Collective creative practices for transformation: an emerging field of practice
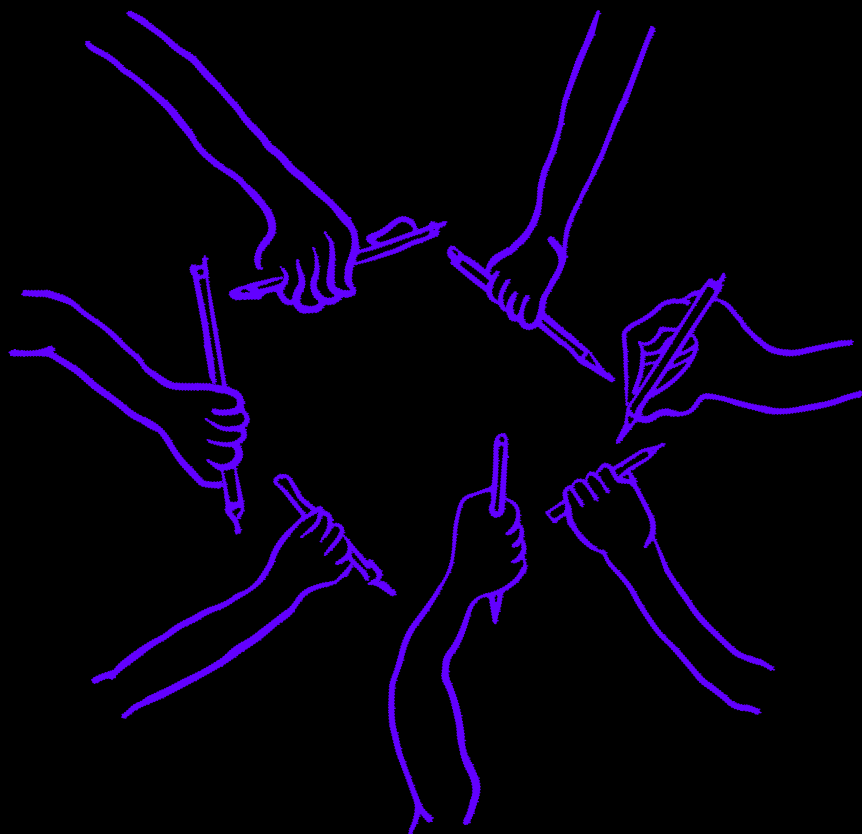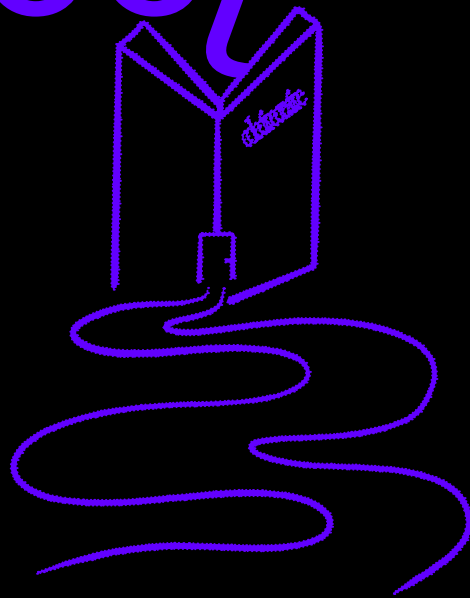

First takeaways of an open research project

The project

Intention

This booklet assembles all of the articles that we, the Plurality University Network team, published in 2022 within the 'Collective Creative Practices for Transformation' project, part of the Narratopias programme. It gives an overview of the work that we've accomplished: identifying and collecting projects from all around the world, meeting with practitioners, creating spaces for experimentations and discussions, identifying problems and questioning biases, and analyzing our own practice in light of the lessons learned. This booklet is a milestone towards the objective of framing a field of practice.

Context

Narratopias is a collaborative and open programme to organize, on a global scale, a collective response to the recurring call for 'new narratives'. An invitation to embark on a search for alternative, transformative narratives as well as the practices that make them emerge, and turn them into the *seeds* of concrete changes. Within Narratopias, we created a collaborative library of Transformative Narratives, from all over the world, and open-source tools and games to invent, play with, and continue narratives.

During the first year of Narratopias, we met with groups who wish to transform something in the state of the world and learned that how and by whom narratives are produced, used and discussed, matters as much as their content. We therefore decided in 2022 to focus on collective creative practices.

The 'Collective Creative Practices for Transformation' project

We define a collective creative practice as follows:

A project led by individuals or organizations (artists, researchers, activists, public institutions, NGOs…) who use artistic formats (fictional writing, theater, design fiction, etc) with groups to open up the paths for transformations, by:

- Raising awareness;
- Building capacities;
- Creating new spaces for debate;
- Exploring new possibilities and paths.

The project intends to bring those who develop these practices together, in order to:

- Learn from one another: Agoras (encounters wherein practitioners share their experience and methods), interviews of practitioners and researchers…
- Give more visibility to what they do via a Library of Collective Creative Practices
- Define and delineate this field of practice (describe the common grounds, problematize the differences, distinguish them from other practices…)
- And in the future, address shared challenges.

In this booklet, you will find all of our 15 publications since the beginning of the project, structured around three main articles that develop our first lessons learned.

Juliette Grossmann, Daniel Kaplan, Chloé Luchs

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Introduction

Assuming we do need 'new narratives' to change the world, especially in the face of climate change, are certain conditions necessary for these narratives to play an effective role in transforming reality?

In 2020 and 2021, we collected over 250 narratives, stories and other artistic works focusing on the ecological and social transformation of our societies, as part of the Narratopias project. However, we figured out in the process that the transformative power of a story depends less on its content than on the conditions of its emergence and its reception. Who produces it? For what purpose? Using what method? Who can it be discussed with? Can we picture ourselves in this story, continue it, make it our own?

A story can only play a transformative role if it changes collective representations. Therefore, we started searching for collective projects that mobilise creative tools from art, fiction and speculation to bring about changes in representations, so as to facilitate the transformation of reality. Some projects focus on shifting perspectives and challenging the status quo. Others explore radically different futures, (re)create dialogue between groups that do not talk to each other (anymore), or try to give a common meaning to a myriad of concrete yet seemingly unconnected actions...

The purpose of this project called 'Collective Creative Practices for Transformation' is to create dialogue between people who design and implement such practices throughout the world. By collectively discussing methods and formats, by learning from their failures and successes, we hope to contribute to the development of a field of practice and to help those who design them grow together. In this context, we sought to identify as many practices as possible and we brought them together in a shared library that everyone can contribute to. During the 'Agora' sessions, we experienced some of them (at least partly). We also immersed ourselves into other projects thanks to a series of interviews. The reports from the Agoras, interviews and other articles are available online. These publications help define, problematise and delimit the edges of a field of collective creative practices.

We are now almost a year into the project, what have we learned so far? The three articles that follow are the result of discussions within the University of Plurality Network team. They aim to share the first lessons learned, as well as our questions and the topics we feel are important to explore in the near future.

In the first article, 'What do narratives want?', Daniel Kaplan questions the intentions of the projects we have observed and reflects on what they aim to transform.

In the second paper, 'Politicrafting', Juliette Grossmann looks into the ethics of these practices and underlines their deeply political nature, one that is not always easy to define and claim as such.

Lastly, in 'Sailing the archipelagos of collective practices', Chloé Luchs focuses on the concept of collective: why do people take part or participate in these practices? What is the relation between the desire of transformation from the initiators of these practices and the reality of their reception? Ultimately, what can we expect from the field of practice we are trying to create with this project?

The lessons we share through these articles are tentative and fragile, as fragile as most of the collective creative practices we have identified. We hope that these articles will make you want to comment and enrich them, so that the practices of collective imagination they describe and analyse are enhanced and become more substantial and widespread.

1.
What do narratives want?

1. What do narratives want?
By Daniel Kaplan

The 'collective creative practices' we have been observing since the beginning of 2022 are, in their own way, part of the more general search for 'new narratives' that could facilitate the ecological and social transformations our societies need. Our intuition was that the process for creating and welcoming these narratives - by and with whom, in what contexts, in what ways – was just as important as their content. Though the first few months of observation of the practices confirmed this intuition to a certain extent, they also brought new conclusions that will need to be either confirmed or invalidated at a later stage.

• Whence the 'need for new narratives'?

The Narratopias project was initially designed to answer the call for 'new narratives' that emanates from a great variety of sources. That call arises from the tension between a shared observation of climate change (basically : 'our house is burning') and the lack of action matching its seriousness. Something is missing or preventing change, but what is it? Science is not at issue here : knowledge exists, it is available and increasingly accurate. Political debate and decision-making mechanisms have clearly shown their limitations, but these limitations may result from a deeper challenge : within our respective societies, we have a hard time imagining a sustainable world in which we could consider living - or at least project a sufficiently clear, engaging and shared image of this world to spur concrete actions. The obstacle to meaningful change would therefore reside in our social imaginaries – i.e., the system through which we create meaning, either to make sense of our experienced reality, or to change it.

Such is therefore our initial hypothesis : That we are somehow stuck in a reality that we know to be unsustainable, and trapped in particular by the power (and plasticity) of a narrative so dominant that it obliterates or trivializes all alternatives : the narrative of progress, understood as growth, performance and the material well-being of humans alone.

• What do we mean by 'narrative'?

When calling for 'new narratives' or challenging the 'dominant narrative,' one does not refer to a specific story, but rather to a kind of 'metanarrative' or a 'grand narrative', as Jean-François Lyotard wrote. This grand narrative is the matrix of all the stories in which a social imaginary manifests itself : the syntax, the grammar, the set of symbols through which any given story, creation, or manifestation of this social imaginary in the real world can be recognised.

In practice, the word 'narrative' can refer to either or all of three things : a metanarrative from which stories are derived; a synonym for 'story'; the underlying message of a piece of artistic or fictional work.

In this hypothesis, transforming reality involves transforming narrative(s). The new narratives we need are alternative, subversive ones. A 'war of narratives' is raging, which, according to sociologist Alice Canabate, only reflects the war of political ideas : change implies not only undermining the dominant narrative, but also replacing it with one or several alternative one(s).

Within the environmental movement, even the people who prioritise concrete action have later recognised the importance of framing it into a narrative : In 2019, 12 years after founding the Transition Network, Rob Hopkins published From What is to What If. The French city of Loos-en-Gohelle felt the need to create a narrative for its transition project, over ten years after its inception. This is because as Garry Peterson - Professor at the Stockholm Resilience Centre and co-founder of Seeds of Good Anthropocenes - stated during the second Agora : 'great changes start at the bottom, but they can be crushed by the main narrative.' Is there a better way to say that real and imaginary worlds coexist? Here, the narrative 'politicises' action (as opposed to a technocratic vision of action), it gives it meaning, it makes it consistent (or reveals its incoherence) and consequently, it helps it last through time, be transmitted, and widen its audience.

Yet, what does this narrative say, and what shape does it take?

• What are good 'new narratives'?

In their op-ed entitled 'What can cinema do for the climate?', film producer and activist Magali Payen and director Cyril Dion explain that 'we need stories that show different ways of moving around and living other relationships with

animals, trees and oceans. Stories about how we can get out of this mess. Stories that imagine how we could live tomorrow and provide alternatives to the perpetual apocalyptic dystopia and hyper-technological fantasies. For how can we build another world if we cannot imagine it first?'

The challenge would be to mobilise artists and cultural distribution networks and make them work in a common direction to 'provide the narratives and imaginary worlds needed to face the challenges of our time.' Through their evocative power, narratives will pass on the right messages and conquer hearts and minds, thus easing the processes of taking action and converging towards common goals.

In this discourse, the narrative is mainly a tool acting on the individual and collective psyche that can influence or even condition behaviours. It is thus assumed that the relevance of a transformative narrative is assessed by its ability to (1) move people out of inaction and (2) produce the expected change, and not another one.

When adopting this perspective, producing the right narratives is crucial. Hence the frequent call, also present in Payen and Dion's op-ed, for an alternative to two binary oppositions which they think structure and sanitise the space for acceptable futures: utopia (too distant, unreal, and even dangerous if it were to become real) vs dystopia (too disheartening); and collapsology (the 'end of the world as we know it', with no clear emergence of what comes after it) vs technoptimism (solutions that do not involve any structural change, or mere leapfrogging through an evolutionary jump: transhumanism, dematerialisation, space colonisation...).

Whatever the case, intentions might be different, but the mechanisms used are those of storytelling management, as described by writer and researcher Christian Salmon. The narratives are used to carry a message to the masses, an orientation that is defined by the avant-garde. The narrative gives the message its shape and effectiveness and makes it just as accessible to our senses and feelings as to our minds, if not more.

• What if narratives served another purpose?

Still, the experiences of collective creation we have observed seem to define another space for 'new narratives', one that is less deterministic and more open.

A space where senders and recipients (authors and audiences) are one and the same; where narratives and changes are created simultaneously, influencing each other without one determining the other in a linear way. A space where (co-)produced narratives are expected to open opportunities for dialogue and initiative rather than to convey a specific message.

Let us start with an empirical observation: several French collective writing initiatives began by asking their participants to imagine positive or desirable futures, then changed their mind. This is because on the one hand, this constraint proved to be mind-numbing and on the other hand, the fear that the lack of such constraint would only produce dystopia hardly ever materialised.

Across all the collective creative practices we have observed, groups of participants rarely seemed to imagine purely technological responses or fully collapsed worlds.

Inviting groups of all sizes and backgrounds to produce a myriad of narratives, collective creative practices do not seek to create yet another dominant narrative, nor to guarantee consistency between the narratives produced. And participants do not spontaneously mention the necessity of either.

In other words, the injunctions and tensions that structure the media and political discourse on new narratives do not seem to be reflected in the observation of collective creative practices that also focus on these narratives. This hypothesis still needs to be validated through a more systematic observation, while asking another question: what else is at stake during these practices?

• Collective narratives in the making

Whether they are long or short, structured by facilitation techniques adapted from the corporate world or by artistic practices (writing workshops, drama, design fiction), collective creation practices involving non-artists seem to strive to produce three sorts of results: the imaginary exploration of alternative worlds and their 'habitability'; collective mechanisms; and personal capacities.

The stories, artifacts, or scenes created in the workshops do not illustrate a pre-existing message. They need to be autonomous to unfold and produce their potential effects. From a more or less precise starting point (a pre-existing world in Witness or Stories from 2050, free associations and questions in Ketty

Steward's approach), participants bring out a common story by exploring the world they are building together, drawing out its characteristics as they describe characters, situations, places and artefacts.

Content is important here. Collective creation works as a form of social experiment process whereby the 'habitability' of a speculative world - as Yannick Rumpala puts it - is assessed. However, the stories created in the process often contain tensions and contradictions. Sometimes, co-authors even wonder : 'How could we write this part of the story where we recognise our values, and that other part that is deeply offensive to us, all at the same time?' Yet, they do not wish to change the story to remove this contradiction. If it is there, it means it makes sense within the logics of the world this group is exploring. It will thus need to be tackled rather than hidden.

For the collective story to be interesting, inspiring and induce action from the group's perspective, it must be fundamentally organic and emergent, with all the surprises and contradictions this implies. In that sense, the product of these collective experiences is indeed a form of work of art : a production speaking from its authors' very own and internal worlds, which seeks to produce consequences through its formal dimension (may it be storytelling, style or aesthetics) rather than through its practical usefulness or moral message. Like many works of art, these stories will be subjected to diverse interpretations following their creation. If they are artistically and/or narratively sound enough to be communicated to others - this is rarely the case without editing or mediation - it could lead to other uses, other interpretations.

Thus freed from the task of conveying a message, this content becomes more down-to-earth : it does not provide a general description of a given world, but an imaginary situation experienced by protagonists, within specific territories or organisations, bringing specific technical, economic or social systems into play. A multitude of small yet very meaningful inventions thus emerge, sometimes playing key roles in the stories, sometimes merely mentioned in passing : a company introduced as the most flexible organisational form to politically organise millions of stateless refugees; collective means of transportation so slow they become living spaces; ingenious forms of inter-species communication, of money, of vote…

The scales of these inventions make their potential realisation plausible and open a possible interaction between fictional work and actual change.

