edition of 30, which were then all signed and numbered by the artist.

ALICE: But you didn't see yourself as just a producer in that?

TINA: No, it was completely a collaboration because Sarah Morris needed our technical capability to make it happen. And we kind of had to direct the project and say, "No, you can't do this, but how about that?" So it was really an exchange of ideas. In the end, it was close to what she wanted, but there were a lot of my ideas in the piece as well.

ALICE: That brings up a really interesting point: What's most valuable in that relationship? Is it the technical facilities or the original vision?

MICHAEL: To take that even further, are you invested in her artistic vision as the paramount thing that you're trying to solve and satisfy for her? Does that thing somehow have to be preserved? And if so, how do you reach visibility on your own, if she's this artist with an idea, and your job is to grapple with her naïveté?

DAVID: What if only one side considers it a collaboration? What if, as far as Sarah Morris is concerned, that's her sweater, and you only executed it? It's the fate of the fabricator, you know, who doesn't get a credit, who's totally anonymous, and yet, they're the ones who executed it technically.

This spread, left to right: Installation view of "The Castle," as part of *Documenta 8* held at the Museum Fridericianum in Kassel, Germany, 1987. View of "MASS," exhibited at The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1986. View of the group's seminal exhibition, "AIDS Timeline," held at the University Art Museum, University of California at Berkeley, 1989. Photo by Ben Blackwell. Courtesy Group Material; Four Corners Books.

Artists Space, an audience member asked how, given recent cultural shifts, young people might continue making socially and politically engaged work. Tim Rollins answered, simply: "It's up to you," suggesting that the possibilities are as wide-reaching as his own practice, which straddles the commercial art market and public education system with the same determination that marked Group Material's undertakings. The group's demonstrated openness in sharing that conversation with others is a testament to the enduring nature of their practice, which has since informed the practice of countless artists, activists, curators, and designers. ●

Interior of Artists Space during exhibition installation with director Stefan Kalmar seated at left, 2010. Photo by Henrik Knudsen.

What happens when you ask a curator, a graphic designer, and a group of architects to reinvent an essential New York alternative art space?

Sweet Are the Uses of Adversity

TEXT: ADAM KLEINMAN
TITLE TYPOGRAPHY: PLAN GROTESQUE STENCIL` BY NICOLA DJUREK
PHOTOGRAPHY: HENRIK KNUDSEN

Founded in 1972 to promote emerging and potentially marginalized art practices, Artists Space became a stalwart of the alternative New York art scene. The institution played host to many iconic exhibitions, such as 1977's *Pictures*, curated by Douglas Crimp, which canonically announced artists like Sherrie Levine and Robert Longo to a wider audience—and helped influence a whole generation of artists concerned with what is now called the "postmodern image." As a touchstone of such programming, Artists Space has been the epicenter for landmark, if not iconoclastic, displays covering themes such as identity politics and the culture wars, the AIDS crisis, and the institutional recuperation of the avant-garde. In recent years, however, the program has faltered a bit in presenting field-defining exhibitions.

In an attempt to redefine its image and position, Artists Space recently brought in a new director, Stefan Kalmar, who, in turn, signaled the establishment of a "new era" by redesigning not only the program, but the actual physical space of the gallery, its offices, and its website, as well as Artists Space's print media and style guide. To achieve this monumental task, Kalmar brought in a mix of provocative designers—ultimately, Common Room, ifau + Jesko Fezer, and Manuel Raeder—

ALEC: But what if you're in a publisher role, what if you're Farrar Strauss & Giroux? It's possible that you'll receive more credit than some of your authors do. Some literary authors will get attention because they're on that imprint. Same goes for a gallery or museum that's showing a certain artist.

DAVID: But the thing is, I would say that the presenting institution, the press or the museum or what have you, or the label, isn't in any kind of competition for space or prestige with the artist who's being presented. I mean, that's symbiotic. But to me, collaboration would be two people who can make an equal claim to artistic credit.

to think about how this branding could function symbolically as well as on a day-to-day basis.

Wherever these ideas led, the realities of use and budget became a filter dictating the final product, not to mention the delicate negotiations that take place when drawing together multiple partners. The resultant package has been universally lauded in the press; *The New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith went so far as to equate this bottom-up restructuring with the revolutionary setup that Alfred H. Barr, Jr., used to found the Museum of Modern Art.

To get to the heart of this possibly historic process, I spoke with various players to uncover how their ideas were made manifest. What follows is an impressionistic collage of these multiple voices, which together trace a tale of how all of these sometimes contradictory thoughts were distilled into a functional framework.

LANA: I was thinking of a totally different arena, which is psychoanalysis — psychoanalysts often think of this analysis as a collaboration. I don't know if the analysand thinks of it as a collaboration, because there is a power relation, but, in fact, isn't the author of the analysis the analysand? Does there have to be a product or profit?

MICHAEL: But then that shared purpose would have to be implied. In your analysand example, you and your analyst are working together to heal; there's an economic exchange, but you share that purpose somehow.

PREM: It's funny because at another moment in time, a group of people sitting in a room like this would have simply been called "sociability," or "discourse," not "collaboration." It would have been something else. But nowadays, at least in New York, we assume that a group of people sitting in a room will lead to an outcome — a kind of work.

MICHAEL: Yes, is it that there has to be some sort of task at hand that you feel you're equally in charge of solving or addressing?

This spread, left to right: Greene Street facade, New York, featuring lettering by artist John Baldessari. Interior during a screening in the 1970s, New York. Adrian Piper performs at Artists Space in the 1970s, New York. Historical identities for Artists Space from the 1970s and 1980s. View of the group show, *Pictures*, at Artists Space, New York, 1977. Interior of Artists Space before its renovation, 2009. All images courtesy of Artists Space.

CARIN: What if it's not a task, but an interest?

TINA: In German, the word for collaboration is "Zusammenarbeit," which means "working together." In the example I brought up with the artist Sarah Morris, what is so wrong that somebody produces and somebody designs? That's a collaboration because she couldn't have done it without us, and we couldn't have done it without her. It doesn't need to be a product. It can be a goal or it can be an idea, or it can be a statement...

MICHAEL: Would all the workers at the Ford factory be collaborating to make that Taurus?

PREM: Is collaboration intrinsically equal, or is there a distinction between equal collaboration, in which investment and power are equally divided, and another form of collaboration that you described, like the Sarah Morris sweater?

Around May we were all asked to meet together and to have a completed project by a fixed end date, the opening of the first show, September 10, 2010. Also, the budget was very small, only about $100,000 USD.

There are no rules in design. The photographer, of course, knows more about a given picture than I would even dare to imagine. So, often we remove ourselves so that the expert can determine the reception or use of something.

We had worked with Jesko previously on the Wyoming Building in New York, but we did not know everyone that was brought together for this "think tank" meeting.