• Creating creators

Producing a collective story does not mean all group members share the same opinions about the present and the future. However, if they are given the opportunity to do so, together they build rules and mechanisms for co-production, discussion, and choice, which are as important - if not more - as the resulting narrative. When describing the main goal of the Rehearsing the Revolution project, Petra Ardai talks about 'experiencing reality from different perspectives and truths, and in doing so, discovering the things that connect us'. In her case, by changing stories about highly divisive topics, participants primarily find a common ground, a prerequisite to any concerted change in the real world.

In the sessions we observed, collective creation worked as a form of democratic exercise whose primary outcome was to constitute a group of people who can imagine a narrative together and discuss it afterwards. Objectives were defined, rules were established or accepted, deliberations were held, and particular attention was paid to providing everyone with an opportunity to give their opinion. This constitutive act (constitutive of the group, at the very least) is not only instrumental, for when dialogue and cooperation methods are indeed missing or inefficient in the real world, restoring them in this collective space becomes part of the objective itself. Of course, this does not always work, but the quality of dialogue between stakeholders can prove to be more important than that of the stories produced.

• An empowering creation

As they commented on what they brought back from their experience, the people involved in a collective creation project on the futures of corporations mentioned ideas and questions about the future on the one hand, and on the other hand desires and capacities : 'A new feeling of urgency', 'a wider field of possibilities', 'ideas for actionable methods and techniques' to 'convince the Executive Committee to implement actual transformations', and 'develop commons-related projects'.

How can such feedback be described? Two complementary avenues seem to arise : the ideas of 'capabilities' and 'futures literacy.' Capability, as defined by philosopher Amartya Sen, mainly refers to the possibility of making choices, which presupposes self-confidence, the awareness that alternative possibilities exist, and the ability to act on such choices. It does not in itself require any

new skills. Futures Literacy, a term coined by Riel Miller and UNESCO, is 'the skill that allows people to better understand the role of the future in what they see and do' in order to 'enhance our ability to prepare, recover and invent as changes occur'. It is presented as a skill accessible to all, based on imagination rather than prediction: 'We can become more skilled at 'using-the-future,' (…) because of two facts. One is that the future does not yet exist, it can only be imagined. Two is that humans have the ability to imagine. As a result, humans are able to learn to imagine the future for different reasons and in different ways, thereby becoming more 'futures literate'.' Based on this definition, it appears that the collective creative practices we have observed contribute to develop a basic level of futures literacy, which is to become aware of the way we and other people anticipate (that is, how our picture of the future influences our actions in the present) and to dare to imagine different futures.

To better understand the lasting effect of collective creative practices, following up with participants and their collectives would be necessary in the medium term. This has not appeared to be the case in the frame of the projects we know about.

• Models and handles

Though all the collective creation practices observed within Narratopias aim at somehow transforming reality (without necessarily specifying which one, nor at which levels transformation takes place), all their initiators agreed that at this stage, the articulation between their practice and the aforementioned transformation is complex, difficult to assess and systematize. These projects have real impacts, some of whom we have just described: exploring a plurality of other possible worlds and bringing back insights and questions from those, imagining fruitful processes, recreating dialogue when it has been damaged, giving participants resources and self-confidence so they can perceive themselves as actors of change, etc. However, these consequences do not occur mechanically through a deterministic causal chain. A wide reflection must be conducted on the necessary mediation between collective creation and actual transformations at different levels (individual, collective, organizational, territory-wide etc.).

Ultimately, narratives produced through transformative collective creative practices do not provide models, as it often seems to be expected in the calls for 'new narratives.' This is probably why generally speaking, these practices sit comfortably with the multiplicity of stories they produce and with the sharing

of their ideas and tools. What they have to share is more of a process than a specific direction.

Instead, these productions provide handles to explore new possibilities that are not mutually exclusive; to make sense of concrete transformations on the ground, and help them grow and sustain themselves; to build and develop mechanisms for dialogue, design and decision-making that are more open thanks to their focus on the common construction of futures; to think of oneself as an actor of change; to begin to think about the changes we want to make in our own lives…

This does not exempt collective creative practices from stating their intentions. As Kelli Rose Pearson from the ReImaginary Project said during an Agora: 'creative methods are morally neutral, but each project must assert its political stance'. The political meaning of these projects does not lie in the production of a consistent representation of a sustainable future, or of a grander narrative intended to supplant others. Instead, it is about spurring individual and collective capabilities, developing self-confidence and skills to picture other futures, peacefully discussing the latter, and imagining the first steps towards their possible emergence.

The second article in this series, written by Juliette Grossmann, will precisely look into the ethics of these practices and underline their deeply political nature.

Agoras / Collectively writing [ourselves into] alternative futures

This online agora took place on July 7, 2022, as part of Narratopia's Collective Practices project. It was facilitated by Ketty Steward.

Article written by Juliette Grossmann.

'How do you want to be called?', asks Ketty Steward, 'Here you can be called whatever you want'. 'Here', means Thursday, July 7, 2050 in the future that we are creating today with Ketty, the psychologist and science-fiction writer hosting the agora. We are a group of 15 people who don't know each other, and we can't wait to start building a shared future !

Ketty chose to make us build a family in 2050 together. A strange, undetermined, improvised family. The method she uses balances creative freedom and guidance : the idea is to guide us into expressing our own imagination. But first of all, we need to get into the right mindset. Ketty challenges us with a hard but important question : 'Why do you think you're a great person?'. Answering this question is a way of sharing personal thoughts, while thinking about the best version of ourselves. Care, generosity, curiosity, empathy, honesty, spontaneity... With such a gifted group, we can now start to work together.

• Collectively expanding our imagination

The first step invites us to make mental associations, in order to free our minds and connect with our spontaneous imagination. Each one of us says a random number, that Ketty has associated with a word just as random, and we must answer quickly with three words appearing in our minds. Ketty is very reactive and doesn't let us think twice. For now, we just let go. The bank of words we collectively created - from 'flamingo' to 'rust' - can help us get inspired if we struggle with the writing later on.

In order to build a family, we must first build a world to inhabit. The science-fiction writer Laurent Kloetzer recently told me that science-fiction is about developing creative assumptions formulated from your own sensitivity, and projecting them into an imagined world. Ketty is guiding us into creating our own collective science-fiction story, but starting from the creation of a world that we picture together. This 2050 world is neither utopian nor dystopian,

it is made up of many diverse, sometimes contradictory elements. Every idea is a good idea. 'What do you eat? Where do you live? What do you see from your window? What do you hear? What does it smell like?' Each question Ketty asks engages us to see ourselves into an alternative world, and progressively, collectively, shape it. The ideas fly and answer each other : 'I can smell the delicious flies and caterpillars that are being fried', or 'I don't hear much because we live underground, but there is a weird and distant buzzing noise, is it music?'.

Now that we have constituted a world together, we can build our family. Ketty guides us again through randomness by asking us to pick numbers. Each number is associated with information from which we will start imagining situations for our family. As fate would have it : we are 6, we are linked by intellectual affinity, our central ritual is sexuality, and we have a house. Undoubtedly, the future is surprising.

The challenge is to imagine together the life of this alternative family, by freely sharing any idea coming to mind. After more than an hour discussing and sharing personal thoughts about nuclear RVs and luxurious cow milk, we are now comfortable with one another. The ideas fly again, with even more engagement and precision. Through discussion and dissensus, we try to agree on something :

- 'We can be a genetically superior family, using sexuality to reproduce our family's great genetics', suggests Ghustavo.
- 'I think that sexuality will only be for pleasure in the future, and reproduction will be engineered by scientists', answers Lilla.
- 'So sexuality can be a way for us to deal with conflicts, like bonobos !', exclaims Anna.
- 'And our great genetics could be the result of an AI profiling and matching us into families', settles Olivia.

Accordingly, we are a genetically optimized family, matched by an AI, and dealing with conflicts through sexual rituals. This family is going to be

interesting to write about! The timing is right because we arrive at the last step of the workshop : writing.

• Creating a collective and telling its story

Ketty gives us 10 propositions of constraints within which we must write : 'A crisis endangers your family, tell us about it and how to solve this', for example, or 'A member of the family dies. What happens?'. Rather than a self-imposed constraint, it is more of a frame helping us to channel our imagination into a given situation. As one of the participants underlines, it is difficult to imagine something out of the blue : a name, an emotion, a situation. Ketty offers a structure for us to thrive in. Without structure, we wouldn't be able to work together and be open to new perspectives, and without freedom of imagination, we wouldn't be able to see ourselves in our stories.

The aim of Ketty Steward's method is to enable the participants to project themselves in a story. The power of a narrative comes from its ability to say something about the people who wrote it, and to offer a door to another world of possibilities – or perhaps many other worlds, if there is enough space for the readers' interpretations. As the political scientist Yannick Rumpala explains in his book *Hors des décombres du monde (Out of the rubble of the world),* narratives – especially science fiction – allow us to experience the habitability of different worlds. But Ketty's focus here is less the political and critical aspect of narratives, than the empowerment of individuals through the experience of collective imagination.

We are proud of the stories that we managed to write in less than two hours: some are disturbing, some are poetic, some are funny. And more importantly, we shaped a unique collective future through discussion and imagination, we connected with each other and with our creativity. One thing is certain: that skill is going to be of much need in the next decades!

Ketty offers a structure for us to thrive in. Without structure, we wouldn't be able to work together and be open to new perspectives, and without freedom of imagination, we wouldn't be able to see ourselves in our stories.

Agoras/Stories from 2050: 'futures are a matter of narrative'

This online agora took place on April 20, 2022, as part of Narratopia's Collective Practices project. It was organised by the Plurality University Network (U+), and facilitated by Graciela Guadarrama Baena, with the help of Jocelyn Cheung.

Article written by Juliette Grossmann.

Graciela Guadarrama Baena, futurist and design researcher based in Mexico City, has been invited by U+ as one of the ten people composing the team project behind last year's European program Stories from 2050. The subtitle is attractive : 'Radical forward-looking imagery of sustainability opportunities and challenges ahead'. 'Radical' in both form and content, because they worked with communities 'beyond established elites', and focused on stories shaping thought-provoking alternative realities. Let's see how creating non-standard imagery of the future can help us shape our shared future !

• The workshop : projecting yourself in a story

Graciela is here to offer us a taste of the workshops created for the project. We start with a bit of reading. She chose 3 of the 25 stories from the project's booklet *Stories from 2050*, and randomly split all the participants into 3 groups, one story for each group. The story my group is assigned to - called Aeras (p.73 of the booklet) - is very exciting : a mysterious planet, an encrypted message, gigantic insects, robots, quantum physics... All the ingredients for a classic science fiction novel ! The story describes a distant utopian planet where gigantic flora and fauna develop wildly and beautifully, along with a few mysterious anthropomorphic beings. After sending a robot to explore this planet of abundance, humans living on Earth and Mars prepare to launch an expedition for colonisation. The story ends with the decoding of an encrypted message received through the robotic probe :
'We have found true freedom and transcendence, at the cost of our ancient planetary system and our predecessors. Don't infect our new mindset, or there will be consequences.'

For the next activities, we meet in a collaborative online workspace (Mural) designed like a board game : each activity of the workshop is described and organised with a dedicated space for each group. Virtual post-its are arranged in the 'Activity 2' section, for us to write our opinions on whether or not we would like to live in the world we just read about. We are four participants, with four different understandings of the story : the interpretations are all the more plural as the story is short and ambiguous. Before discussing our potential house move to this utopian planet, we must start by sharing our interpretations, as they influence our capacity of projecting ourselves in the story. For my part, I wouldn't want to live in a world where closed borders seem to be the condition for utopia. Or maybe I would live there as one of the giant insects : they seem to thrive without humans' destructive activities. The other participants are happily inspired by the perspective of the 'new mindset' described in the message, which has the advantage of being undetermined enough for any ideal to be projected into it.
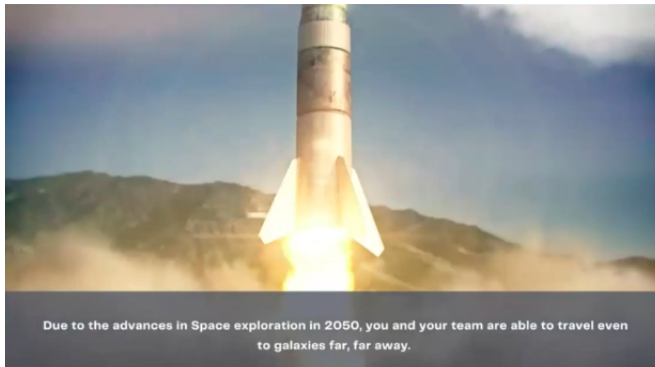
The fact that we each chose to focus on certain aspects of the story enables us to look at it from different standpoints and leads to rich conversations on our political perspectives. Even more interesting : we rapidly step away from the original question of the activity - that we considered unfit for our story - and start questioning :
'Who's talking?', 'what is the story telling us?'

It encourages us to reflect on how a narrative is constructed and for what purpose. For example : why is it obvious for us readers that the people sending the encrypted message are the identified anthropomorphic beings? What does it say about our egocentric vision of ourselves as representatives of planet Earth? Or as the French philosopher Vinciane Despret would put it : 'With whom will the aliens want to negotiate?', underlining the narrowness of our imagination when we think aliens would want to meet with us first, instead of cows.

• The workshop : bringing worlds together

The third activity invites us to share our thoughts on what we think of the interactions between the people (individuals and collectives), the living beings and the planet in the world described. A question remains in our story : who sent the encrypted message? We have no idea of the kind of power relationships that order the planet, so we can only take the message at its word. We only know this planet from afar, so we must imagine the conditions for a relationship between our worlds.

Due to the advances in Space exploration in 2050, you and your team are able to travel even to galaxies far, far away.

Once again, we have many questions and even more possible answers:

-   Is conflict inevitable when ways of being are so different? Is our extractive mindset so deeply anchored that we are incapable of being in relationship with Aeras' inhabitants without thinking of exploiting their resources?

-   Can we be 'infected' by their (supposedly) free mindset? What would we be prepared to question in our own system to actively learn from them?

-   Who would the participants be for an expedition aiming to build trust and learn from the beings in this new world instead of colonising it and them? Scientists, anthropologists, artists, people randomly selected from the general public?

The last activity gathers the participants from the 3 groups, and invites each group to share what they have learned and what they would do if they were in charge of the transition from our world to the world described in their stories. The first group was assigned to a dystopian story called *Hunting Shadows* (p.86 of the booklet), featuring a planet similar to the world described in the famous science fiction novel *Dune*, by Frank Herbert. Their challenge is obviously to avoid the future of a dry conflictual world by taking care of our environmental resources: save water, plant trees, and other mitigation strategies to face the climate crisis. The second group (mine) shares the importance of shaping potential relationships with the other world, adapting ourselves for

the sake of a fertile inter-world diplomacy, and avoiding the idea that we can solve our problems on Earth by colonising other worlds. The third group entered *Arcadia* (p.40 of the booklet), a utopian world that the participants would be eager to visit, but not to inhabit because of the many rules and obligations regulating the life of the communities:

'Is freedom the price for a perfect world?', they ask.

Associated with our group's question, 'to what extent is isolation from the outside necessary for the protection of a perfect world?', this constitutes a potentially exciting discussion on the representation of utopian worlds.

You are part of a few people selected to go on a Space Mission to search for a new planet, a new home. Each of you will be part of one of five space teams whose purpose is to find a different planet.

• 'Futures are a matter of narrative'

As described by Graciela, Stories from 2050 is an exploratory project with the primary goal of enabling its readers and policy-makers to imagine futures beyond the usual thinking. Through a series of participatory futures workshops and an open engagement platform developed in 2021, they aimed to collect what activist communities, stakeholders, and citizens think, feel and say about our shared futures, with a focus on sustainability opportunities and challenges associated with the European Green Deal. Going back and forth between the contributions of designated experts, professional writers, individuals and communities from the general public all over the world, they published a booklet (*Stories from 2050*) gathering all the stories written throughout the one year project. The participatory workshops focused on the explora-

tion of imaginary planets, starting from five canvases of planets created by futurist experts inspired by the Green New Deal's engagements. Each planet represents an element (fire, air, water, earth, life), and is associated with challenges extrapolated from those currently facing our activities in relation to each element (e.g. food distribution, air pollution, damaged oceans, disconnection from nature).

All the methods, designs and processes of the project are openly described and available on a dedicated website, for a matter of transparency as well as reproducibility. In order to reach a diverse range of people, the project team used many different tools and media to develop the project and communicate it : open platform, online comments and discussion, collaborative workspace, calls on social media, and immersive videos.

• Futures are also a matter of politics

The booklet's introduction reads : 'Stories offer our imagination an open space to go beyond the usual thinking. They are not meant to reflect reality but to encourage us to explore the unknown.' The project aims to open minds, to stimulate radical thinking, to prepare us as well as policy-makers to face unthinkable challenges by creating collective spaces for imagination. At the same time, it seeks to build bridges between citizens and political institutions through a participatory project. It seems to me that these goals raise three issues :

1. The participatory format is very well designed as a succession of short tasks supported by precise questions and carried out by writing (online) post-its. Is there a risk that the very quality and precision of the design process could prevent participants from questioning normativity and really exploring uncharted territory?

2. To what extent can fictional stories influence policy-making directly? Especially since the stories are left to open interpretation, how can their critical aspects be carried without a political discourse associated with them?

3. This question leads to another : what are the organisational conditions for this kind of project to effectively empower citizens to participate in decision making?

The three worlds described are utopian or dystopian, maybe lacking the complexity of a world we could really aspire to. I can't make up my mind between finding this rather unfortunate, and considering that in order to explore the radical we have to imagine the limits, with the best and the worst case scenarios. As we say, the devil is in the details, and it appears that the most fertile discussions around these worlds reside in the capacity of the participants to project themselves within them, describe precisely their environment and organisation, and inhabit them with characters and interactions. That is : make citizens science-fiction authors ! The sci-fi writer Frederik Pohl said that 'A good science fiction story should be able to predict not the automobile but the traffic jam.' Which means that it must problematize our present world, creating doubt and reflexivity for the readers. That appears to be the next challenge for Stories from 2050 : making future narratives a path for real transformation by creating space for political debate, and potential dissent.

One thing is certain : we had fun exchanging during this workshop ! And that is also a condition for collective intelligence.

Israel Viadest: 'I want the workshop to reveal that you have agency towards what happens around you '

Israel Viadest is an artist and media designer. Currently, his practice focuses on the discursive dimension of the intersections between design, art and technology, as tools for analysis, discussion, creation and updating of futures, through critical design, fiction and speculation. He is also a partner at The Near Future Laboratory (California, Gijón, Geneva, Mexico). His work has been exhibited in Mexico, France, Switzerland, Italy and Germany.

Interview conducted by Daniel Kaplan.

How did your project, 'Vestigia Futura', start and evolve?

When I came back to Mexico after working on design fiction in Spain and Switzerland, I wanted to explore how we can enable new ways of discussing our collective futures through objects, through design. I wanted to create a space for collaboration, a space where many diffe-rent people could come and work on their fears or expectations about the future, and produce something tangible in the process.

The topic was the future of Mexico, which is of course too broad. When I started the project, I had this map of all the things I wanted to explore. But I also wanted it to be something that revealed itself through the project, through the meetings with people : How do people think about the future in Mexico? Is it utopian or dystopian, does it resemble the present? What topics are important?

We had only one in-person workshop before the pandemic. It lasted 12 hours and it was fun, but then we had to move the workshops online, which was fine, but not quite the same.

Can you take us through the experience of one of these workshops?

I took inspiration from The Near Future Laboratory's Design Fiction Work-kit and made this deck of cards in which we can have different combinations of Context (local and global), Technology, Objects, Point of view (of someone living in the future), and Archetype (which is the thing that the teams will eventually have to produce : a newspaper ar-ticle, an ad, a brochure, something simple but that can encapsulate

the whole scenario). It's an ever-expanding deck. Each time I have a workshop, people suggest additions.

The card game is a great way to get the teams going. People will work in teams of three or four. Let's say you're in a team, each of you draws one card and you combine them to create a common scenario. First you draw the Archetype card, so you know what you'll be producing, say a press release. Then another player pulls a global context card, like 'Fully automated luxury communism', and the team starts figuring out how that may work. Then you pick a Point of view, say we draw a teacher, what does a teacher do in such a world where we may not need to work? And so on. The group can pick their cards randomly, or sometimes choose the ones it wants to include in its story.

After drawing their cards, the team has templates to work on and draft ideas of what their story, and the object they'll be creating, will be. They also have the space to describe the timeline, the sequence of events that made that future happen. At the end, once they have everything, they have to write a narrative about that future. We also ask them to specify where their future falls on the spectrum between utopian and dystopian.

Since the groups are often random, normally there's a lot of friction on what things mean, on what's good or bad. I like it when there's conver-sations and negotiations on what the future means for everybody. Initially, the process lasted for two days. Online, it's often shorter : two three-hour sessions. With an architecture class, it was four days, once a week for a whole month.

By the end of day one, each team has chosen their cards, they have a notion of what their future will be, and how they will produce their ar-tefact. So I gather them up and ask them to share the first approach of their project. There's a discussion on what that means for everybody. The most constructive is when other participants share references, add ideas to the other teams' scenarios. Then, by the end of day two, each team tells their stories and shows their artifacts, and we have a discussion.

Who runs the project, and how is it funded?

I run the project. There is no specific funding, aside from the request for some workshops by organizations or institutions.

When and where does it take place?

Mostly online since the pandemic, but we aim to go back to physical experiences.

What publics do you work with, why, and what do they do together?

So far I built the groups by invitation. I initially focused on the creative types, like designers, artists, writers. I also invited anthropologists, sociologists, and scientists. I try to open it to as many different backgrounds as possible.

In September, I'll be hosting a workshop for Ambulante, a network dedicated to documentaries as a tool for social and cultural transformation. The topics will be territories, climate change, and the future; the participants will be NGOs working on the defense of water or earth, indigenous communities, etc.

In what ways do you work with arts, fiction and narratives?

For people, or groups, that are not used to working with designers, I think it opens another way to tell the things they see in their everyday work, the things they understand better than people that are not into

their discipline. It gives them another tool to share their stories. And there's the power of narratives. The object that the groups produce could be intriguing, eye-catching, weird, but it's only a hook, and then there's this whole story behind it. There's a lot of power in the way we understand the world through narratives.

I also do more traditional foresight, but Vestigia Futura is more like an art project. There's more freedom to explore and to propose; there's this richness of diversity; there's an invitation to discuss, to confront your worldview with someone that may have a very different one. You don't have to be aligned, whereas when you work for a company, you want participants to be aligned in order to make things work.
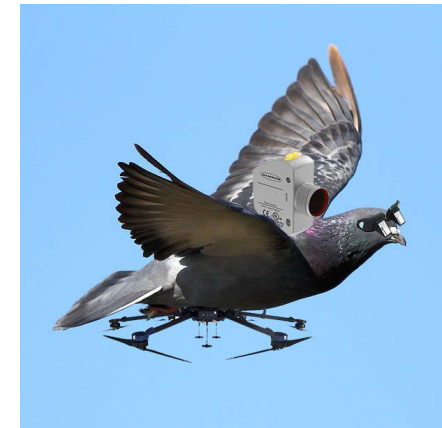
What change(s) would you like the project to produce for the participants?

In an ideal world, it would instigate change. It would push us to understand first our differences, and then to work collaboratively towards something that we build. I'd love Vestigia Futura to reveal that you have agency towards what happens around you. There's a lot of factors involved in the way we live, but we still have agency. While a lot of people I've seen feel that they don't.

How do you know you have succeeded? Do you have evaluation methods?

I don't have a way of analyzing that. I wanted to have a critical mass of projects to start analyzing this data. Obviously though, if I see a project that jumps from fiction to action, I would say that's a good indicator.

I created a virtual version of the whole process so that people could be more autonomous. I also had a couple of people messaging me about how they made the exercise with their students and were able to publish their scenarios themselves.

I also do more traditional foresight, but Vestigia Futura is more like an art project. There's more freedom to explore and to propose; there's this richness of diversity; there's an invitation to discuss, to confront your worldview with someone that may have a very different one.

Project name
Vestigia Futura

Description
Speculative design to imagine the futures of Mexico.

Vestigia Futura intends to materialize – physically and digitally – glimpses of possible futures of Mexico. The material it integrates works as materialized critiques of the consequences or contemporary problems, and as provocations triggering discussions. The aim is to facilitate the creation of new imaginaries that question our vision of the present and the future.

During these workshops, participants embark into a collective inquiry on the possible futures of Mexico, using methods of speculative design and narration.

Juli Sikorska: 'We don't tell people what to do, what matters are the visceral experiences'

Juli Sikorska is a designer and a researcher. Originally in service design, she now focuses on systems, futures and the environment, in order to translate the uncertainties that are coming from the climate crisis into physical experiences. She mostly lives and works in Berlin.

Interview conducted by Daniel Kaplan.

How did your project, 'Urban Heat Island Living', start and evolve?

When consulting with companies on how to make them more sustainable, I had the feeling that I would always get stuck by a lack of a tangible understanding of why it is so important to include a climate component. Right now, most of the information we receive, the goals that we set, are numbers, like tons of CO2, and it's often far away, either geographically or in the future. I felt that until we manage to make this tangible, here and now, there would be no way to really transform the governments, the organizations, the companies that are creating the tissue of our world.

Around 2019, I started looking at heat in cities ; for a place like Munich or Berlin or most European cities, that's the most direct effect of the climate crisis. I started looking at all of the little ways that heat is already changing Berlin, as well as projections dealing with climate scenarios to understand how a specific place may change in the future. I got a grant from [ngbK] to work on my neighborhood, Neukölln, to create a precise map-based experience of heat in the city, and make a group exhibition out of it. This is how Urban Heat Island Living was born.

Then, with another designer, Francesca Desmarais, who had run the Climate adaptation mission at the Copenhagen Institute for Interaction Design, we translated several climate scenarios into a physical experience. We looked at local data as well as weak signals to create a scenario of Berlin in 20 or 30 years from now.

Eventually, we built a world together. For this world we created posters that we put up in the city for over eight weeks, in July 2021. Together with that, we hosted a two days' workshop where we invited people to play within the world with us : 'Imagine it's Berlin, 2039. It's been 10 years since the massive heat waves that happened in Europe in the late '20s. How did Berlin adapt? How did we deal with this initial intense series of heat waves? And then later, how do we create more resilience in the city?'

We rented this little chapel in the neighborhood; inside it was very cool, while outside it was a very hot week-end, and we had a summer thunderstorm. The workshop was a fantastic immersive experience that was built by the weather, and the chapel that we were in, and the worlds we had imagined, and the people who joined us to embody that world.

We then distilled it into a shorter format, the Heat Resilient Cities Conference. The conference format allows us to talk about a lot of different topics in a way where people get to have agency but don't need to know everything, so they can talk with other people, have a little group work, etc. We wanted to develop that into an experience : something between a conference, a workshop and an immersive experience that people would be part of.

Who runs the project, and how is it funded?

Francesca and I run the project when we can. It's not an organization, nor a long-term program with its own funding.

Who is generally involved in putting the project together?

Francesca and myself, then for each session we put a team together.

When and where does it take place?

Today, mostly online. However, we also want to go back to physical experiences and make them more immersive.

What publics do you work with, why, and what do they do together?

We work with organizations and teams whose mission is related to climate, environment, urban planning, human health. We figure out how it relates to their work and how the experience may be helpful for them. Then we take them through our experience, followed by a short debrief where we return from our future world, and try to translate that into a present-day context to understand how that affects them as organizations.

In what ways do you work with arts, fiction and narrative?

It's basically a narrative that we take people through. It has three key topics. The first topic is heat adaptation. Imagine Berlin, or any other city in the future, experiencing more intense, more frequent, and longer heat waves. We talk about the super-hot subways, people dying, but that also spurs adaptation. So we put up the first cooling centers, then we create a network of them. We try to talk about how we adapt to extreme heat, we let people walk around this, create their own memories...

The second topic is the social and ecological transition, where we talk more about how the economy has also changed. We imagine this big Resilience Fund, groups that plant and water trees in the city, mushroom growers, nature artists creating green facades, etc. We imagine if we had little pockets of new cooperatives, new companies, forming to regenerate the city and create more resilience long term. And what if we had this public-jobs guarantee where everybody has the right to a meaningful job within that transition? We talk about what it would mean for a city to put social and climate-regenerating innovation really at the core of its economy.

The third topic is redefining care work, where we talk about care and its different place for people, for nature, for infrastructure, for culture. For each of those topics, we have activities for people to project themselves into that world. So we take them on this roller coaster ride where we first deal with this big crisis, find the very quick ways to deal with it, reactive responses, and then look at what are the proactive ways that we can work on at different levels or scales.

Heat resilience cities

What change(s) would you like the project to produce for the participants?

Geoff Mills, a creative writing coach we hired to help with our first workshop, wrote a really nice article, where he said that he'd never dealt with climate change before because it's always been shouted at him. He knew that it's important but it was still not something that he has found engaging. It wasn't until the workshop that he realized how important it is. I have this wonderful quote where he says that, 'Now I feel a need to act and the need to inspire others to do so, too.' I think that sums up my main objective.

We don't want to tell people what they should do. Whenever we talk with businesses, they want to have an 'outcome'. When we say, 'it's the physical, the visceral experiences you have on your body', they tend to answer 'Yes, but we want to have recommendations for how a city can adapt.' It's not something that we do here. This is something that people themselves need to create afterwards, although we try to help during the debrief sessions.

And beyond the participants (for a community, an organization, for the world…)?

A lot of people we have worked with want to stay involved, they want to do something. How is that going to become part of their own work?

How do you know you have succeeded? Do you have evaluation methods?

We have a debrief at the end of each conference, where we try to understand how the experience was for people. The first question is whether they had an emotional connection, which is my main goal of doing this work. The second is how it could translate to their day-to-day work or life, whatever it is.

We have not formalized evaluation more than that. However, since the first conference, a few people have since then been sharing articles with me because they now look out for this. They now are more in tune with it, they pay attention.

Have you formalized methods and/or tools? If so, are they accessible, open-source? Are you using pre-existing methods and/or tools?

Everybody who's gone through the experience gets to use the materials : we make everything open source and available for everyone to create their own worlds and stories on top of it.

Are there references you'd like to share (e.g., theoretical references, precedents, other projects that inspired you, etc.) ?

I have been very inspired by Transition Design as it comes from Carnegie Mellon University, and by Ethnographic Experiential Futures from Stuart Candy (2010). The very first work was inspired by the Extrapolation Factory (american design-based reasearch studio) and London's School of Speculation (SOS, an independent design school).

More practical inspirations from other works that have been really influential are Stuart Candy's US Earth Force (2020), which was also a poster campaign ; Superflux's project Mitigation of shock ; and Radical Ocean Futures, from the Stockholm Resilience Centre.

Project name
Urban Heat Island Living

Website
www.urbanheatislandliving.com

Description
'Since the historic extreme heat summer of 2029, we have been building urban resilience in Berlin and beyond to let all those who live in the city thrive – from the smallest inhabitants like microbes over humans to large-scale infrastructure. Since then, we've been responding to heat emergencies with Hitze-Hilfswerk, building strong ecosystems for carbon accounting and wildlife regeneration with Neukölln2040, and redefining care occupations with Germany's first public job guarantee program Care4Germany.

We hosted the first Heat Resilient Cities Conference in Berlin-Neukölln in 2039 to review the transformation we crafted in the German capital, foster exchange with other cities and invite new communities of knowledge to the conversation. We have since hosted events in Helsinki/virtual, Amsterdam and Prague/virtual. We are always looking for citizen assemblies, municipalities, communities and organizations to host an event.'

2. Politi crafting

2. Politicrafting
By Juliette Grossmann

• The political project of Collective Creative Practices

Ever since the beginning of the 'Collective Creative Practices for Transformation' project, its name has been debated. If 'naming the thing is enough for its meaning to appear beneath the sign', as writer and politician Léopold Sédar Senghor wrote, then our task is a difficult one: agreeing on a name that embodies the meaning of this experimental and collective research project. Each of these words: practice, collective, creative, transformation, was chosen carefully. Yet they all deserve to be explained, both for us to frame our work and set the limits of the projects we chose to include or not, and for others to recognise themselves and feel integrated in the project. This is not about branding, but rather about identifying the subject of our interest and focusing our efforts in the right places. Several recurring questions arose among the University of Plurality team: how shall we describe our project? What words shall we use? What practices and groups shall we include or not? We realised that defining words always brought us back to an underlying question we could not answer: what does acting for transformation mean? Is it not just another word to say we are acting at the political level, by wanting to change the way people live together in our societies? It then occurred to us that defining this political project would both clarify the meaning of the Collective Creative Practices project and set a common ground for the practices we gather.