Stefan knew us from a project we did with him in Munich for the Kunstverein. There, we put a large table in the center of the space that could be used as a bar or café. This communal table was a natural outgrowth of the large tables you have at beer halls in Munich. However, the large table could also be reconfigured and used as a stage, for example.

There wasn't much said of display during the first meeting; most of the desire was to create the space as a kind of generator with an open or common area at the core. On top of that, there was a desire to bring the office area into view so that the visitors and the staff would see each other.

I drew a kind of diagram of overlapping circles, with one representing a library, another the office area, and another the exhibition space, and so on, so as to create zones of contact between these usually discreet aspects.

I didn't really understand the teams. There was a lot of interest for collaboration, but there was little discussion of how this would result. So we just went off from that meeting and thought about the project independently.

Before the renovation, the space was a bit moribund, which paralleled the state of the institution: 30 percent of the floor space was used for storage, and another 30 percent was taken over by administration, in particular, a large corner office for the director. Basically the space began to mimic a kind of corporate institution.

Just gut the place, and be through with it. Then you get a kind of 1970s SoHo artists loft, much like what was around at the time the institution originally opened.

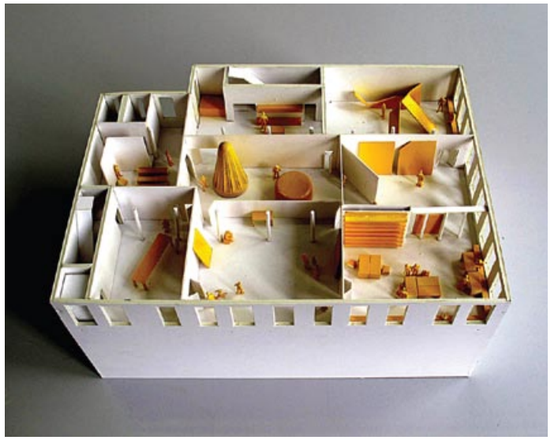
Well, the demo idea might have been a more a strategic move than a design move—a kind of let's-do-it-and-see, but also more as a *fait accompli* requiring new architecture.

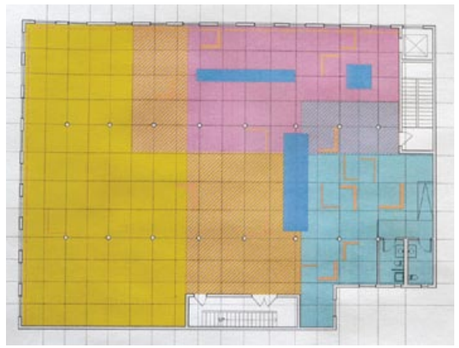
At this point we thought that the loft idea is sort of untrue, I mean, as architects you're not really doing anything with this situation.

At the second meeting we came back with a proposal. Okay, build in nine spaces with 20 doors between them, as a counter-proposal to the wide-open space idea. This way you preinstall a setting that is rigid, one that is very rich as you move around in a nomadic way over time.

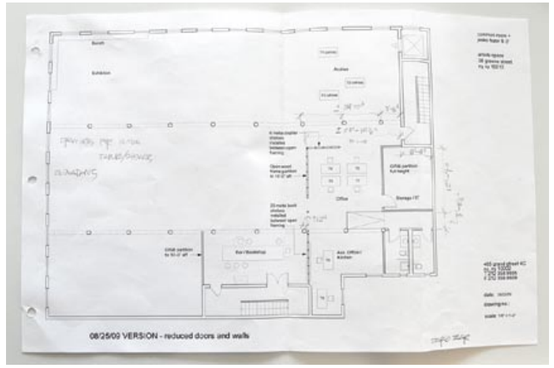
We weren't sure what to expect from the second meeting, so we just came back with a programmatic diagram superimposed on the gutted space. This grew out of the use diagram given in the first meeting.

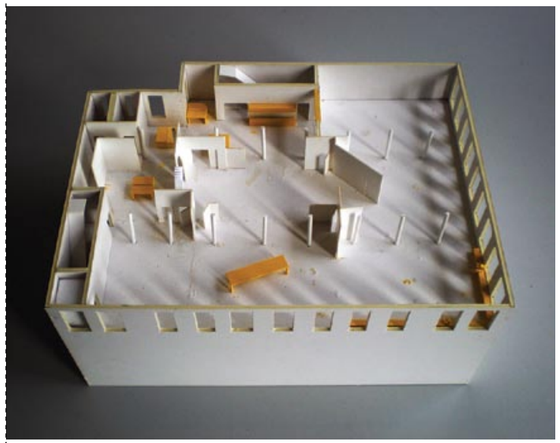
It is more dramatic to show change from within. Before their removal, the existing walls had congealed to define the cramped context of the exhibition space, which was something to move away from. So, the idea to take out walls just to put in new walls…





This spread, left to right: An early model for Artists Space containing nine rooms. Photo courtesy of ifau+Jesko Fezer. Proposed programmatic scheme for the space. Photo courtesy of Common Room. Demolition of existing walls as part of renovation, 2009. Photo courtesy of Artists Space. Revised model for Artists Space showing a large gate in the center of the gallery, 2009. Photo courtesy of ifau+Jesko Fezer. Annotated plan for Artists Space, 2009. Photo courtesy of Common Room.





MICHAEL: The question is: Is collaboration a certain state of grace which is different from all other work? Is it a special condition of work, unlike division of labor, for instance? You know, division of labor is essential to modern capital. It is the coordination of specialized activities that allows a modern product to be produced. But that's not necessarily collaboration.

DANIEL: I think collaboration is a way to describe a labor relationship that recognizes elements of social reciprocity rather than command and control. But, then again, if you pursue equality, you'll never get it. When you described the sweater project, I thought of your role as being this filter, a gatekeeper. That's an important position because you're a curator who decides there's an input and there's an output. What about the Coalition of the Willing, the people who wanted to invade Iraq? Is that collaboration? [General laughter]

MICHAEL: Coercion, I think.

DANIEL: Yeah or coordination. They're definitely there together, but they're not collaborating.

The idea of the nine rooms was rejected.

At some point, a member of the board, who was an architect, came in to see if we could actually complete something, and on time. I think there was some nervousness about what we were doing.

Some members from the original "think tank" team had already dropped out by now, probably because there wasn't enough structure.

The point of design is to take seriously the daily use, and not to just leave gestures. You could put in an open office in the space, but what if a screening room was needed? Further, what happens in the future when a new director comes in? There needed to be some base structure from which the space could logically adapt instead of falling back on the ad hoc.

We decided to pare down the room idea to match it with the open-room idea in a way that could serve as a backdrop for all of the mixed events in the future program: exhibitions, performances, talks, films, etc.

The walls were taken out, but we wanted to keep the doors from the first proposal, as a door is more expensive to build than a wall, if either should be needed.

This large door/gate idea was a kind of weird addition; what does it say about "transparency" to have a large door looming in the space?