This article tries to answer these questions, first by linking the issue of wording with the political issue. Secondly, by distinguishing what is ethical from what is political in these practices (through a reflection on the practices we carry out at U+). Thirdly, by defining the political dimension of the collective creative practices we observe through their capacity to recognise differences and take them into account: an eminently democratic perspective. And lastly, by questioning these practices' objectives and their capacity to generate collective norms or actions based on common concerns with the world.

• Finding the words

We are at a point in Western history where political positions are very clear-cut and centred around fundamental issues people cannot seem to agree on: ecology,
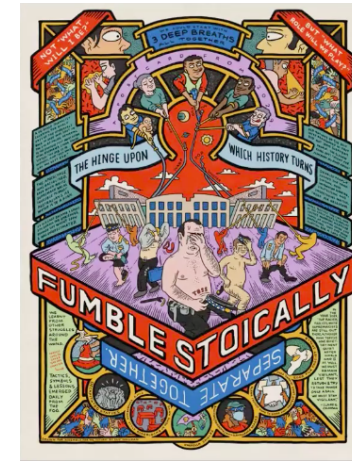
A Postcard from 2029: Dispatch by Sam Wallman from the First Assembly for the Future. (See p.63)

feminism, immigration, capitalism… Gaps in existing opinions around these issues are widening. This reality materialises in the words we use, which can be associated with different opinion groups. For example, though both statements are technically true, saying that we, at U+ 'create an alternative collective approach towards transformation', or that 'we develop an innovative futurist project' implies completely different - and even politically opposed - associations of ideas. And that is the problem: this choice is not technical, it is political. Either of these expressions will allow some people to identify with us and take an interest in what we do, and others will dismiss us as people they do not care about or are opposed to. Choosing the right words is most certainly not a new problem, but it is even riskier in the current context of political tensions, radicalisation of speech, and strengthening of information bubbles on the Internet. U+'s team discusses what words to choose to describe our actions on a daily basis. Though giving an account of the plurality of our points of view is difficult, there comes a point when we must *say* something collectively.

This task is all the more complicated since we wish to open the Collective Creative Practices project to as many different people as possible and make sure that people and organisations with different opinions meet in debating spaces that are open to all. Because of this requirement, we avoid saying explicitly where we stand politically as well as connecting our activities to specific political move-

ments. Though Collective Creative Practices does not place itself in the field of politics, it is an eminently political project. Not only do we convey political values and ideas through this project, but the search for a political transformation is one of the necessary criteria of the practices we involve in the project. Then how can we balance non-exclusion with the political project? And how can we clarify our political expectations towards practices? To create a field of practice, we must first and foremost reflect on how we characterise the political dimension of the Collective Creative Practices project, and by extension the political dimension of the practices that constitute it.

• Setting boundaries : between ethics and politics

We noticed a common thread between most collective practices we came across : they pay great attention to the way people talk to each other, and to the diversity of participants. For example, Alex Kelly and David Pledger from The Things We Did Next describe the different actions they have implemented to bring in diverse audiences : a partnership with a university to attract students, another one with a secondary school, specific communications towards Australian First Nations peoples to encourage their participation... Inclusivity also works the other way around, by excluding people whose behaviours do not respect the values promoted by the collective.

As an association creating projects and collective practices, we at U+ had to explicitly define these different values, and we were pushed to do so by members of our Board who were personally affected by discrimination. Ethical values give a direction to several aspects of any given practice, towards what we consider to be fair and right, which is defined individually at first and then collectively after discussing the subject. These values include the practice's ways and means, the behaviours and ways of doing things together, the people involved or not... These discussions resulted in the drafting of a code of conduct for the Plurality University Network. For example, sexist behaviours are forbidden. But the rule is not enough, as it can be applied and interpreted differently according to the context. We value the fact that the Plurality University is a space where men and women are free to express themselves according to the same rules : a man 'hogging' the conversation would be considered to have an undesirable behaviour. Yet we cannot make a rule out of this, except by asking everyone to respect a given time limit to speak, which does not seem desirable to us either. It is therefore left to the discretion of each individual to explicitly condemn this kind of behaviour when necessary, without making it a binding behavioural norm.

This observation led us, as a team, to reflect on the following question : do we have red lines when it comes to including a collective practice in our project? Things we consider to be unacceptable in a collective practice? We easily agreed that hate speech (racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, sexism, anti-LGBTQIA+) would be unacceptable to us (whether conveyed by the collective or tolerated when it comes from a participant in a workshop). Things get tricky regarding more divisive subjects : climate scepticism is a red flag for some people, for others it is acceptable as long as it is backed with arguments. It appears that we have a few non-negotiable and definite *red lines*, but most of them are rather *limits*: they mark the line between what we agree on, and what should be discussed. Such a dialogue helps highlight the values that underlie each person's choices and behaviours. The objective is not to agree on a *single right conduct,* but rather to open the discussion on the questions that need to be asked in specific situations, and to define an *ethical common ground* on which we could all agree.

This common ground could be found in the respect of values that are intrinsic to ethics, as defined by philosopher Emmanuel Levinas in *Totatity and Infinity* (1961), who defends the idea of 'infinite responsibility' for the Other's vulnerability. The meaning we give to our practice is then defined by the value of the encounter with the Other, which allows us to recognise his/her fragility, and be responsible for him/her. Though this may sound abstract, it appears that the principle of individual responsibility towards others is what drives us at U+ to *act with caution* during our workshops, to *take care* of each individual, and to include marginalised or underrepresented people so they can *show their faces* (within the meaning of Levinas' definition, i.e. creating face-to-face transformative encounters). Most collective practices we have encountered have integrated some form of this morals of individual responsibility, of care for the Other, and recognise everyone as conscious and unique subjects.

Though ethics help delimit several aspects of a collective practice - both through discussion and the personal and collective questioning of the people involved, and through the recognition of a responsibility towards the people met during these practices - it appears, however, that it is not enough to characterise a practice's political project, which seems to lie elsewhere than in values.

• The political project : plurality and inequalities

The Collective Creative Practices project seeks to bring together creative and collective initiatives that work towards an ecological and social transformation

of the world. This goal is clearly political though it lacks a clear definition, both by us through the selection criteria of the practices we invite, or by the collectives undertaking these practices. Still, we noticed that the practices that best define the way they articulate their intentions, goals, and methods, and that clearly state where they stand in specific political contexts, also happen to be the most relevant ones.

For example, SPACE's Rehearsing the Revolution method - which was introduced by Petra Ardai during the first Agora - was created to enable politically divided audiences to find common ground through the co-creation of a shared story. These methods have been tested in specific political contexts, notably in the areas of Cyprus that are disputed between Greece and Turkey, or with Roma communities in Hungary. The strength of this method lies in its ability to bring conflicts to light, to recognise diverse truths, to take account of the differences between the people involved, and to allow them to rediscover forms of dialogue using imagination and fiction. Rehearsing the Revolution's website reads as follows: 'The project allows the audience, who are active participants and not passive spectators, to experience what it is like to look at the same reality differently, where the differences lie and, above all, where the common ground can be found'. And this is purely political.

In his article *What political speech means*, political scientist Thibaut Rioufreyt maps different meanings of the concepts of politicisation and depoliticisation of a discourse. He explains that 'what is considered to be political can be seen as a form of expression and a way to deal with differences'. He then goes on to say: 'At the root of conflictualisation lies the recognition that societies are not only pluralistic, but also unequal. Politicisation is thus inseparable from the identification of a form of social relation marked by domination mechanisms'. The political character of a project such as Rehearsing the Revolution then becomes clear: the collective imagination work is integrated into a plural vision of society, impacted by dominant and unequal relationships that are recognised and addressed throughout the methodological process.

Consequently, politicising a practice does not necessarily mean getting involved in politics with politicians, nor having a defined and common idea of what ecological and social transformation should look like. Instead, it means anchoring one's practice in a political vision of society, one that considers the power, inequality and plurality issues at stake, as those are specific to the world in which the practice takes place. For example, Finn Strivens, who described his *Tomorrowlands* project in an interview we conducted, works

with the charity Sirlute in order to run his workshops with struggling young people in the outskirts of London. As a result, social inequalities are explicitly addressed during his workshops.

Conversely, Thibaut Rioufreyt explains that some discourses also 'create depoliticisation through non-reference, euphemisation or denial of difference'. The difficult part is to differentiate a discourse that seeks neutrality through uncertainty and non-reference, from one that takes differences and conflicts into account, while accepting uncertainty because of its experimental character. In other words: does uncertainty about a practice's political project (i.e., the transformation it seeks to bring about) show depoliticisation, or rather the open character that comes with any experimental practice? As Lara Houston of the Creatures project pointed out during the second Agora, we must 'take care' of the experiments and let them unfold before criticizing them for their instability and their trials and errors. Of course, building and perfecting a political discourse as the practice progresses is important, but it must not imply having to water down or erase the political disparities that inevitably exist in any collective work on the future. The future is a space for political struggle.

• The political project: public spirit and collective norms

Besides the recognition of differences, another dimension of politicisation is what Thibaut Rioufreyt calls generalisation, i.e. a discourse that is 'oriented towards the public spirit', as sociologist Nina Eliasoph defines it in her book *Avoiding politics: How Americans produce apathy in everyday life.* This kind of political discourse - a sine qua non condition of democracies - must be 'open to debate and addressing issues affecting the common good, the good of all', explains Rioufreyt. As opposed to individualisation, political discourse is characterised by the fact that it invokes norms, values and principles at the *polis* or community level and not at the individual level or for specific situations. In that sense, being part of the ecological and social transformation of the world and reflecting on the collective future of our societies and of our coexistence are true political acts. As philosopher Hannah Arendt wrote: 'The moment I act politically I am not concerned with myself, but with the world'. This collective concern for the world is one of the things that brings together the collective and creative practices we work with.

Thibaut Rioufreyt specifies the generalisation at work in political practice: it is 'both normative and performative, and it refers to the statement of what must collectively be, and to the creation of a collective solely by announcing it and

speaking in its name'. These two forms of generalisation can be found in most practices we have encountered, although sometimes one is more present than the other. The performative dimension is crucial to some practices insofar as they seek to constitute collectives through their practice, and thus build communities of thought on issues of transformation. For example, the Untitled project intends to create collective actions: 'any part of a real transformation requires some types of alliances and coordination among actors, and we want to be the infrastructure and space for that', Johannes Nuttinen shared with us during an interview. For that matter, most practices have emerged from a meeting between people with shared interests, who then formed a collective around a project, an idea or an intuition. During the second Agora, Kelli Rose Pearson of the Re·Imaginary project explained that it was born out of an intuition shared by first two, then several researchers and practitioners: 'We are a collective of practitioners and researchers exploring how creative methods can support deep change towards just and ecological cultures', their website states.

The normative dimension of collective and creative practices' political discourses is not as clear: what norms for societies are defended by these practices? Some collectives do not define these norms. For example, the methodology Ketty Steward had us try out during the fourth Agora did not aim to formulate common standards nor to start a debate. The goal was totally focused on creating a collective around the common creation of a story. The collective arises out of cocreation rather than through a normative political discourse. The transformation Ketty seeks is the empowerment of the individual through the experience of collective imagination. This is also the case of projects such as the Science Fiction Committee created by Anne-Caroline Prévot, or Urban Heat Island by Juli Sikorska. However, although they are not always explicit, these practices indeed convey norms: most of them advocate for horizontal and collaborative forms of governance and more equal inter-species relationships, to name a few. These norms are very diverse, and they are not always formally expressed, which makes articulating practices all the more complicated. However, the uncertainty of norms seems to be what makes these practices accessible to a wide audience that comes together for the experience and ends up finding more or less common norms in the process. Most collective creative practices formulate very little norms to allow for freedom, diversity and open-mindedness. This is also where the artistic and experimental dimension comes into play: creative freedom can easily do without norms - 'but not without constraints!', as Ketty Steward likes to recall. She uses literary constraints to help us use our imagination without feeling paralysed by the immensity of possibilities. This virtual absence of political norms (which often goes hand in hand with the flexibility

of methodological norms) allows practices to evolve as experiences take place, rather than remaining fixed in one initial discourse.

• To politicise or to depoliticise, that is the question

The issue of politicisation (of companies, universities…) and depoliticisation (of State, citizens…) is currently very acute, and it is no coincidence that addressing the definition of collective practices' political project is so complex. Some collectives advocate for politicisation as a necessary recognition of power relationships (how can any collective issue be addressed without including inequalities and domination?), others seek to free themselves of politics and to focus instead on the human experience and individuals (conversations between human beings might succeed where politics failed). However, the proliferation of actors practicing and talking about the future and imagination means we have to clarify what we are trying to do in the Collective Creative Practices for Transformation project. By carefully listening to the discourses of the different collective and creative practices, we can try and formulate the conditions that unite us: exemplifying an ethics of responsibility and care, defending the importance of democratic dialogue within collectives, taking existing power relationships into account and questioning them, highlighting the diversity of opinions, and the prevalence of topics about the common good. A tension remains regarding norms: how can we be as open-minded and creative as possible without depoliticising a practice? And how can we formulate political norms without ending up bringing together only like-minded people?

Besides what collective creative practices *say*, what do they *do?* We cannot experiment with all methodologies, but the interviews we conduct help us clarify practices (provided collectives are transparent about their goals, interests, and processes). Agoras are also enlightening moments where the collective experience of practices clarify the relationship between discourse and action. They are nevertheless limited by their virtual and punctual nature, while the physical and repeated experience is often part of the process of collective creative practices. We are still reflecting on the complex link between the collective aspect and the transformative power of these practices.

Chloé Luchs-Tassé further explores this issue in the third article in this series, 'Sailing the archipelagos of collective practices'.

Agora / Ingredients for change : collecting and sharing transformative practices

This online agora took place on March 3, 2022, as part of Narratopias' 'Collective Creative Practices' project. It was organized by the Plurality University Network and the CreaTures consortium.

Article written by Juliette Grossmann.

The agora is about to start, rock music resounds in the virtual reunion. Just like Rob, the main character in the 2000 film High Fidelity, we share a moment together waiting to the sound of Bob Dylan and The Velvet Underground. As Cristina Ampatzidou from the CreaTures consortium points out, we have another point in common with this fussy character desperately trying to find answers to his questions : 'We are list-making lovers !' The people gathered seem to share an interest in the art of collecting projects, stories, initiatives, in order to make them visible, to understand their interconnections, or to create communities around them. Seven collectives are here to share and discuss their experience of making different types of libraries, repositories, and collections of creative and collective practices that pave paths towards sustainability and new narratives. All of them are looking for the answers to the same question : how do we enable positive change?

• 7 collections, 7 methods, one purpose : transformation

Daniel Kaplan and Chloé Luchs-Tassé start by presenting the purpose, methods and projects of the Plurality University Network (U+), focusing on their digital collaborative library Narratopias that gathers works of fiction, visual arts, speculation, design, or any other form of what they call 'transformative narratives'. How do you identify what is transformative, and what can be considered a narrative? Although a definition is available on the website, U+ chose to enable anyone to contribute directly to the digital library. It is a way of saying : whatever effort we make to formulate a definition and therefore draw the essential outlines of the collection, in the end it's the people's understanding and use of it that matters. The openness and collaboration seem to self-regulate in a relevant corpus.

Kelli Rose Pearson follows with the ReImaginary Project, defined as a 'search for practices, metaphors, mental models, and narratives that support ecological regeneration and the well-being of future generations'. They have multiple matters : making visible different types of intelligence, including non-human and marginalized stakeholders, combining pragmatic and 'enchanting' approaches, and connecting with the depth of our feelings, values and beliefs. Kelli explains that 'change comes from the inside out', from the enlivening feeling of engagement that certain experiences activate. ReImaginary collects and makes accessible methods (among which a toolkit of arts-based methods) that enable this type of transformative experiments, organized according to the five steps towards change described by Theory U (convene, observe, reflect, act, harvest). Nine transformative mindsets emerged from the research around the project, such as 'Expanded spheres of care' or 'Intersectionality'. If 'creative methods are morally neutral', as Kelli defends, it becomes essential for a project to assert its political purpose.

A spectacular Baining fire dancer appears on our screen, with this question written : how can the arts contribute to realizing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? The arts that Diego Galafassi and David Tàbara are looking for include any kinds of arts-based research approaches and creative practices, at the intersection of different types of knowledge : scientific and experimental. Starting from an analytical catalogue focused on the climate crisis, the Living Catalogue of the Arts for Sustainability Transformations network adapted the project to the SDGs. 'Living' both because anyone can submit an entry anytime, and the catalogue itself is enlivened with interviews, portrait films and workshops. Either by making the interface between arts and sustainability science visible, or by looking for different ways of learning and creating scientific knowledge, the catalogue pursues a single purpose : 'to turn passive audiences watching the drama of unsustainability into empowered actors engaged in SDGs'. Two main challenges surface :
'How to turn repositories into actionable knowledge?
What is the value of such a repository for artists and practitioners?'

Romain Julliard, from the research project Mosaic, introduces on our screens an adorable – and critical – hedgehog, who reminds us that this is not about big data and artificial intelligence, but about quality data and collective intelligence. Mosaic helps collective projects in the conception of data exchange platforms, using participatory science methods. For example, they created a protocol to collect data on hedgehogs' state of health in France, allowing anybody to observe the animal in their garden, share the results on a platform and be part of a collaborative research project. The data is as useful to science

as it is fun to collect for the participants, creating a community of people interested in their garden's biodiversity and willing to contribute to citizen science. Romain shares the secrets to their success : encouraging comments on the platform, allowing different kinds of data to be shared (quantitative and qualitative), and having the data validated by other participants. Romain is currently working with Joffrey Lavigne, here to present the Comité de Science-Fiction (Science Fiction Committee) that mobilizes artists and students to produce science fiction art, imagining new relationships between humans and nature. Mosaic and the CSF are collaborating on the conception of a platform for facilitators to share and discuss their methods for creative and collective practices. Using participatory science methods seems like a fertile idea, in view of the emergence of a community of practitioners.
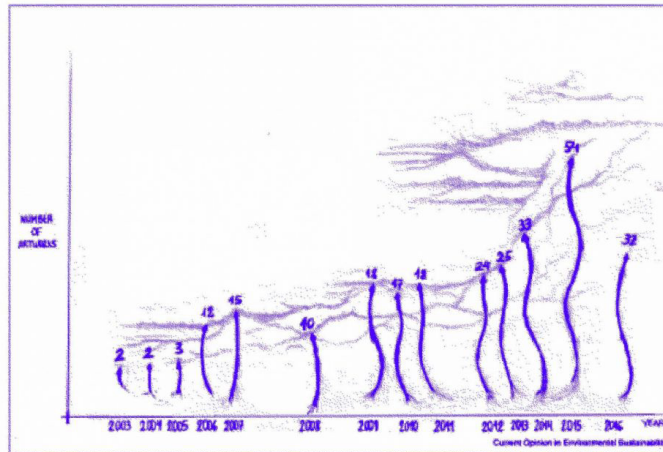
Representation of the number of artworks present in the climate-related art catalogue.

Figure 4
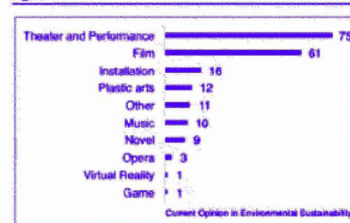
'What do artists know?' Embedded into political programs, artists bring new perspectives and creative processes to projects addressing climate change, has answered the artist Frances Whitehead (lien). This statement inspired the creation of the Library of Creative Sustainability that Lewis Coenen-Rowe is now presenting. The main audience for this collection are 'those who can take on similar projects' (e.g. local communities, public agencies, community organizers, etc.), by re-using the information from the case studies : all the details of processes, difficulties, tools, etc. Art-lovers are welcome to use the catalogue, but the real purpose is to encourage non-art sectors to trust artists on their ability to think differently and practically. 'Show, don't tell' is the phrase guiding the elaboration of the library, aiming to show how deep collaborations with artists help achieve efficient – and often surprising – sustainability outcomes.

'Our project aims to expand the range and diversity of better anthropocenes', explains Garry Peterson, Professor at the Stockholm Resilience Centre, up next to present his repository project. In his eyes, there is an urgent need to propose other visions of the anthropocene than what *Mad Max* and other popular dystopias offer. 'We build the future based on *seeds* of desirable futures that exist today', explaining how Seeds of Good Anthropocene went from developing desirable *scenarios* for the future, to collecting existing elements, *seeds,* that could compose these better futures. To be considered a seed, an initiative must 'exist (at least as prototype), be marginal (or not yet mainstream), and contribute to creating a sustainable future (according to someone)'. The term *seed* is all the more relevant for a project focusing on humanity's connection to nature all over the world. If 'big changes come from below, but are crushed by the dominant narratives', as Garry believes, it is essential for these seeds to recognize one another and 'catalyze transformation by connecting people'. Workshops based on 'seed cards' created from the project's collection, allow participants to make these connections. But on one condition : that they integrate the disagreements that arise on what the future will look like.

'How can creative practices contribute to positive social transformation?'
In their own way, each one of the speakers above addressed this question, but the CreaTures research project that Lara Houston is now describing focused on answering it directly. Using different methods (literature reviews, sector mapping, networking, interviews) to gather case studies of projects that creative practitioners and interdisciplinary researchers considered transformative, they managed in a second phase to analyze them and identify 25 transformative strategies. From 'ecological interconnectedness' to 'friendship', these strategies are detailed in articles and interviews, making them more accessible than a cartography of 160 case studies. Sometimes, less is more, even in list-making.

It seems that this abstract from the Dark Mountain Manifesto (one of the projects identified by CreaTures) sums up the purpose of the different projects presented :

'Together, we are walking away from the stories that our societies like to tell themselves, the stories that prevent us from seeing clearly the extent of the ecological, social and cultural unravelling that is now underway. [...] And we are looking for other stories, ones that can help us make sense of a time of disruption and uncertainty.'

• Common challenges

From the discussion after the presentations, five challenges emerged :

1. Managing a common resource

A catalogue is even more demanding in terms of maintenance when it is collaborative and alive. Alive in the sense that none of the repositories presented are meant to be archives, but rather catalogues of objects that evolve, that we can enter in relation with. Keeping the catalogues useful and relevant means spending a great amount of time on checking and updating the data. Specific time and skills are rarely assigned to this 'laborious work', depending on the governance and the financing of a project. It is then up to the goodwill of organizers to ensure that necessary maintenance occurs, taking into consideration that they 'each have different motivations for the time spent working on the library', as Kelli Rose Pearson reminds us.

2. Placing knowledge into context

What is the difference between a manual and a collection of case studies? Placing knowledge into context. The reusability of the information you find in a collection of projects is not evident : 'what type of practices work well, for what, in different contexts?', Garry Peterson asks. The way Lara Houston answers this challenge is to 'cut the ties' by pointing out directly which elements can be reusable within each case study. Lewis admits that the difficulty for each project is :

'to find a fine balance between showing sustainability outcomes (technical, quantitative, what actually happened in a specific context) and lessons, tips, and advice (qualitative, replicable information)'.

Maybe the answer is in the interface : if a scientific or artistic project always responds to its particular context, the purpose of the interface of the repository must be to enable the embodiment of the information presented (using interviews for example). Kelli salutes the humility of collecting experimental initiatives because the most important thing is to 'embrace the uncertainty of experimenting' and stay ready for surprising outcomes.

3. Evaluating the experimental

Can you collect without evaluating? Garry's answer is a firm 'no': 'the act of picking one project versus another is an act of evaluation; as soon as you have a collection, it is a kind of validation'. It then becomes essential to make your criteria visible and look for experiments which satisfy the conditions you set. This appears to be a paradoxical task for people who precisely collect experimental initiatives. Diego Galafassi and Daniel Kaplan agree on the fact that it is impossible to judge a project from an external point of view, even less with an objective criteria, so the questions become:
'Are the projects taking time to self-evaluate?'
'Are they verifying the goals that they set for themselves?'

There are no means of evaluation other than the claims of a project's initiators or participants, or maybe looking for secondary sources to triangulate the information collected (which can make sense if pursuing a scientific approach). Or could a qualitative criteria like inclusivity be a way of measuring artistic practices? Lara concludes by reminding us that 'it takes time and multiple tentatives for an initiative to be stable enough to be evaluated so it is essential to nurture the experimental, especially in crowdsourced libraries'.

4. Reaching an audience

Who is actually using the libraries, and what for? Any collection initiator must reach an audience to make sense of their work. Some of the speakers started their library to satisfy a surprising interest from different people for methods and examples, like Kelli who 'was shocked by the enthusiasm for the toolkit', and decided to create an abundant website of methods. 'Collecting data for the common good is one thing', qualifies Romain Julliard, but to create real engagement around a participatory project (whether it's a collaborative library or a participatory science project), you must 'focus on the process of the crowdsourced deposition'. Participants must find at the same time an immediate interest (learn something), and a sense of belonging to a community of participants. Designing the interface by putting yourself in place of the users is crucial, keeping in mind that possibilities of use often go beyond what the collections are envisioned for. The Narratopias library, for example, is knowingly used by practitioners to nourish their practice, for workshops or teaching, or by people who seek inspiration to build upon, but maybe it is also used for research or other means.

'How then can we create spaces that can have multiple uses?', asks Diego.

Two approaches emerge: aiming for the right person in the right place (focus on relevance), or making it as diversified and uncomplicated as possible (focus on accessibility). What better than a spontaneous testimony from the audience to settle the matter:

'I'm Inga Hamilton, a practicing artist currently doing my PhD and these repositories are going to be a huge and valuable resource for me. It brings methods and research together from like-minded people and highlights successes and pitfalls. A selection of curated libraries that feel like a gift!'

5. Creating a community

Like-minded people, yes, but does that make them a community? Chloé Luchs proposes the idea of finding a common language, symbols and typologies, to create a continuity between the different repositories. 'I am skeptical', replies Garry, underlining that 'it's useful that words have different interpretations, it enables comparison and articulation of the differences, making visible the theories of change behind the words'. Identifying different collections with different goals and processes makes them reflect on their own assertions. But if 'we want to make transformation happen [...], we have to upscale multiple synergies', asserts David Tàbara. Daniel follows:
'There is a field of practice that is trying to emerge and can grow wiser and bigger. Behind all these lists there are people and experiments, it's actually a huge community whose members, in many ways, are pursuing the same goals. How could it lead to collaboration and common visibility?'

Meeting in an Agora seems like a good start. Lara concludes with enthusiasm:
'We could organize virtual coffees to share taxonomies, strengths and weaknesses of methods. There is a huge potential for comparison, looking for consensus and dissensus, sectorial and cultural differences. Is there a catalogue of libraries in the making?'

One thing is certain... They truly are list-making lovers!

Agora / The Things We Did Next : embracing the mess

This online agora took place on October 6, 2022, as part of Narratopia's Collective Creative Practices project. It was organized by the Plurality University Network (U+), and facilitated by Alex Kelly and David Pledger.

Article written by Juliette Grossmann.

• Diving into 2029 : a narrative performance

'David, let's take a deep breath together', says Alex Kelly, climate and social justice artist, to begin this fifth Agora : 'Time stamp : October the 6th, 2029.' Without further ado, she and David Pledger, artist, curator and critical thinker, casually start to share their thoughts and experiences about life in this future world. Their discussion weaves through history, politics and culture, taking us a few years forward in time. David talks about his ongoing work with a digital human, explaining how 'our ability to figure out the human from the digital is harder and harder to grasp'. Digital humans have been replacing artists in Australia because of the huge decrease of artist population, unable to find financial sustainability. The dialogue then takes a vivid political turn (especially in the context of Australia) : 'With the development of the Truth-Telling Commissions, in parallel to the Blackfullas University, I feel that discussions about land, country and colonial history are very alive, they don't feel as fixed as they felt in the past', observes Alex. This 'past' that she refers to is our 2022 present : it becomes clear that their performance carries out a critical approach regarding our present world.
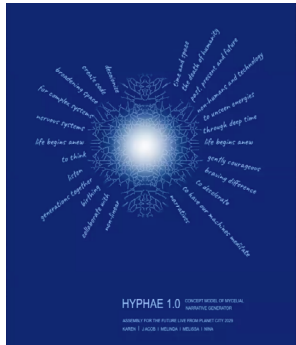
HYPHAE 1.0 Concept Model of Mycelial Narrative Generator : Dispatch by Nina Sellars, generated by Karen, Jacob, Melinda, Melissa and Nina, in response to speculative architect Liam Young's provocation, who proposed a place called Planet City in which the entire global population moved to one city to let the rest of the planet rewild.

David continues on the subject of colonialism in Australia : 'The possible dystopian future of an Australian race-based civil war, that some warned us about in the early 2020's, made us work a lot harder to ensure that *that* future wasn't realised.' Thus, David reminds us of the preventive power of foresighting. 'Truth-Telling Commission', 'Blackfullas University', 'Disaster Preparedness Space'... The artists introduce us to new cultural and institutional spaces without describing them any further, letting our imagination project whatever we want into these evocative titles. With a direct but subtle criticism of the liberal system, David relates the caregivers' strikes that led to a renewal of our modes of relationship : 'It wasn't just about care as an economic tool anymore, it became about care as a necessary way of engaging with each other as human beings'. David Pledger and Alex Kelly's narrative performance goes as far as inventing actual political reforms for the australian society : 'One of the most interesting and radical things that student strikers did was force the calendar shift of our school years, moving the calendar year to April rather than February in recognition of the hot summer months, and repurposing the school infrastructures as bases of storage and resource use for people', Alex shares with enthusiasm.
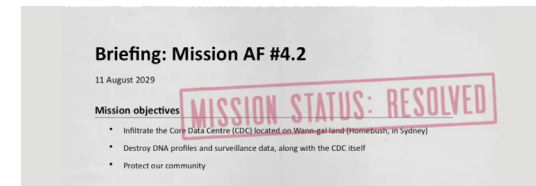
Activist Mission Report AF #4.2 : Dispatch from the Third Assembly for the Future, generated by Mali, Jodee, John, Tal, Lara and El, and written by El Gibbs.

After half an hour of dialogue, David ends the discussion on a hopeful note, inviting us to 'hang in there' and trust our collective ability to create the changes we want to see in the world : 'All this seems normal now, when it used to feel like an impossible change at the time'. Like casting a political spell, the two artists project us into a near future in which political mobilisations have led to real changes. The performance's hidden assumption seems to be : the more you can actually see yourself in a different world - in which what was fearful yesterday has become normal - the easier change becomes.

• The original futurists

Welcoming us back to 2022, Alex Kelly reminds us that 'so-called Australia is made up of over 350 different aboriginal nations', and specifies that she is located on the Dja Dja Wurrung territory. In doing so, she sets the scene of the highly politically engaged nature of their collective creative practice. Working with first nation collaborators is as important for them as it is instructive, particularly because they have a way of thinking about time very different from our western way, since 'the apocalypse - British arrival - has already happened for them'. 'First Nations peoples are the original futurists, we have so much to learn from indigenous futurism', claims Alex enthusiastically.

Dja Dja Wurrung share ceremony for Yapenya 2018
https:djadjawurrung.com.au/giyakiki-our-story/

• Practising future making

After this artistic immersion, it is time to explain the collective creative practice that Alex and David created together, The Things We Did Next. Their website reads : 'It is a collaborative practice that generates a series of interconnected artworks and projects based on collectively imagining multiple futures'. What we just experienced is one of many methods and art performances that they (and their collaborators) carry out. Alex Kelly relates how one intuition became the seed that brought the project to where it is today : 'We are not good at imagining other futures because we are reinforced by our dystopian reality (like the global rise of right wing parties). We must become

more disciplined at imagining new futures, to change our determinism'. After meeting with the artist David Pledger, they decided to undertake this purpose together, using art to bring people to practise their capacity to see a larger range of possibilities. The goal is not to design one great future, a singular and better destination, but to invent, experiment, and assume the contradictions and the plurality of what our imaginations are capable of creating : 'the messier, the better', claims Alex.