As a compromise, posts were put in to establish a coordinate grid that matched the outline of the rejected rooms. This way, there would be some anchors that could define the space, but also so that some coordinates could be set up to build off in the future.

These coordinates would be slightly askew from the column grid so that they would read as something different.

Going back to the diagram, an office was needed, but one that could allow the staff and the visitors to see one another. So a series of screens grew off our anchors that could frame the space but keep it open.

With their exposed studs, without dry wall, the screens have the actual qualities of a wall but also allow for shelving to store the library and archive around the office.

There was a lot of interest in having a kitchen, although there wasn't enough money for that. Instead, the coordinates mapped out a space that a kitchen could go in, so we also factored in the plumbing and gas to make that option more feasible at a later date.

The screens themselves are based just on the module of the wood, which set up the clear story of the office. Likewise, the distance between them is dictated by the function of the shelves and circulation.

There was then a long discussion on whether to paint these screens, as painting could create some form of hierarchy. In the end, it was decided to leave them blank.

The floor was left unfinished, just sanded down. This was pragmatic, as there was little money, yet it is also risky as you think of maintenance long term.

All in all, the idea is to have something that is not finished, to have something that has the quality of a wall, of a shelf, that could be added to in the future. Also, this allowed a relationship to be established where we would be working on the project over a longer time, together.

New York is unique because it has three generations of artists living and working side by side. So there was also an idea to get these people talking, but how could design be used as a tool to open up new questions?

The calendar and announcements needed to be clear and consistent. So the mailers are designed on a serial leporello format that allows for variation, but could also be collected to form a book. That is, they create their own archive. Also, when they are unfolded, they become a poster, which fits evenly on the screens in the office area. This way, there is an extension of the 2-D into the architecture as the posters fill out the library.

DAVID: But let me ask again, what's the value in calling that a collaboration rather than "working together on a project"? We're using "collaboration" as a special term, and Tina is defending what she did as a collaboration when, in fact, it could be described as, "I contracted this sweater from Sarah Morris" or "I commissioned this sweater from Sarah Morris" or "We were hired to do this." But we're calling that a collaboration for a reason, and my question is why? What's being added when you do this?

ALEC: I think the important idea is that it wouldn't have existed otherwise. There's a band, Animal Collective, who just made a shoe. They would not have made shoes unless a shoe manufacturer came to them and said, "Come to us, design a shoe, and we will put it out there."

DAVID: Does the world need Animal Collective shoes?

ALEC: I think that's a better question.

PREM: Going back to the question that David brought up before: If we were to ban the word "collaboration" from our speech, how would we define these situations?

ANGIE: But I think the only tractable question is how the word is used. We cannot say what collaboration means. There wouldn't be a talk here if it weren't for the fact that the word is being used in a variety of different ways.

ROB: Sometimes, the word is used in a way that makes work feel not like work. As work becomes more socialized, there is less of a division between the office and the home.

ANGIE: But I think that's where it can be very coercive. Whose purpose does it serve to call something a collaboration and in what particular context? Where do you stop defining where collaboration ends in any kind of production?

Opposite, top to bottom: Artists Space under construction, featuring exposed studs as "screens" for shelving and office use. Photo courtesy of Common Room. View of brochures on display, with Charlotte Posenenske installation behind. Photo courtesy of Manuel Raeder. Artists Space brochures in leporello format. Photo courtesy of Manuel Raeder. Artists Space vitrines in finished space. Photo courtesy of Common Room.

In the Wyoming project we decided to put in a facsimile of Aldo Van Eyck's "ring" in the central exhibition space. This ring, which Van Eyck developed from looking at the form of the circle in various anthropological studies, serves not only as a platform or meeting place for communal exchanges, but also as a support that could be used in various ways. For example, a plank could be placed across it to form a table.

There was an idea that various barriers could work as a kind of hindrance so that contingency can set up a starting point for interaction. In other words, make something that someone has to deal with, as well as a base from which some form of context could be established. These coordinates play into that, however, we felt there should be a greater intervention.

The idea for interpretation was carried on in a design for a bench. This bench, much like the bar in Munich, could be used for people to meet.

At first the bench was to be placed in the corner where the old director's office was removed to show the transformation from a private closed space that approximated a corporate model to a now open and generous one.

It's funny: The identity for the space began as a kind of joke. In the past, Artists Space had a circle for their brand, then there was later a square, so why not a triangle? Then you get something that approximates the letter *A*, but also get something that looks like a strong corporate logo.

Sometimes if you play with history it becomes too heavy.

It was decided to unfix the bench so that it could be used for other functions as need be, and not serve as a souvenir of a past memory.

Although the triangle brand has a clear form, the color often changes. It will stay like that for now to establish the identity, but in the future it will probably get played with, and it should mutate.

The bench has moved around over the last few months. For a while it was in front of the office, however it wasn't used much.

We hear through the grapevine that things have been changed or that new furniture has been built, but we seldom get that information first-hand.

Well, the design was kind of reused again in another project, and I feel a bit cheated by this.

We are happy that it is unfinished, but would be unhappy if it stayed this way. o

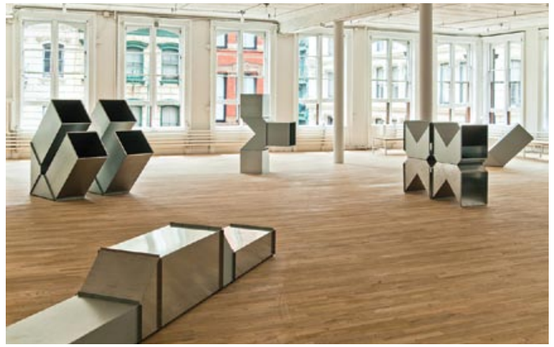
Above and below:
Foil stamped business cards and stickers for Artists Space, employing a triangle in f exible usage as a mark. Photo courtesy of Manuel Raeder.

DAVID: It would be good to track some basic contexts where the word is used. Your collaboration is different from a graphic designer's collaboration, which is different from a collaboration in theater.

ROB: Right. I was talking to a friend of mine who was an assistant director on Law & Order who says he's taking out the trash, but at the same time, they're calling the project a "family" and a "collaboration." Using the term might suggest you're not at work even when you are. In order to not feel as if one is not working all the time, one makes the claim that some work is "collaboration" whereas other work is just "work." What is working with your friends when they're under contract? Which brings us back to the topic of weak ties: Is participation enough? Is knowing your colleagues enough to collaborate with them or does it require more than that?

LAN THAO: It requires a lot more. In my experience, it takes much longer to finish a project with five collaborators than if I completed a project myself. In my mind, it would be perfect, right? I have this vision, I have this idea, let's say it's a sweater, and I could do it, and it would be perfect. But then when you introduce collaborators to the discussion, the process is challenged, so it takes four times longer for the sweater to happen. Students often ask, what's the secret? And I say, be prepared that it will take a lot longer. Working together is great, sure, but there are a lot of ruptures.

MICHAEL: Why do you tolerate it? There has to be something on the plus side.



Above, clockwise:
Interior of Artists Space of ce area and desks, 2010. Photo by Henrik Knudsen. Installation view of Danh Vo, *Autoerotic Asphyxiation*, September 15 – November 7, 2010. Photo by Daniel Pérez. Courtesy of Artists Space. Installation view from *Charlotte Posenenske*, June 23 – August 15, 2010. Photo by Daniel Pérez. Courtesy of Artists Space.

LAN THAO: Well, this particular collaboration [referring to Lin + Lam] works for me. Each time we begin a project, it's an agreement. On each project, my collaborator asks, why is your vision perfect? And that is the moment that I come back to myself and am challenged and grow.

LANA: I think it's discursive. You're offered another voice outside yourself but one that's not on equal ground.

MICHAEL: So it's therapeutic?

LANA: It can be but, as I said before, it's a kind of productive antagonism.

**Tucked away in Queens,
Linco has become the printing plant du jour.**

THE LITTLE PRINTER THAT COULD

TEXT: DREW DERNAVICH
TITLE TYPOGRAPHY: BOUTIQUE ENGRAVED BY TIMO GAESSNER
PHOTOGRAPHY: HENRIK KNUDSEN

If you don't count Japanese pears as one of the fruits of collaboration, then you probably haven't worked with Linco Printing. Tucked into an industrial Long Island City neighborhood that literally sits under the Midtown-Queens Expressway, this rugged New York City printing company is the last place you'd expect to find a backyard garden overflowing with sunflowers and okra. But it may be one of the intangible reasons for Linco's success. They've got roots.

Linco is your classic family-run business. Andy Lin, originally from Taiwan, founded the company in 1975 as a printer of community newspapers: Chinese and Greek dailies, among others. Their original location was in a cramped Chinatown basement, where they prayed that paper deliveries would not occur on a rainy day. They left Chinatown for Queens in 1980 and have since upgraded their capabilities with brand-new, sheet-fed machines that enable them to produce all kinds of glossy publications: posters, catalogs, and independent magazines.

Seventy percent of their work, however, is still done on the Helvetica of paper materials: newsprint, a material traditionally chosen not for its look but because of its cheap price. Given the anemic economy, that may sound about right. What may be surprising, though, is that last fall,

A worker keeps an eye on the presses at Linco Printing, Long Island City, New York, 2010. Photo by Henrik Knudsen.

MICHAEL: But do you think that the product of it is somehow superior to the individual labor?

LAN THAO: I would say it's different and it's not where I could have gone by myself.

LANA: And since you might not have thought of it on your own, you think of it differently.

DAVID: Let's say we don't know each other at all, but we say, "Hey! Let's see if we can make a shoe with wings!" We have nothing in common, except that you like wings and I like shoes, but we're so committed to solving this problem that we succeed and we feel like it's a huge artistic success just because we put ourselves through hell to do it. But in the end, I didn't get to make my shoe, and you didn't get to make your wings, because we got so caught up in incorporating two different points of view.

ALEC: But collaboration isn't just about the product, it's about the process. I hate calling myself a writer. When I started collaborating more, and I stopped calling myself a writer, I was also saying I was tired of being lonely. Collaboration is more interesting than that, and I don't care what comes out of it.

MICHAEL: You just want friends [laughing].

ALEC: I just want some friends. I just want you to like me.

some of New York's highest fashion houses sought out Linco to produce their Fashion Week lookbooks on, yes, newsprint. When the design firm Pure + Applied made a brochure for the November opening of the Noguchi Museum, they did the same. And when MT TF created a set of maps for the New York City MTA and a book for the Design Trust for Public Space, they intentionally designed them for newsprint. As Pure + Applied's Paul Carlos told me, "A good designer knows how to maximize a shoestring budget." Is a medium that traditionally screams "thrift" now whispering "haute couture?"

"Newsprint does fit with the DI aesthetic that's been big for a while now," says Tammy Lin, Andy's daughter. "But because the paper absorbs so much ink, it has a nice, soft, vintage kind of look." And indeed, newsprint has a tactile element which makes it more appealing than the reflective sheen of the glossy page. It feels rich without conveying decadence. Carlos says he believes designers are choosing it for nostalgic reasons, not just economic ones, mourning the fact that what was once a common printing medium is slowly disappearing. If newsprint is the new black, it's because it's a warm and intimate hue.

Either reason is fine with the Lin family, who, as a business, shares newsprint's familiar, no-frills sensibility: There are no job titles here. Tammy's business cards are stacked in a box that says "SA S," but there is no actual selling going on: Linco's business has always arrived via word-of-mouth. And despite the many technological advances in the industry, those I talked to stressed that printing is still an art. "The ink levels in these

DAVID: I think that solo work really valorizes the product, but collaboration valorizes the process.

ROB: It takes resistance to build a muscle. The kind of thinking that develops in dialogue is often much clearer, more nuanced, deeper. When meeting with someone, I can draw a complete blank while trying to recollect the things I wanted to talk about. And yet the minute we sit down, there are many, many things to talk about. There is something about social norms, being in circles or sitting around a table. Also, someone taking issue with a point that you're making helps break open your ideas and deepen them.

ALEC: It is interesting to talk about what's sacrificed in collaboration and maybe it's idiosyncrasy.

This spread, left to right: Inside the of ces of Linco, with potted plants and rolls of paper. Photos by Henrik Knudsen. A selection of recent books and publications printed at Linco, including: *Dot Dot Dot* number 19 (2009), by Dexter Sinister; *On Becoming An Artist: Isamu Noguchi and His Contemporaries, 1922–1960* (2010), designed by Pure + Applied; *The Studio-X NY Guide to Liberating New Forms of Conversation* (2010) and *What is Affordable Housing?* (2009), designed by MTWTF; *X* (2009), designed by Glen Cummings and Adam Michaels; and *Act Patriot Act!* (2005), designed by Project Projects.

ALICE: I'm wondering if our conversation would change if we talked less about luxury — having the luxury to collaborate. Does it change the terms at all if the situation is urgent? When you consider situations in which teamwork is required, they always have to build a survival kit, don't they? Or a bridge across an insurmountable river, a life or death situation.

PREM: Which opens up our dialogue about collaboration versus coordination versus cooperation, which are the terms we sometime use in such situations. In that context, the word "cooperation" has a different nuance, a connotation of necessity.

DANIEL: But the goal is also clear before the whole thing starts. You know you want to build a bridge. Collaboration can change the goal as you go along.

machines have to be adjusted by eye, depending on how you want the image to look," said Felix Lin (Andy's son), who directs the offset printing. For instance, images that look dark and rich on your backlit computer monitor just might cause the ink to become oversaturated, causing the pages to stick together during printing. Getting it right is a fussy trial-and-error process. That's why Linco is fond of press checks, where clients can come in and proof the actual printed product themselves, before Linco commits to a huge print run. In all likelihood, Linco's success owes as much to their approach to collaborating as it does to printing.