• The method

One of the main projects within Alex and David's practice is what they call the Assembly for the Future, which is a participatory digital workshop of future making. David Pledger explains the dramaturgical strategy of concentric circles used to create disruptive and transversal thinking. The gathering starts with a provocation (resembling the narrative performance they made at the beginning) proposed by an artist: the so-called 'First speaker' maps out a future world in 2029. Then, two previously selected respondents improvise a reaction to this call, speaking from the present or the future, thus creating a triangle of discourse. The assembly is then split into 10 groups, moderated by 10 artists who guide the conversations towards embracing collectively a large range of possibilities for the imagination. After one hour of conversation, each artist-moderator delivers a short snapshot of what went on in their group, shortly describing the future that they developed. Artist-moderators
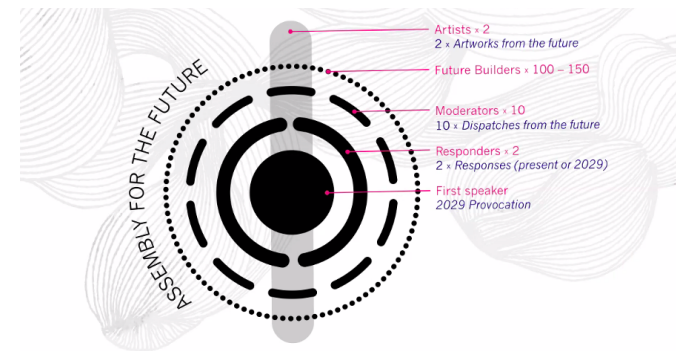
Concentric Circles of Dramaturgy
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13528165.2021.2059178?journalCode=rprs20

are then given a week to generate any form of artwork based on their group's conversation. In addition, two other artists are invited to observe the Assembly, and are then commissioned to create artworks from the future that inspired them during the Assembly. At the end, the Assembly, generally made up of 150 people - so-called 'Future Builders' - produces approximately 2.5 hours of conversations, 1 'Provocation' and 12 artworks called 'Dispatches from the Future'.

'The afterlife of the work is tentacular', claims David. The Dispatches are openly published on the website, leading to various exhibitions, but also the artists themselves reuse what they created. For example, an artist-moderator created the [Centre for Reworlding](#) from [one of the Dispatches](#) generated during an Assembly for the Future. The participants usually find it useful to attend these assemblies: Alex relates conversations with activists and political organisers who find themselves rethinking their strategies in a less linear way.
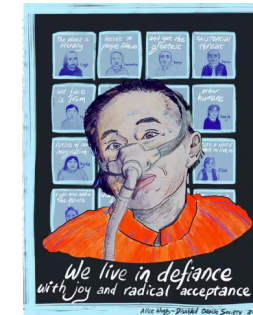
• The art of embracing the mess

Every aspect of The Things We Did Next's practice is designed to embrace the mess, i.e. considering imperfections, differences, and trial-and-error as the most interesting and beautiful parts of life: (1) welcoming contradictory narratives, (2) mixing people from different social and cultural backgrounds, (3) and constantly questioning the biases of the methodology.

1. Welcoming contradictory narratives: The objective is indeed to operate in the space between utopian and dystopian futures, therefore creating narratives with complexity instead of consensual and binary issues. The plurality of the futures created enables them both to be contested, discussed, and to exemplify the democratic nature of our common future. For them, embracing the mess is highly political.

2. Mixing people from different social and cultural backgrounds: First, because diversity is a condition for the cultural richness of the narratives. Secondly, the careful approach to accessibility - including that of the design methods - reflects the political engagement of the practice's initiators. For example, they organised an event with the objective of reuniting generations around future making. Regarding accessibility for socially disadvantaged groups, David Pledger explains that it demands specific work in order to create an environment in which

'they feel that they have the same agency as everyone else'. While they haven't been focusing on this issue for the Assembly for the Future project - and are conscious that they could 'do better' -, they conduct other artistic projects that address it directly. Each Assembly is an occasion to gather participants that reflect the Australian society, so the practitioners 'target and send information to various social groupings, especially when choosing artists and respondents'.

3. Constantly questioning the biases of the methodology: The challenging of the process and the method is an important ingredient of this creative collective practice. Alex and David pay a particular attention to the biases that are conveyed through the narratives that they produce. Attending to the biases in the present which can impact the future is a way both of preventing determinism, and reducing the practitioners' blind spots. 'We cannot control, we are constantly challenged by the numerous artists and collaborators that participate in the conversations: it's a way for us to attend to the bias that we have', explains Alex Kelly.

Dispatch by Joshua Santospirito from the Third Assembly for the Future, after Alice Wong's provocation, The Last Disabled Oracles.

• 'Art is a process that cannot be grabbed'

Embracing the mess is also a way of resisting the instrumentalisation of their practice for capitalist means. Art is not used as a tool, but as a method and a process: 'How do we subvert this idea that art only has a value if it can work as a tool for something?', asks Alex. She and David are highly conscious of the current neoliberal system through which the value of art has become

doing something for the world. David deplores that 'in Australia, art is often talked about as a commodity, a cultural product, reducing an artwork to a financial unit primarily'. This is due to the fact that 'neoliberalism shifted from an ideology into an interface, most interactions are now transactions', continues David. Instead, they decided to think of art as something that is about creating and experimenting processes, conversations and methods.

Defining their practice as a process has the advantage of rendering it resistant to the capitalist approach because 'a process cannot be grabbed, possessed', claims David. It is all the more important given that 'the corporate world has an interest in futurist methodologies to support companies and protect capital', explains Alex Kelly. In opposition to this approach, The Things We Did Next designed a practice whose goal is to 'enable new discussions around hope, adjustment and possibility, centering care and justice', as defined in their manifesto. I can't help but wonder : if a process cannot be grabbed, but can be told, is storytelling just a new way for the neoliberal doctrine to instrumentalise art?

Seen from the outside, the artworks generated by the practice are intriguing but obscure. One thing is certain: you had to be there, and next time I will!
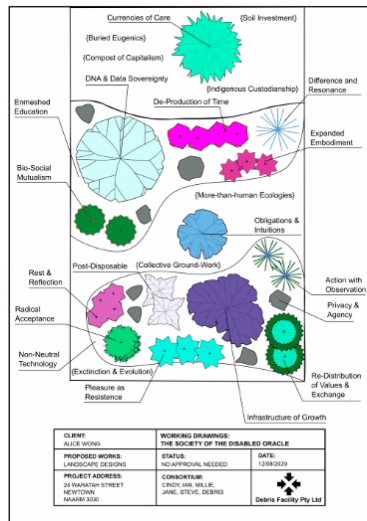
Working Drawings of the Society of the Disabled Oracle : Dispatch from the Third Assembly, from a future generated by Cindy, Ian, Millie, Jane, Steve and Debris.

The goal is not to design one great future, a singular and better destination, but to invent, experiment, and assume the contradictions and the plurality of what our imaginations are capable of creating : 'the messier, the better', claims Alex.

Finn Strivens: 'We are building a community of practice of youth-centred projects globally'

Finn is a designer and foresight practitioner creates tools, experiences and participatory foresight processes that help people to imagine and implement their visions of a better future.

He is the creative lead on SOIF's National Strategy for the Next Generation programme, an NGFP fellow, and the inaugural winner of the NGFP Walk about Prize.

Finn is a visiting lecturer in Global Innovation Design at Imperial College London and is founder of Futurall, a design studio specialising in producing design led participatory futures engagements. He is also a public speaker at foresight conferences (Primer, Futures Festival, and the Global Foresight Summit).

Interview conducted by Chloé Luchs.

Can you describe your project, 'Tomorrowlands'?

Tomorrowland is an open, inspirational, safe space for praxis – physical or virtual – where youths co-imagine radical, preferred futures, produce cultural artefacts of their envisioned futures, and sustainably act on identified projects of interest. Tomorrowlands is funded by the NGFP (Next Generation Foresight Practitioners) to pilot projects in Bangladesh, Brazil, UK, Australia and the Netherlands. The Tomorrowlands project is led by NGFP Fellows Shakil Ahmed, Erica Bol, Rodrigo Mendes Leal, Finn Strivens and Ana Tiquia.

Tomorrowland Community Meet is an open invitation to foresight and futures practitioners working, or interested in working with young people to articulate, explore, and generate pathways towards desired futures. This quarterly series of talks, workshops, and participatory sessions aims to build a community of practice through sharing of outcomes and learnings from youth-centred projects globally.

How did your project start and evolve?

Lots of the Tomorrowlands work goes back to what Shakil Ahmed wrote in his story as part of a future manifesto with SOIF's (School of International Futures) NGFP (Next Generation Foresight Practitioners) network, where he talked about someone in Bangladesh walking through their 2050 city and visiting a *Tomorrowland*, which was a future space for democratic participation. So it's all framed through a lens about the future of democracy and building new spaces for democracy. Shakil reached out to a number of people in the NGFP network doing work with young people, mostly around creating communities and community spaces to have discussions about alternative futures and, I guess, questioning the dominant narratives that run through our societies and in our media. This is what Tomorrowlands project is about: bring together people who want to make sustainable formats for new communities and who use futures methods to try to create these spaces, co-op and adapt different methods for their own uses.

Do you always start from the same story?

We don't always start from the story, but I think it would be a nice way to start. It's a really powerful piece of writing. And it communicates the vision for *Tomorrowland* much better than when we explain it out loud. Maybe as a result of this conversation, this is something I might feedback to the community : 'Could we start every community meeting by reading this story and cement ourselves in this future narrative. Shakil's story presents *Tomorrowland* as a physical space, but see it as a space we collectively want to make. It could be a virtual space. It could be a wall that has a sort of regularly evolving set of murals that people come to make about the future. It could be any sort of space that we feel is appropriate. *Tomorrowland* is modular and adaptable.

Who is generally involved in putting the project together?

The five of us together (Shakil Ahmed, Erica Bol, Rodrigo Mendes Leal, Finn Strivens and Ana Tiquia) are putting in place Tomorrowlands in different countries and exploring the impacts of the space we create. We come together to share some learnings about common questions. For example, how to evidence what we've done? How to follow up? How to sort of understand the impact on the people who are involved in the processes? How to make a simple shareable set of tools so that anyone else can start thinking about how to make Tomorrowlands in their community.

How is it funded?

SOIF has an impact award, which is a 5,000 usdpound grant. The purpose of the grant is to get members of the NGFP network to collaborate with one another. Inspired by Shakil's initiative, we applied to this grant. We split the grant mostly to cover the costs related to running workshops and supporting the communities that we're working with.

What publics do you work with, why, and what do they do together?

It very much depends on each project. Erica Bol is in the Netherlands. Rodrigo Mendes Leal in Brazil. I'm in UK. Anna Tiquia is in Australia. Shakil Ahmed is in Bangladesh, and he might be doing it in Singapore as well. Erica Bol is doing a project with *Teach The future*: it's running workshops in schools, during school holidays for a group of young people in a local town, who want to come and reimagine the future of their town. They present manifesto to the mayor of that town. And every summer she runs the same project and recruits a local cohort of young people.

I am doing a project called TikTok futures with different youth groups in London. And I basically find groups by reaching out to them saying, 'Hi, I've got this workshop format, I'd love to run it with your community'. I try and go into a preexisting community and do something that works with them rather than bringing people together specifically for an activity. I then have a co-design process where we make something

that works for the young people I am working with, to make sure it is something that can interest them. I think each different project has a slightly different approach. And then we share what we learn from our different approaches.

In what ways do you work with arts, fiction and narrative?

I started an initiative called Tik Tok Futures. It's a workshop format and an ongoing creative community project, all about imagining possible futures with young people. I like to talk about imagining possible futures, I think it is the most open and accessible way of describing our work. I try to avoid any jargonistic language whenever I talk about futures, especially with youth. What the project wishes to do is give young people a sense of agency and optimism over their futures by teaching skills and mindsets effectively in long-term and strategic thinking. The idea is that learning these skills makes the future seem less like something that happens to you and more like something you can shape. We decided to use Tik Tok to reach out to youth who would never even think about attending a workshop or a project called a 'futures workshop'. The youth we worked with were actually attracted and interested in learning and developing video making. It also gives them a direct avenue to share their own thoughts and their own feelings as well as have creative control over the final outputs.

For example:
The workshop is usually organized around a question about the future

of X, Y, or Z. We start by involving youth in framing a question 'What subjects do you want to talk about today?': the future of music, the future of sport, the future of money the future of biodiversity, etc. The first part of the workshop is about expressing ourselves about the subject and engaging youth in creatively imagining alternatives.

To start these conversations, I play a game that I'm currently trying to put online and make open source. The game is about matching two random prompts that give a very weird, bizarre future outcome and tell a story about how the world got to that place. The first prompt is some kind of actor or person, and the second prompt is an event. You might get a giant 10-foot rubber duck as your first prompt and the second prompt might be 'gives global cancer' or 'leaves the earth in search of a better life on the moon'. I also play a game where I put random images about the future inside balloons, and people have to pop balloons to get all their images. And then with five images, you have to tell a story and weave those images into a new set of stories about the future.

We also use quite a lot of video material. I asked them before the workshop to send me links to their favorite features, sci-fi films, or films that present alternative ways of living. We pick out clips from these and try to identify things happening in the present or current trends that could lead to different futures. That way we link back the idea of imagining alternatives to actually being able to see how these could translate into the world we live in at the moment, and effectively teach skills around understanding change, and making change feel more manageable on a day-to-day basis.

Halfway through the process, introduce sets of future scenarios. A couple of lines on each to stretch the young people into very different directions and have a collective session where we discuss what each of these worlds might look like in a bit more detail, and then ask them to pick one of these future worlds. We then have a story board session where we, as a group, come up with lots of ideas about what sorts of narratives we want to communicate about futures, what different stories we might want to tell in these worlds and who we might want to tell.

TikTok is really used as a sort of energizer as much as anything else; whenever young people start to create, the energy levels soars up in

the room. I find it really interesting and very pertinent to use platforms that youth are used to. For some, it's something that's part of their everyday life, and it gives the platform another use. Others have never used TikTok before and they come to the workshop to learn how to use it, as well as cool techniques about how to make TikTok videos.

What change(s) would you like the project to produce for the participants?

In many ways, the change for the participants comes at a number of levels. For example, Sirlute, which is one of the youth groups I'm working with at the moment, specifically works with disadvantaged youth and at-risk young people. Their mission is to use creative programming to minimize destructive behavior and reduce crime in communities. I believe there's a basic level to which providing programming for these young people is really important, to help them have other things to do with their holidays. Salute just moved location and the location is incredibly important : many of the young people in the groups are part of gangs and although the previous location was great, half of their members wouldn't be able to come because they would enter another gang's territory and they'd risk being attacked on the way there.

I think that a set of skills about being strategic and thinking long term, just understanding that multiple futures are possible, can give people a sense of agency that in many cases, young people don't feel. For me, building skills in strategic thinking and understanding long termism, as

well as helping people have fun and engage in activities, are both very important and necessary actions that lead to change.

And beyond the participants (for a community, an organization, for the world...)?

For the longer term, I would love that the SOIF initiatives and projects solidify a national strategy for the next generations and build a long-lasting high-level dialogue with young people around the UK.

The goal of a lot of SOIF's work is to do foresight with impact. To think and learn about how we can communicate future narratives in a way that is hard hitting and memorable. One of the ways that seems to be continuously most effective is directly appealing to the heart as well as the head, and to have young people articulating things for themselves.

One of our questions is about bringing in more diverse audiences of young people into complex conversations about the future. One of our learning goals is to host conversations in spaces that the community controls and is comfortable in. I see this as an experiment and a chance to find new learnings by using youth friendly media formats that explore with and appeal to audiences who wouldn't want to come to a workshop about the national strategy of Great Britain.

This is also a way of exploring how to communicate future narratives in short formats where young people have the power to shape and share their voices easily and directly with someone who's in a sort of decision making or more powerful position.

How do you know you have succeeded? Do you have evaluation methods?

In terms of evaluation, there's the experiences of the young people. At the end of the session, we have a moment to discuss with them what they enjoyed and what they didn't. I also try to encourage the 'leader' of the youth group to do the same when I'm not there; it's really important to have feedback without me in the room. This is possible because I come into a preexisting community that regularly meets, so the space already exists. When I'm not convening, they are still convening themselves and they can reflect on the session without me.

For example, one of the goals in the TikTok videos project was that they directly translate into some form of output, which would be provocative and useful for policy making audiences. (The very first instance of this

workshop was partially funded by the European commission, where I was a maker in residence). The idea behind this residency was to create some kind of output. The TikTok videos would be provocative future visions that could be shared with the joint research center of the policy making community on biodiversity, which was a really nice idea. Nevertheless, the result was not at all what we expected. All of the TikTok videos the young people ended up making were incredibly bizarre, sort of wild and strange. They had huge amounts of fun making them, but they didn't deliver clear messages in any way, shape, or form. As a European policy maker watching those videos, I suppose you would just think: 'My God, what has gone on there? I don't understand a word of it.'

That was absolutely fine for me because I think it was much more about the experience of the participants and the richness of their imaginings than it was about translating to a formal audience. It's made me revise what my goals are : TikTok videos are great tools to unearth new ideas and bring in new audiences to this space, more than communicating clear ideas and messages. So creating clear messages might not be the focus of this work for now. I'm also hesitant to try and formalize these videos too much, there's a risk that they'll lose their weirdness and creativity which in many ways is at the core of why they're so valuable.

Are there references you'd like to share (e.g., theoretical references, precedents, other projects that inspired you, etc.) ?
An early inspiration is the Extrapolation Factory operators manual, and many of the projects included within it. It is a short, inspiring and open access way to learn about futuring with communities.

Project
Tomorrowlands, by SOIF's NGFP
Focus on TikTok Futures.

Website
https://tiktokfutures.com/tik-tok-futures

Description
TikTok futures is a workshop format that helps young people to imagine possible futures. By handing young people a camera or phone and telling them to film their own future visions, it enables them to directly share their voice with their peers, and to add to a growing number of youth future visions on TikTok. In the workshop, Tik Tok is first used as a worldbuilding tool; young people imagine what kinds of social media videos they will see in different future scenarios. Then young people make their own speculative videos to share with their peers and beyond. By placing creative authorship into young people's hands this project helps them to share and to shape their own visions of the future.

What the project wishes to do is give young people a sense of agency and optimism over their futures by teaching skills and mindsets effectively in long-term and strategic thinking. The idea is that learning these skills makes the future seem less like something that happens to you and more like something you can shape.

Johannes Nuttinen: 'Any part of a real transformation requires alliances among actors'

Johannes Nuutinen works at Demos Helsinki where he is in charge of Untitled. Previously, Johannes has led Demos Helsinki's international portfolio, and he has been responsible for several large scale transformation projects together with both private companies and progressive governments. Johannes' expertise lies in new economic thought and ways of building progressive economic policy.

Interview conducted by Daniel Kaplan.

Can you start by describing Untitled?

We are an alliance matched with an approach to collectively reimagine societies. We want to set the agenda for what are, for the alliance's members, the most important interventions and experiments that would be needed to transform society, and then act together towards them.

We believe that we need a comprehensive transformation of ways that we organize our societies, interact with each other, and structure our institutions and our everyday lives. This transformation can't be based on incremental shifts, nor on fixing the current model. That's why we've been modeling our approach at the intersection of imagination and experimentation: imagination, to look at what the possibilities for comprehensive transformation are, at what the world would look like if we transformed it to the better; and experimentation as the practical tool through which imagination comes to life.

The alliance is made up of about forty members worldwide, who act together via two main mechanisms: agenda groups and experimentations. Plus, the Festival, although we are rethinking it.

Who runs the project?

All of our alliance members are equally responsible, everyone has the similar amount of possibility to steer Untitled. Demos Helsinki has initiated Untitled with a couple of other alliance members, and that's why we have a legacy stake in it. The coordinating team is made up of three Demos Helsinki employees working part-time for Untitled. But Demos Helsinki doesn't have a leadership position.

What are these 'Agenda groups' you mentioned earlier?

Agenda groups 'critically examine current narratives of different realms of society and imagine new ones'. They are typically made up of five to twelve people, who gather for a limited amount of time to work on a shared thematic. We just finalized an agenda group on 'Democracy and imagination', spearheaded by the Democratic Society, which starts from the premise that 'democracy now works in an entirely new context', and calls for imagination to renew democratic ideas and practices.

Another agenda group, initiated and ran by the Y-Foundation, about 'Housing as an asset', gathers people and organizations who have some type of interest and expertise in rethinking housing as an institution, who wish to imagine radical alternatives for the current housing institutions, and use each other as a sounding board for their own radical thinking.

And the second pillar of your activities is experimentations?

We've had a very successful collaboration with The Emergence Room in running what we call an Experiment Attractor, which is a program to support transformative ideas through movement building, experimentation and development of their narrative. Last spring, the Experiment Attractor focused on 'community wealth'. We had an open call for projects within this thematic, and then several sessions wherein we supported the selected projects in design, testing, and experimenting on the ground, as well as trying to match them together or with different types of partners, allies rather than just funders. That's what we call 'building a movement'.

Let's talk about this 'comprehensive transformation' you call for. Is there a common sense within Untitled of what direction it should take?

No, definitely not. We see ourselves as an 'unlikely alliance' of different types of actors, which means that we don't have to have a consensus opinion on what the world after transformation should look like. I for one believe that we should, in a way, double down on our disagreements, not in order to solve the conflicts or the tensions, rather because in those tensions, there are often interesting insights to be found. What we all agree on is the timeframe and the scale of the transformation. We think that this decade is critical, that much of the transformation needs to happen fairly rapidly, and that it needs to be comprehensive

– meaning, it has to happen across different sectors and institutions. It's not a technical fix.

And what role would Untitled like to play in this transformation?

We want to be an infrastructure for establishing alliances. We, as Untitled, don't take a more active role in the transformations, our members do. I'd argue that any part of a real transformation requires some type of alliances and coordination among actors, and we want to be the infrastructure and space for that.

To play devil's advocate, when you say that we need a 'comprehensive transformation', that it can't be incremental, some people would tell you that we already know what should be done. So why do you think there is a need for imagination as opposed to just doing what needs to be done?

I'd answer that question in two parts.

First, we definitely know what the problems are. We might even know what the solutions to single-dimension problems are. As an example, we know that our use of oil is unsustainable and that we need to ride more bikes, use more buses, use electric vehicles, and so forth. What we don't know is how that set of 'solutions' relates to transformations in our democratic institutions, in our economies, etc. That comprehensive picture is something that would definitely motivate ourselves beyond just understanding the problems and coming up with issue-specific changes. This is where imagination is needed.

Secondly, we have started to focus more on how change comes to play, and that's where the alliance is very beneficial. We try to understand how change happens to our current models and institutions, what are the different tactical interventions that each alliance member can perform.

'Imagination' and 'narratives' feature everywhere on your website. How important are they in the Untitled process? And what is the difference between them?

Imagination is a core part of our approach. We believe that adding components and possibilities for reimagining things is crucial for us to be able to understand what a comprehensive transformation would look like. New types of narratives would be basically an outcome of the work. So one is an approach, one is an output.

Focusing on imagination, how important is it for you and how do you work on activating it?

In all of our work, we want to make sure that there's enough space for imaginative thinking. I know that many similar initiatives have fairly specific methodologies that they use for imagination. We haven't taken that route. We rely more on partnerships. In our early festivals, for instance, we worked together with the collective Life Itself, who has wonderful methodologies for imagination.

I would say we provide the critical parameters that enable imagination. One of these parameters is what I called our 'unlikely alliances'. The people and organizations involved in our work are not only like-minded peers. That diversity encourages imagination and new types of thinking.

Do you work with art, and artists?

We do use artistic expression as a tool to open up the space for imagination. On the simplest level, in shorter sessions we use physical expression like dance or choreographies, to open people up. We also believe that imagination happens best if people are uprooted from their everyday project cycle. I would say that's more of a craft rather than a methodology, however. Artistic expression is not a focus but a tool that we use to encourage imagination.

The German artistic duo VestAndPage is a member, as well as two Finnish artists. Why? My guess is that they are interested in combining their own work into more activist, society-prone thinking. However, although I find it very important that we work with people who identify as artists, imagination is not limited to artists.

For me - and I know this is hugely reductive - one of the benefits of having artists engaged is that, compared to social activist or transformational leaders, they are less focused on the end result. They get lost in the process, which is very important when engaging in imaginative work. They look at something interesting and see where that path takes them.

How do you know that you've succeeded in the project? Do you have indicators?

There are two parts to the answer. Practically speaking, we're very serious about our alliance members' experience on the work, and the main indicator for that is participation. We also have more qualitative, reflective discussions with all of our membership base on what's valuable and what isn't. We gather feedback from the different programs that we run, as well as the festivals : that's very beneficial to us.

What I don't believe in is having strict KPIs (Key Indicator Performance) or metrics for our work. They make sense for stability, and certainty-focused organizations. It's a very industrial way of thinking about success that doesn't work very well in these types of highly complex, fluid projects. We could have more outcome-oriented KPIs, but I'd say that it goes counter our theory of transformation.

What are the most difficult issues that you face or have faced, and how have you dealt with them?

One of the very challenging issues that we've dealt with is the tension between an alliance approach and a transformation-oriented approach with specific organizational premises. All of our members agree that we need to transcend our organizations, our everyday projects, because that, on an abstract level, is the right approach for achieving comprehensive transformation. Then again, all, or most of us, work in organizations and have our organizational priorities which don't fit perfectly with the notion of working as an alliance. It's not atypical to hear one of our members say something like : 'This is very inspiring and very useful for my transformation objectives, but I'm unable to prioritize this work because I have many organizational fires that I need to deal with.'

It also translates into our relationship with funders, who have a very atomized and singular view on how change can happen and can be measured.

What are the next steps for Untitled?

Untitled was founded in 2019, and I'd say that we're coming to the end of our first exploratory phase. We've stayed true to our mission of establishing alliances based on imagination and experimentation, but we've tested out tens of different ways of doing that. Some of them have worked, others not so well.

Now, our challenge is narrowing down our focus and concentrating on the activities that really work, that really can build the infrastructure for alliances of transformation.

Project name
Untitled

Website
https://untitled.community

Description
Untitled is an alliance and an approach to collectively reimagine society, create an agenda for social transformation and experiment on executing it. It is founded by an alliance of activists across sectors. The community works together at meet ups throughout the year, collaborates around real-life experiments, celebrates at a festival and spreads the stories via publications.

3.
Sailing the archipelagos of collective practices

3. Sailing the archipelagos of collective practices
By Chloé Luchs-Tassé

'To have a practice, you need to have a community of practice' (Anna Tiquia from All Tomorrows Futures). At the beginning of our research on Collective Creative Practices for Transformation, this affirmation justly represented our ambition of federating practices using arts and creativity with groups to activate transformation. An implicit desire of knowledge exchange and curiosity towards the creation of a field of practice in order to act on various problems observed, and to develop a better understanding of our commons. What is it, in our practices, that allow us to converge, to diverge? How can we inspire each other? Can we find ways to put common meanings on our intuitions, our intentions and our actions? Can we learn more about the impacts of our projects?

Launched at the end of 2021, the Collective Creative Practices for Transformation (CCP) project aims to create a community that involves groups from around the world who develop collective and creative practices (theater, writing, design, poetry..) with intentions of transforming something related to the current state of the world and towards the emergence of a field of practice. After a year of gathering and discussing the artistic and fictional narratives that feed these collective and creative spaces (conducted during a first umbrella project in 2021), this project is born from an intuition drawn from observations: could the conditions for these practices to play a transformative role lie in their collective character? That is, the moments of co-creation, preparation and discussion in the process of a creative production. Moreover, it seems that all over the world, these artistic, fragile and experimental practices are multiplying and gaining both terrain and participants.

During a webinar organized by the Elisabeth Bruyère School of Social Innovation with Judith Bulter, Elsa Dorlin and Françoise Vergès, the three panelists agreed on a general portrait of the situation of our world today: we are at a moment of collective suffocation and 'exhaustion of bodies and minds'. In their opinion, the spaces where we can express ourselves freely and creatively are narrowing down significantly (even if technology makes us feel like they are expanding) and many liberties and collective initiatives are being restrained by different political, economic and social processes. More than ever, it seems urgent to multiply spaces of liberated expression where it is possible to imagine alternatives with others for more inclusive and desirable futures. These spaces, refuges and sanctuaries are 'essential', as they allow us to practice imagination, to learn to dialogue with others around new images generated and to set directions towards the worlds we want to inhabit. The time spent in these spaces are valuable occasions to glimpse at other possibilities and ignite new hopeful perspectives.

• Who are the Collective Creative Practices for Transformation?

There is undoubtedly a common desire on the part of the initiators of these practices to help guide current social-ecological systems towards desirable and necessary transformations for a sustainable world, by creating open spaces to help social imaginaries get back on track.

In these spaces, a participant learns to use or practice artistic formats; to develop tools for thinking and reflecting; and, to cultivate ideas that could inspire actions towards constructive changes for the world. It goes without saying that in order to change the reality of a specific society, imagination is an essential resource providing alternatives to sometimes pragmatic and cemented imaginaries, such as the reorganization of certain systems that exist solely because they have a lingering status of existing.

Besides the obvious benefit in the encounters between our initiatives and the creation of a community (making visible and accessible our explorations, methods, challenges and new learnings), our wish is also to gently legitimize these spaces of fragile practices. By keeping a trace of their history and setting up procedures to perpetuate and assemble them. We want to figure out how the plurality of what we all stand for and do (people, things, ideas), can connect and weave into something of a commons, something of a bigger unit (Latour, 2005) .

The project becomes political when the individuals and groups who initiate a creative practice feel responsible and concerned by one or more ecological, social or economic issues and wish to activate a change by federating a collective[1].

Our initial intuition is to assume – like any other process or initiative – that the creation of a space can be motivated by the desire to solve a problem (climate crisis, conflicts, poverty, immigration, oppressive man-nature relation, patriarchy, racism...).

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1. Translated from, *Joie militante* : construire des luttes en prise avec leurs mondes (*Joyful Militancy* : building thriving resistance in toxic times). By Carla Bergman and Nick Montgomery. Édition du commun, 2021, Rennes, p.188.

The energy behind putting in place this kind of practice comes from a strong aspiration to activate a paradigm shift and bring other individuals towards taking part in that transformation, by offering a space to experiment other possible visions for a livable world. The practitioners we have met so far carry the desire to activate (more or less radical) changes against stifling injustices they have identified as being their cause.

So far, we have been able to identify four types of transformative intentions behind these practices, to:

- Make individuals and groups aware of the roles they have to play in the face of climate catastrophe and the social injustices that result from it;

- Recreate spaces for liberated expression and dialogue around polarizing issues and experiment with forms of sharing;

- Give visibility and room to voices of marginalized individuals and communities;

- Develop imagination skills and the ability to project oneself of participating individuals and groups.

What we know today is that the practices we are federating share at least three commonalities:

- They create open spaces that activate the encounter between disciplines, cultures and environments. Whether it is the art format, the diversity of participants, or the flexibility in the venues, fluidity in the organization and openness to differences are important values shared by these practices.

- They are evolving practices. Most of the practitioners we spoke with said they are continually searching for new methods to adapt, integrate or mix with their own, in order to meet the needs of the individuals, groups or themes being addressed.

- They have difficulty understanding how to evaluate their impacts because they operate on different logics than those used for 'changemaking' and hence, cannot use common evaluation methods. These practices are still searching to articulate the link between the individual's

creative experience, the collective's creative experience and the relation between the collective experience of a practice and concrete actions.

• How to create common knowledge in our community

During a session of exchange and experimentation we call Agora: Ingredients for change, it was noted by the group Seeds of Good Anthropocene that delimiting common notions to an emerging community could rigidify a set of principles and stifle the emergence of new understanding. So, how then do we build common knowledge and distinguish common typologies towards being a community and building a field of practice?

Especially when the practices we are studying use everything differently: from methods to approaches and artistic formats. Do we need to find some kind of vocabulary specific to the Collective Creative Practices for Transformation? What could allow us to all address 'our field of practice' in a way we can recognize its practices and identify our common potentialities and limitations, our similarities and differences as a community of practice?

If we start with a general perspective on what these practices are trying to do by taking poet and philisopher Edouard Glissant's work on the metaphor of relation through archipelagic thinking, we can allow ourselves to look at our community as a hesitant and intuitive movement where differences can link us in a plural, diverse and narrative form. Archipelagic thinking offers a lens to think of commons. Namely, gathering around values, strategies, relations, projects, towards the common change we want to see. The archipelago is also a strong image as it gives us a symbolic form to depict collectives as islands floating in waters. The water could be our field of practice with similar values and goals. Projects, as boats in the water, navigating between the islands.