Having your roots in newsprint has clearly been productive for the Lin family, whether it's in the machine room or out in their garden. "We just grew some husk tomatoes," Tammy says over the hum of the expressway. "They're these strange little things with a papery shell. But they're really good." ○

AARON: Yeah, it does seem that collaboration is a much more conscious choice. You identify something or someone you want to surround yourself with. There is a difference between forced cooperation and the luxury of collaboration.

CARIN: It is a commitment to this shared space, this shared time, and that is very, very valuable. I'd be interested to talk further about ways of coming together without any goal in mind and without a long-term idea.

ALICE: It would be a salon. It could be a collective salon.

DAVID: While I'm not denying the productivity of that, I wouldn't call that a collaboration.

CARIN: One aspect of that is your physical presence: being in a space together, making the commitment to spend hours together. I think it's a different experience from just hanging out.

MICHAEL: In collaboration, somehow you always achieve something you'd never achieve on your own, right? In the case of the Sarah Morris sweater, it forced you to work in a way that enlarged you, which is the ideal aspect of collaboration. It breaks you out of your well-defined space and it makes you do something else.

TINA: When collaborators come together, do they need to be equals, or does it even matter so as long as everyone is open to growth?

ROB: Our conversation has centered so much on wearable items. What if the product isn't something that one wears? I keep wondering how it would change if we swapped the winged shoe for a university course. What is the difference between teamwork and collaboration?

Opposite, bottom: Newspaper bundles ready for distribution. Top: a worker catches up on newspaper reading in the pre-press room.

This page, top: stacks of leftover newspaper and files in the of ce. Bottom: At work on the presses. Photos by Henrik Knudsen.

DAVID: The issue might be less about process and more about credit. Tina, when you were collaborating with Sarah Morris, your ego as producer didn't conflict with her ego as artist. But if she started to take credit for calling Scotland, or if you started to take credit for the artwork, then you might have a problem.

MICHAEL: It's still signed as a product that way, as a product of Sarah Morris somehow.

With a major retrospective in London approaching, veteran artist and filmmaker Jonas Mekas shows no signs of slowing down.

MEKAS IN THE MIDDLE

TEXT: PADDY JOHNSON
TITLE TYPOGRAPHY: PDU SKELETON BY DRIES WIEWAUTERS
PHOTOGRAPHY: HENRIK KNUDSEN

DANIEL: How do people look at this in the age of Facebook? We're part of a society in which collaboration is the new competition. Successful collaborations bring about positive social ties and hold promises of another successful collaboration. But ultimately, that individual occupies a special position in a network. Even though he's listed among the names of other people who collaborated, this person does not completely disappear into a network.

ALEC: For a while, I had a thing with Facebook where I would only friend people that I had already met in person. If someone tried to add me as a friend and I didn't know who they were, I would email them. But I've given up. Weak ties have defeated my strong ties.

DAVID: You would expect that the most basic, most conventional use of the term would involve face-to-face contact. And if there's not face-to-face contact, you would assume that the collaborators at least know each other, right? If a bunch of people I would never bother to email are all busy correcting a Milli Vanilli entry on Wikipedia but we never talk to each other, then intuitively, it's not a collaboration. It can be a collaborative process, though.

DANIEL: But we all have this binding goal, which is Milli Vanilli. And there's a Wikipedia supervisor involved, too.

DAVID: I'm most interested in the utopian connotations of it: We're going to beat this system; we're really going to know one another for no purpose other than —

DANIEL: To be unpaid.

DAVID: Yeah, we'll all be unpaid together.

Nabbing the last cold beer at James Fuentes Gallery felt good, but it did not lessen the insufferable heat at the Jonas Mekas opening last September. It was stifling, in part because the place was packed with 20-something hipsters. They were there to show their support for Fuentes's inaugural show—he'd moved his location from St. James Place to Delancey—as well as for Mekas, the famed 88-year-old filmmaker.

The thick crowd made sense for an artist whose work cannot be separated from social experience. Everyone knows him. Frequently touted as Godfather of American avant-garde cinema, Mekas is lauded for far more than just filmmaking, to the extent that his recognition in each field has been uneven. "Most magazines focus on my early video," Mekas complained after I told him I would be focusing on his more recent work. "I'm more known as a filmmaker in Europe. Here [in New York] I'm known as an organizer, maverick."

Worse titles have been bestowed. It was out of necessity, Mekas tells me, that he came to collaborate with so many people. "Now I am just focused on my work, but I went through those other stages," he says, listing a seemingly endless number of publications and organizations he's helped establish. In 1955 he founded *Film Culture* with his brother Adolfas, the first publication of its kind to provide in-depth analysis of all

cinema, including the avant-garde. The *Village Voice* began publishing "Mekas' Movie Journal," a weekly film column, in 1958. It was the first of its kind. Four years later he invited Andrew Sarris to cover commercial cinema at the *Voice* so he could focus more on independent filmmaking, and then spearheaded the founding of The Filmmaker's Co-Op along with 20 other filmmakers; today, it is the largest film archive and distributor in the world. Finally, together with Jerome Hill, P. Adams Sitney, Peter Kubelka, and Stan Brakhage, he formed Anthology Film Archives in 1969, which now serves as both a reference library and the host of a widely recognized innovative film program.

Interestingly, much of the sensibility that drove his work organizing communities also runs through his new films. The two wall-sized projections on display at James Fuentes, for example, came together as a result of personal history and social exchange. "He used to reside on Orchard Street many decades ago with [his brother] Adolphas," Fuentes says, beginning the narrative of how the show came to fruition. This history, combined with the gallery's new location, sparked the new work in the tradition, which Mekas named, *Diary Cinema*. Shots taken between 1953 and 1956 of street signs, crowds of people milling around the street, and his family are threaded together. The camera is handheld, and the film often slightly overexposed or out of focus and is slightly bluish in tone. This is probably due to its age.

In one sequence, a shot of Mekas holding a leather shoe cuts to a picture of his wife outside a storefront soothing their baby, and then to a blurry image of the Allen Street sign. Nothing happens—it's just life.

Previous spread: Jonas Mekas, 2010. Photo by Henrik Knudsen. This spread, left to right: Installation view from "World Trade Center Haikus" at James Fuentes Gallery in New York, September 2010. Installation view of Jonas Mekas's exhibition at the Museum Ludwig, 2009. Installation view of framed prints from "To New York With Love." Installation view of Jonas Mekas's exhibition at the Museum Ludwig, 2009. All photos courtesy of James Fuentes Gallery.

MICHAEL: But if we try to work towards a definition and look at the etymology of the term, there's some common purpose. There has to be some intention, which describes a lot of spiritual junk that makes collaboration different than other kinds of labor.

PREM: This goes back to Angie's opening remark that she doesn't even think of collaboration; it's like air. Either there is an assumption that one works within a social context that is shared with others, or collaboration is a separate thing to be valorized.

DAVID: What I resent about the term "collaboration" is there are a million unique, specific ways in which people work together toward a common goal. The term, in spite of its utopian elements, tends to reduce everything to the same sentimental thing rather than serving as a force for greater individuation and greater complexity.

LANA: I totally agree with you: We only use the term for pragmatic purposes, to separate the work we do individually from the work we do collaboratively. Not to valorize but to distinguish it.

ALEC: You have to separate what happens before, during, and after a collaboration. Both before and after, it can be a very cynical thing, but during a collaboration, you inevitably feel closer to your collaborators — you identify with them, whether you like them or not. Generally, collaboration is an idealistic thing, but the relationship between collaborators is often entered and exited in a cynical way, I'd say. Kind of like sex.

MICHAEL: Going back to the question of intent, I was thinking about how you fill gaps in yourself through collaboration. By choosing your collaborator, you choose someone who's going to allow you to do something that you couldn't do yourself, because you see these failings in yourself which are filled in someone else.

CARIN: But then you would define what the failings are. I don't know if it's such a specific prosthesis.

MICHAEL: But in fact, maybe the prosthetic is part of the collaboration. You don't collaborate with someone with all your same skills, you collaborate with somebody who augments them in some way.

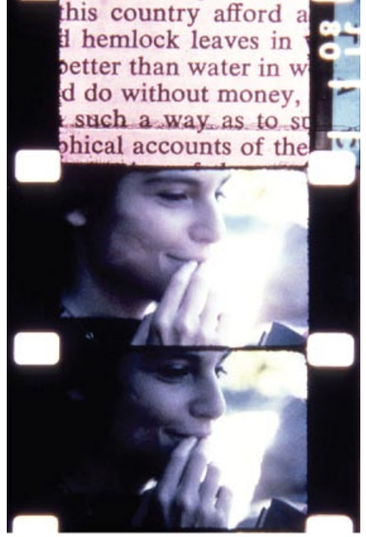
CARIN: But you don't always know your shortcomings.

MICHAEL: No, that's the problem. You're discovering them all the time. And often you see collaborations that are started midstream because that lack only becomes apparent as you get into something.

A companion film titled *World Trade Center Haikus* projects shots taken between 1975 and 1995 when Mekas lived in SoHo, the World Trade Center looming on the horizon. Like the previous piece, the footage is all handheld, and initially visually indistinguishable from most home video. But in the same way a reader draws more from a poem through contemplation, a viewer gathers greater knowledge of Mekas's experiences through extended viewing. In one particularly long shot, the artist holds the camera while turning 180 degrees and panning the camera up and down. Adding to this footage, Mekas threads together other zooms of the buildings, including one or two shots that rest on the World Trade Center. The buildings do not seem remarkable, they are simply part of a New Yorker's daily experiences.

The work underscores a theme that had come up in conversation recently with Ed Halter, the co-founder of the film and electronic art venue Light Industry. "Whether it's in his role as an artist over the years, or as a programmer and curator or writer, his whole concept of cinema can't be separated from the idea of filmmaking as a community as a social world," he says. "In that way, all of his work is collaborative because he is responding to and interacting with and also building this social world. To him, cinema can't be disentangled from social experience."

As it happens, Mekas's work spills over into other fields as well, particularly over the course of the last 15 years. He's created installations, prints, and performance art. A recent project involves an improvisational performance group he calls "Da Gang," which includes his brother Adolphas, his son Sebastian, Benn Northover, and



even Marina Abramovic. Another, titled *365 Days*, is a video podcast he produced in 2007, where he uploaded a new diaristic video every day for a year. It totaled 38 hours of footage.

Possibly the biggest show to date is one that is rapidly approaching. In 2012 the famed Serpentine Gallery in London will present a survey of Mekas's work, which will include a number of new pieces. "There will be no film except one," Mekas says. "By the time I switched to video technology, I still had a lot of film footage unfinished. It's my last movie as a film." The still-unfinished piece began as a portrait of architect Raimund Abraham. Mekas thought it would run about 90 minutes—it's now more than eight hours long. "I will show practically unedited footage. I have 20 hours of footage of Raimund Abraham. So I will trim it a little bit, of course, but when you become part of the life of this person, you begin to know more about it. . . So it won't be a collage, it will be a real life."

Meanwhile, Mekas continues to collaborate with the organizations he founded when they need it. In 2009, the Film-Makers' Cooperative lost their location at the Clocktower Gallery when MoMA terminated their lease to make room for Art Radio International. Mekas stepped in, wrote letters of protest, and ultimately found them a new home, thanks to the help of Charles Cohen. "The Film-makers Co-op has a place for the next five years for $1 a year and they can expand, they can expand better services," Mekas said, before reminding me that beyond attending to outside emergencies like this, he is focused on making art. "I stick to what I'm doing," he says. "And I have a lot to do." ✪

LANA: What if rather than having a relationship with someone who fills in your failings, you find someone who actually brings out the best in you?

TINA: I like the positive spin. In order to go into a collaboration, you need to check your ego and you need to be willing to grow. Ideally, you become a better person through it. And I think that's a successful collaboration. If those three things don't line up, it's incredibly frustrating.

DAVID: Right. But to me, the only thing that would make a successful collaboration would actually be the end product.

TINA: But I said these are the conditions of an ideal collaboration. If I walk out of a collaboration feeling like, "I learned a lot about myself, I grew, it widened my horizon," then that would be a successful collaboration. Does it happen all the time? No.

DAVID: But a lot of times you get good artwork out of it but you didn't widen your horizons or grow.

Opposite: Print from the series, "To New York With Love," 2009. Courtesy of James Fuentes Gallery. Above: Jonas Mekas at work in his studio, 2010. Photo by Henrik Knudsen.

A meditation by artist group Raqs Media Collective

On the Time of Collaboration

TEXT: RAQS MEDIA COLLECTIVE
TITLE TYPOGRAPHY: NEUE HAAS GROTESK DISPLAY
BY CHRISTIAN SCHWARTZ

TINA: But maybe you widen your horizon by finding out what you don't like.

MICHAEL: It's interesting — you've established the metrics for success. Is it a success when everybody feels equally good about it? Is it a success when you feel that you're a better person even though the product's stupid? How do you measure successful collaboration? If it's measured through personal enrichment, that's different than measuring the success of a design project.

ALEC: Are you making a product or are you getting together and having a conversation? I think there are different kinds of collaboration, and there are different ways of measuring the success of a product: It sells well, or it becomes historically important or it lasts. Or it's an Eames design, a chair that's going to be produced for 50, 100, God knows how many years. I would argue against discussing collaboration that doesn't have a product. It seems like collaboration has to leave some artifact.

ALICE: I also think collaboration has to be about something really big and difficult that you can't do by yourself, something meaningful or a complicated problem. Something where you need to combine expertise.

DANIEL: So how are we going to deal with the idea of antagonism? Someone said that if two people always agree, one of them is unnecessary. [It was William Wrigley, Jr. —Ed] I mean, I'm not always sure my idea is the best idea, so I need someone else to keep me in check. Now, to what extent is that antagonistic? And is antagonism the right word for it, or is it actually something else? Is it friction?

PREM: I think conflict in and of itself is interesting. It also asks the question: Is longevity a part of a successful collaboration? Or not? Can a one night stand be a great collaboration?

MICHAEL: A purer way to think about it would be a film production, which is a temporary organization put together only to produce one thing. A film production company really has nothing except an office, and then everybody is brought into this one end to solve this task. You can judge whether or not it was a successful organization because you have this product at the end, and metrics do apply.

ROB: American business is starting to resemble these film crews. Temporary teams...

MICHAEL: So perhaps your projects then have a bit of that quality. You can assemble around a certain person who destabilizes your company, absorb it into your process for a while, complete the project, disband, and then reorganize around someone else. You get these temporary conditions which only have to exist for the lifespan of that project, which can be one sweater or one garment, and you don't have to see the other person again if you don't want to.

During a recent visit to a museum of manuscripts, each of the three of us in the Raqs Media Collective was drawn to different things in an exhibition on medical traces: One saw the glyph for an eye inscribed in an Egyptian Papyrus, another was arrested by a Hellenistic terracotta grotesque with anomalies in the limbs, the third was drawn to the botanic annotations and floral decorations in a medieval Arabic herbal. The tropes that lodged in our triangulated consciousness during this visit may or may not add up to a detail in a future work, but they will keep bouncing back and forth in our conversations, possibly leading to a completely different, and even unrelated, set of ideas and images.

The promise of collaborative energies in such an instance would not emerge from the simple junction of the images of an eye, an amputated arm, and a flower, or from a bridge between the time of their specific creations, long ago, and our time now. They would flow instead from the as-yet unpredictable form (which may be neither eye, nor cleaved arm, nor flower) that might arise at their intersection. We do not necessarily know where the maps scanned by our three pairs of eyes will take us. It is this ambiguity that has kept us going for the past 19 years, and it is the desire to know what might happen next, or how we may yet again be surprised by the sum of our cognitive parts, that will keep us going into the foreseeable future.

When artists collaborate, their actions are usually seen as instances of trust, as either leaps of faith across the gulf of individual aloofness, or as betrayals of their fidelity to the cult of the solitary genius in favor of a more gregarious (and, it is said, a less singular) practice.

In both these senses, collaboration is seen as the result of what individuals contribute to a process. Correspondingly, artists may be seen as "joining forces" with others; this stance seemingly requires one to either commend his cooperation or condemn his refusal to go forth bravely alone.

But there is another way of thinking about collaboration—that of seeing it as the consequence and corollary of what individuals draw from (rather than simply contribute to) a common, shared matrix. In this sense, collaboration is not a mere "giving away" (either altruistically, or suicidally) of the resources of the self, but a "taking from" and, we might add, a reciprocal "nurturing of" what takes place between different actors.

This requires us to think of acts of collaboration along somewhat different temporal axes: not as sporadic or even episodic instances of people joining hands to finish or start a project, but as the traces of *longue-durée* processes of the unfolding of an ensemble of desires. As the meander of decades of conversations that do not (or even cannot) get minuted.

CARIN: If there's no goal or no product, you need to be able to return to your own practice and feel that you have learned something.

DAVID: So, collaboration is only successful when it's over? Either the criteria of success are based on a much older model of an individual creating artwork or collaboration means going back to our individual lives somehow enriched. My definition of collaboration would be something that resulted in a good piece, period. But with antagonistic situations, you just think it's good because it was such a hassle to get to the finish line, right? And the "good" result of collaboration is that it looks like the work of one "super individual" or one "corporate individual." But there's this more modern, almost retro, and quite cranky vision of collaboration I can imagine where you express all of the chaos — it would be like a Rem Koolhaas book!

ANGIE: It's a totally different model. It's more like an improvisatory sketch, where you don't negate, you add.

DAVID: Yes, while a more typical collaborative process is often an edit.

MICHAEL: The exquisite corpse idea still has some individuality in its pieces. I like our Cyborgian vision — a super individual created by a pastiche of all these skills put together that has one kind of shared ego.

CARIN: You assume this unity of time or space or product — I think it's important to acknowledge that we come together for collaboration just at a certain moment, and what comes out of it is a manifestation of that moment in very different ways. The idea of a unified product, created by the same people at one moment, seems so unresolved for me and so limited.

MICHAEL: I think the idea of time manufacturing is exactly that. There are independent groups producing things that somehow come together exactly at the right time because of incredibly sophisticated logistics and result in this product or idea. So you're able to coordinate discontinuous work that's highly dispersed, all the while still working towards some end.

Right now, I'm closing a magazine in China. I send a series of files to China, and when I come back in the morning, I get them all back again. Something's happened to them, and now I have to deal with that reality of what's happened to them. Then I do something to them, and I send them all back again, and it's this weird cyclical nature with a disynchronous time-zone quality to it.

Work is happening almost continuously on the same thing. But what happens overnight completely changes what I have to do the next day. It's quite a strange coordination of activities.

Seen this way, collaboration is not something that one switches in and out of, depending on the season or on inclination. It persists as a decision to build a life of practice along with others. It acquires a sense of creative companionship and intellectual camaraderie built not only on the foundations of projects that succeed or on consensual agreement, but arrived at along paths that do not necessarily end anywhere, paths that often lead into unknown territory, or occasionally even fork into disagreements that are as generous to the creative process as are moments of consensus.

Like migrating flocks, the companions of such passages through times of laboring together do not act collaboratively because they could not occasionally forage for themselves alone. Instead, they act in the ways they do because their journeys require the reading of a map that is so complex that it can only be comprehended in a networked fashion, across the minds of the flock. Across times of flight, nesting, and repose. ◦

Contributors

ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

Writer ALEC HANLEY BEMIS has been published in *The New Yorker, The New York Times, LA Weekly*, and the *LA Times*. As a creative executive, he has worked extensively with musicians bridging the gap between art and pop, such as The National, Dirty Projectors, Alexi Murdoch, and !!!.

ANGIE KEEFER is a writer, based in Hudson, New York.

CARIN KUONI is an independent curator and critic, and director of the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School. She's the editor of *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America*, *Words of Wisdom: A Curator's Vade Mecum*, and, with Aleksandra Wagner, *Considering Forgiveness*.

DAVID LEVINE's artwork examines the condition of spectacle and spectatorship in theater, visual arts, and the workplace. He is the director of the Studio Program of the European College of Liberal Arts, Berlin.

Inspired by a particular site, historical incident, or political issue, LIN + LAM (LANA LIN and H. LAN THAO LAM) bring together their backgrounds in architecture, photography, sculpture, installation, and time-based media. Lin is faculty at Vermont College of Fine Arts and Jacob K. Javits Fellow in the Media, Culture, and Communication doctoral program at NYU. Lam is faculty at Goddard College, MFA-IA program.

TINA LUTZ, co-founder of the fashion line Lutz & Patmos, graduated from ESMOD in Paris in Fashion Design and Pattern Making. Born in Germany, she has lived and worked in Paris, Tokyo, San Francisco, and New York since 1992.

MICHAEL ROCK is a founding partner and creative director at 2×4 in New York, director of the Graphic Architecture Project (GAP) at the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation, an adjunct professor at the Yale School of Art, and a visiting lecturer at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

ALICE TWEMLOW directs the Design Criticism MFA program at the School of Visual Arts in New York. She is also a Ph.D. candidate in Design History at the Royal College of Art in London.

DANIEL VAN DER VELDEN is a graphic designer, writer, co-founder of Metahaven in Amsterdam, and senior critic at the Graphic Design MFA program at Yale University.

WRITERS

DREW DERNAVICH draws woodcut-style cartoons on scratchboard—really cool if it was still 1912. He won the National Cartoonists Society's "Reuben" award for magazine cartooning in 2006. His work can be seen regularly in *The New Yorker* and in the most recent Flight comics anthology.

ISAAC GERTMAN is a designer, writer, educator, cyclist, and croquet enthusiast. His writing has appeared in *Step* magazine, *DesignBureau*, and the design blog *SpeakUp*. His design work has been recognized by the American Institute of Graphic Arts and the Society of Publication Designers. He currently teaches at Parsons The New School for Design.

SARAH HROMACK writes about the intersections of contemporary art, visual culture, and the Internet from Brooklyn, New York. She manages the Whitney Museum of American Art's website, and is also a former web editor of *Art in America* and *Curbed.com*.

PADDY JOHNSON is a New York-based art critic, blogger, curator, and writer. She is the driving force behind the art blog, *Art Fag City*.

Writer and curator ADAM KLEINMAN has programmed numerous projects ranging from intimate site-specific performances to museum-scale exhibitions and conferences and contributes to multiple publications, including *Artforum*, *Frieze*, and *Texte zur Kunst*, for which he also runs a monthly column, "New York Letters."

PRUDENCE PEIFFER is a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University. She specializes in modern and contemporary art with an emphasis on abstraction and artists' writings and has written for publications such as *Artforum*. She recently contributed to the exhibition catalog Luc Tuymans (SFMoMA, 2009).

RAQS MEDIA COLLECTIVE was formed in 1992 by media practitioners Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, and Shuddhabrata Sengupta. Their work, which often takes the form of installations, online and of ine media objects, and performances, focuses on the convergence of contemporary art, historical enquiry, philosophical speculation, research, and theory. They live and work in Delhi, based at Sarai, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, an initiative they co-founded in 2000.

PHOTOGRAPHERS

HENRIK KNUDSEN studied computer science and mathematics before taking up photography and graduating from Art College in Denmark in 1992. Currently based in London and New York City, Knudsen's work captures people and environments with a unique and sensitive vision. Editorial clients include *Dwell* and *Entertainment Weekly*, among others.

JOSH MELNICK is an artist and filmmaker based in New York City. A forthcoming book on his show at Art in General, *The 8 Train*, will be published in Spring 2011.

TYPE DESIGNERS

KAI BERNAU holds a master's degree from the Royal Academy of Arts (KABK) Type and Media program. With Susana Carvalho, he co-founded Atelier Carvalho Bernau, which designs printed matter (mainly books), bespoke and retail typefaces, and identity programs. His typeface Lyon Display, distributed by Commercial Type, is used for the subheaders in this section.

NIKOLA DJUREK runs Typonine, a digital type foundry and graphic design studio based in Croatia and The Netherlands, which he founded in 2005. Djurek currently teaches at Art Academy–DVK, University of Split and University of Zagreb. Djurek is also a delegate for the Association Typographique Internationale.

TIMO GAESSNER, Berlin-based typographer and graphic designer, studied at Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam and founded studio 123buero in 2002. The studio produces projects for clients across the fields of culture and business, such as Adidas, MTV, Kiss FM London, and Gallerie Kunsthaus Dresden.

BERTON HASEBE graduated in 2008 from the Type and Media Masters course at The Royal Academy of Art in the Hague (KABK), and has since been living in New York. He currently works as a type designer at Commercial Type.

The Aero typeface was designed by Village partner CHESTER JENKINS in collaboration with JEREMY MICKEL. While Chester avoids the spotlight, Jeremy will be delighted to see his name in print in *Print*. The Aero typeface is built around memories of Roger Excof on's Antique Olive.

ERIC OLSON is a type designer and founder of the Process Type Foundry. His work ranges from publicly available typefaces to custom work for clients from *The New York Times Magazine* to the Walker Art Center. His monospaced typeface Kettler is used for the running transcript in this section.

AURÈLE SACK is a Swiss graphic designer specializing in type and editorial design. He graduated from ECAL/University of Art and Design in Lausanne, Switzerland in 2004. In 2006 and 2010, he was awarded the Swiss Federal Design Grants for typeface projects. He currently teaches at ECAL.

CHRISTIAN SCHWARTZ is a partner, with London-based designer Paul Barnes, in the type foundry Commercial Type. Schwartz has published fonts with many respected independent foundries and designed proprietary typefaces for corporations and publications worldwide. His typeface Bau Pro is used for the folios in this section.

KRIS SOWERSBY graduated from the Wanganui School of Design in 2003. After brief employment as a graphic designer, he started the Klim Type Foundry in 2005, currently based in Wellington, New Zealand. The Klim Type Foundry markets its typefaces exclusively through Village. His typeface Tiempos Text is used for the body text throughout this section.

EMMANUEL REY is an independent type and graphic designer who graduated in 2007 with first-class honors from ECAL/University of Art and Design in Lausanne, Switzerland. His typeface, Simplon BP, is licensed by b+p swiss typefaces.

DRIES WIEWAUTERS is a graphic designer who also happens to be an avid type designer. He currently lives and works in Belgium as a freelance graphic and type designer for various clients, specializing in printed matter and custom typefaces.

PROJECT PROJECTS
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ADAM MICHAELS

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PRINT MAGAZINE
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SPECIAL THANKS
ATHLETICS
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MAXIME BUECHI
COMMON ROOM
GENEVIEVE COTTRAUX
MEGHAN DELLACROSSE
JESKO FEZER
JAMES FUENTES
BECKY JAMES
STACEY KAHN
STEFAN KALMAR
TAMMY LIN
JOHN MALTA
MANUEL RAEDER
SARAH VAN BONN

PREM: Sadly, as a counterpoint to that fluid temporal vision, we are out of time. However, it's been wonderful to have this particular group of 13 people together in one place to have a synchronous conversation! Thank you to everybody.

MICHAEL: Thank you — and let's collaborate some more...