To think of this community as an agile, fragile and flexible network is also described in Corinne Morel-Darleux's 2019 book 'Plutôt couler en beauté que flotter sans grâce' (Better drown with beauty than float without grace), as the possibility of a new form of political project for the 21st century. To begin by welcoming our differences and the fact that we can all be at 'our post' whilst contributing to a larger political plan.

As our wish is not to fit these practices in the same boxes, but rather to look at this field as a rhizometric form, that extends from one root to the other, al-

lowing a few practitioners to meet towards reactivating many things, such as our political desires, around several archipelagos of common issues, themes, problematics, that help guide the strength of this new field's potential.

After several months of Agoras, interviews and research certain questions have been raised :

- Regarding this community of practice : are we able to specify the reasons why we choose to invite certain collective and creative practices and others not? Is it possible to map or gather several definitions, quotes or even larger motifs in which the practices we federate also identify? Is it possible to do this while keeping the evolving aspect of classifications? How does the use of creative forms allow us to achieve certain transformative goals, whatever they may be?

- With regard to creative and collective practices : what do they wish to transform? Who are the target audiences? What are the indicators used to demonstrate that these practices are succeeding in their transformative objectives? In what ways are these desired transformations expressed in creative formats?

- With regard to the reception and the effect of these practices on collectives : who are the publics or individuals involved in these practices and what makes them a 'collective' together? What is the link between the creative process and the creation of a collective? How do the initiators' desired transformations act on these individuals and the collective they are aimed for?

• How to build a community with Agoras and interviews

In order to compare our experiences with those of other practices, and to continue to evolve in an international and changing field of action, the Agoras offer an online space open to all who wish to learn more about these approaches and for practitioners to share their explorations, challenges and advances.

The feedback we received from the Agoras is consistent with its intentions : many practitioners feel grateful that such a space exists and find it enriching to discover new people, new tools and methods from everywhere in the world. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the dynamic online format of

the Agoras offers an opportunity to experience *the experience* of a practice. The strength is also the limit of these get-togethers as they allow us to glimpse at the experience the participants might live, but from them are subtracted conditions linked to the context, the field and the community in which it is rooted.

During these reported and/or reproduced zoomed-in practices, it is possible that several conditions limit the potential of an immersion with others in a creative activity. Screens, poor connection or transmission, the digital supports used such as Miro, and even working towards building common grounds with strangers from a distance, are examples of the factors that can influence the experience. Moreover, in order not to tire the participants on zoom, the Agoras last a maximum of two hours. They offer the glimpse of a practice which, in order to generate the impression of creating a common, must undoubtedly be built over several sessions with the same participants.

This is a considerable teaching as it shows us that the context (place, people, format) and the time allocated to the practice are conditions for its success. Our next step for these sessions of community building will be to define a number of questions to ask participants, in order to understand their motivation in attending these activities.

These observations show us that if we want to look into the impact of these practices, we will need to look more closely at the experience of the participants who attend the practice spaces of the community we are federating.
The Agoras sessions are not a space to study the reception of the participants but are nevertheless very valuable as they offer a meeting space for practitioners from around the world.

• How to use transformation

Several questions were asked about the weight of the word *transformation* in Collective Creative Practices for Transformation. Did the transformation provoke the desire to initiate practice and/or is it the objective of the collective activities carried out by the practitioners as we mentioned above? For instance, what are the motivations behind creating fictional writing workshops on the future of work with workers from corporations? Or, theater workshops on resilient futures for a city? And even fictional tik-tok short films on biodiversity with youth?

At this stage of the research, the use of the word *transformation* is still very broad. What does it wish to trigger and is it able to presume it has achieved its goal? In order to understand if there is a collective effect produced from the desire of transformation that initiates these practices, it is necessary to depict which transformation(s) to observe and how they evolve in time. According to the practitioner Vera Sacchetti, a transformational objective can be largely formulated at different steps of a project or during the elaboration of an action. In the Driving the Human initiative, a call for artistic propositions was sent after a time of deliberation around the objectives of the overall project: to create new visions for ecological and social renewal. The objectives must, in Vera Sacchetti's opinion, remain gaseous in order to allow the emergence of new forms.

Moreover, it is possible to understand the impact of the desired transformation in several ways without constraining the creativity of the collectives involved. For example, by receiving feedback from the participants at different moments during the process, or from the public during the presentations of the creative format, or even by following how certain ideas travel or are reproduced in other environments. It is a shared belief, between the practitioners we've met so far, that creating set boxes of success criteria before starting a practice defies the objectives of transformation in question, as they rely on the current standards for project evaluation. These practices are precisely set up to overcome these evaluation techniques which are, for many, the reasons why we are calling for 'new narratives' today.

• How to create collective dynamics

How to observe the dynamic actualization between creative ideas that imagine other worlds and the creation of new collective forms? What does the emergence of such a space look like? Currently, the community we are federating to identify the limits of this new field of practice articulate their desire for transformation in either or, the choice of participants, the tools used for collective creation, the content explored and the form produced.

For example, the Laboratoire d'expression et de créations (LABEC), a project put in place by the non-profit Plus Loin situated at Porte de Bagnolet in Paris, encourages individuals from working-class neighborhoods to express themselves through performing arts. Working fictional scenes through improvisation and dialogues, this initiative is part of a transformational – therefore political – process, as the project started from the desire to build capacities and confi-

dence in the attending participants. Each week and for several years, the project noticed a growth in their collective of practice, as the older members became more involved in the organization and recruitment of new participants. LABEC does not explicitly explore 'transformative' content or themes, but acts in the name of social transformation.

The SPACE project, presented in the first Agora, has also a common vocation of theater practice and expression for social objectives. The sessions usually include climate and political refugees. However, unlike LABEC, SPACE's creative space's goal is to engage the participants on a social and ecological front by investing it with speculative scenarios as well as stories that trickle down from present or past experiences of the participating audiences. The objective is to build new dynamics and practice dialogue for common grounds. The acquisition of a new creative skill is rather a secondary objective here as the artistic format evolves and adapts itself to the different contexts of practice.

In the project Stories from 2050, presented in the third Agora, the public is not identified as being the primary concern of the transformational objectives but is rather positioned as a leverage for advocacy. The design fiction device is put in place to demonstrate that a significant number of people can be engaged in a reflection on sustainable worlds. The objective of this project is therefore to create a report responding to set quantitative and qualitative objectives set by the funding body - in this case, the EU. The secondary objective would be to raise awareness by pushing the public towards experimenting with disastrous climate scenarios and identifying what needs to change in order to prevent humankind from reaching a place of non-return. The methodology put in place by Stories from 2050 starts with the same scenarios for every public and is structured to follow specific steps along the way.

In this case, the project is less focused on creating a collective, the design process is always the same (the participants are mostly one-time visitors, unless they want to try out another of the four scenarios). Therefore, the role of the collective creation is slightly accessory: the objective is not as much to produce creative content of quality collectives can feel proud of (although it might happen), but to produce a specific quantity of stories to be reported. This is another way to explore how creative research for transformation is put in place on levels we do not completely grasp. It will be interesting to further look at how this data is used by higher instances. It will also be useful to consider this level of initiative in our definitions of transformational motives from our community which is today described as being acted by the collectives.

In one of the initiatives from the Tomorrowland project created by the School of International Futures (SOIF), Finn Strivens works to raise awareness amongst youth on issues related to global sustainability (the future being a pretext to build capacities and shape actors of change). Together with different groups, they determine the theme of their exploration as well as the creative form they wish to practice. In this case, the transformative dynamic is decided during the meeting between the practitioner and the collective, in a distinct spatial context (program, school, center). Strivens' desire for transformation is to teach youth to think more systematically about their futures. The topic is not identified at the beginning of the practice, but emerges during the process. Within this larger frame and throughout the project, there is a collective negotiation and decision-making process to determine the topic, the format and the final production.

This last example is interesting as the desired transformation becomes visible at each stage of the project, up to the final production, through a multitude of decision-making moments. According to Strivens, between the time the group is created and the final production, the method remains flexible in order to let new forms influence automatic responses, and allows surprising ideas to appear.

It is perhaps in this dynamic, one that arises from the process and where it is possible to acquire new capacities with others while agreeing and disagreeing on notions that become common, where we can distinguish some of the typologies of collective transformations. Indeed, to dialogue, to find a common meaning, to learn about new issues, to express oneself differently, also means working on developing important capacities to listen, dialogue, consent, support and of course, collaborate.

Specifying even largely the transformations we wish to observe in our community towards building a field of practice, will allow us to study how they can translate into actions and how they have been embraced by the participants. It will also help us delimit the field of practice we are identifying and the actors who are part of it.

• How to use creative forms in the collective process

The use of art and creation in a collective process encourages us to consider another important condition in the reception of transformational objectives set by the initiators of a practice : the participants' affect.

Art and creativity make us relativize and redefine certain understanding through emotion rather than pragmatism and rationality. In a creative space working towards producing a message, the participants learn to integrate more intimate forms of expression to thoughts and discourse. By using creative formats such as theater, design, poetry, fiction writing, the community we are federating is sending a clear message : can we think of new strategies to idea-building? Creative spaces are by essence evolving and subversive. By establishing artistic and creative format with participants who are not necessarily familiar with these approaches, these practices are stating a desire to change the way knowledge is induced – and the publics we build it with – in order to open up new paths for the future.

• How to build a collective of practice

Putting in place a collective to practice a creative activity is an initiative that may require certain considerations from the organizers, especially if the objective is to generate one or more transformations. If our initial intuition suggests that a transformation occurs from the constitution of collectives, there are certain elements to consider in order to make the encounters favorable between the participants during the creative activity. In other words, how does a collective feel like a collective? What are the conditions that allow this to happen in a creative activity?

The SPACE project uses documentary theater, interactive play and installations in public spaces to dissect complex social issues such as migration, polarization, inequality, gentrification, decolonization... These workshops are for the most part face-to-face, and the participants are socially engaged or directly concerned with the issue in question. In contrast, Stories from 2050 brings together a remote and international network under the seal of the EU, on identified themes related to the climate crisis. The work is conducted online in subgroups of four or five and the pace moves rapidly between the different exercises.

During this first step of the Collective Creative Practices project, we were able to observe that on one hand, the rigidity of a method, a vision, an approach could prevent creative immersion during a collective practice. Other experiences demonstrated that the opposite was also true : the lack of structure and/or mediation created sometimes disjointed, cacophonous and discouraging situations, making the experience frustrating, or even impossible.

In order to enable a creative production participants are proud of, it is necessary to set a general framework, to remain attentive and to clearly set some rules (the spirit under which the session will take place, the way to behave with each other, to build ideas constructively, the objectives of the day, the tools used…).

In these evolving spaces, the dynamic between the collectives and the creative process is both creating new knowledge and nourishing the practices of the community we are federating. As these collectives are made of participating individuals, considering the conditions specific to a positive experience with a creative approach should be investigated further, as should the repeated attendance of a participant. In the years to come, we will look more closely at the collective experience as well as the intimate connection participants may have with the desired transformation at the initiative of the practice.

• Why do participants attend these practices?

The practices we are federating usually rely on volunteer individuals. Their presence can be motivated by :

- The theme explored (climate, city of the future, border…);
- The desire to learn more about the methodological device (collaborative writing, game, design…);
- The desire to discover or improve an artistic discipline (writing, theater, painting…);
- The desire to experience a creative immersion with others in an imaginary world.

Furthermore, the individuals who attend the workshops generally share certain characteristics with the initiators or organizers (discipline, theme, interest…) or belong to a targeted demographic group (youth, migrants, women…).

For example, the LABEC wishes to give another image to youth from working-class neighborhoods. The space welcomes new participants and offers a practice where the emergence of new ideas is encouraged. The production and the theme of the day is decided at the beginning of every session and often, more than one theme is explored, giving birth to a few short productions. Working from a 'laboratory' perspective, some theater improvisations are not worth being reworked while others become short scenes that will eventually be filmed. There are usually one or two days a week where audiences can meet at their

leisure. The LABEC has been able to build trust with its public and has become very much integrated in the social fabric of its neighbourhood, enough to see familiar faces appear every week without much work in recruiting new participants.

Participants in Anne Caroline Prévot's Science Fiction Committee seek to experience creative and collective construction in immersion with other practices and disciplines, around a theme they care for, such as biodiversity. In this practice, the collective builds around a common creative project and takes 'the time to do it together'. The CSF is part of a punctual program with a final creative objective. Here, the participants were chosen for their desire to work together as a collective. In this small group, the absence of an individual is felt and his absence will have an influence on the direction of the final production.

• Conclusion

The first stage of the project allows us to define, even broadly, the limits of the community that we wish to federate towards creating a field of practice. These spaces have a unique spirit, specific and inherent to the experiences and affects of the participants who compose them. Therefore, the productions also depend on the collectives and the practices that nourish them. These spaces have the distinctive feature of being based on a temporal dynamic and a renewed process, built for and supported by conditions of each exploration : contexts, themes, participants, devices…

By creating spaces where it is possible to imagine and express oneself, these practices are also inventing possibilities by allowing collectives to free themselves from suffocating infrastructures for the time of a workshop, a practice, a session… Insofar as the impact of the desired transformations for our community of practice, for our field and for each Collective Creative Practice is not yet completely identifiable, what we can say with certainty is that these spaces are multiplying and demonstrate a strong desire to inspire action towards change and societal movement.

In order to continue circumscribing, even broadly, the desired transformation that initiated these practices, we wish to pursue our exchanges with the practices identified as well as reach out to others that are continuously being invented. Furthermore, before exploring the process experienced by the participants, we will also start specifying a number of typologies from the exchanges

with our community (Agora and interviews) to guide the articulation of our questions. This will allow us to approach the individual and collective reception of these practices with a starting set of elaborated directions.

In addition, we wish to ensure a follow-up with the practices that we've already discussed and observed.

It will allow us to consider the impact of these practices on a longer temporality, and how they infuse collective work to grow and how they end. An important question persists: what remains of an initiative once it reaches its programmed finish line ?

Creative spaces are by essence evolving and subversive. By establishing artistic and creative format with participants who are not necessarily familiar with these approaches, these practices are stating a desire to change the way knowledge is induced — and the publics we build it with — in order to open up new paths for the future.

Agoras / Rehearsing the Revolution: changing the story to change reality

This online agora took place on February 7, 2022, as part of Narratopia's 'Collective Practices' project. It was organized by the Plurality University Network and SPACE, and facilitated by Jorgen Unom Gario (instant poetry), Petra Ardai (storytelling) and Esther Verhamme (online storytelling).

Article written by Daniel Kaplan.

'Draw the route that you've traveled most in your childhood', asks Petra Ardai, the 'theatre-maker' at the source of SPACE and its latest project 'Rehearsing the Revolution: storytelling for common ground dialogues'.
'Where is that road?' - participants respond with Paris, Montreal, Budapest, or a village in Greece, France, Poland...
'Add five objects that you remember along this road: an animal, a machine, a plant, a landscape, a natural phenomenon'. A cloud of words emerges: a bike, a zebulon dog, a flooded road, a monster rabbit...

This initial stage of the game serves two purposes: to reconnect participants with their past as a foundation to think about very different futures, and to create a personal connection among the participants.

• Imagine earth without humans

Then we break into five small groups, and are introduced to the story we are to tell: 'Imagine Earth without us, humans. What does the planet look like? How do nature, organic and synthetic entities develop and regenerate without us? What happens to the traces and the memory of mankind? What if, after a few million years, the conditions become optimal and a new species in the lineage of humans occur? How does this offspring relate to other sentient beings and the surrounding? Can Earth teach the descendents to become kin?'

Each group represents one character: a pomegranate tree, a typewriter, heavy rain, a river valley, a falcon. The poet and songwriter Jörgen Unom Gario takes us through the four stages of the story we will imagine through the eyes of our character.

In 'The Habitat', we imagine earth after the humans, from our character's point of view. We describe what each of us need to thrive. The valley likes to welcome visitors on the rare occasions when it's not dry. The tree has learned to hoard water and live in symbiosis with other animals, however the falcon needs prey. The typewriter requires cover in a human ruin, but also someone, or something, to write on it... How can all entities live together in the same space? Negotiations begin. Could falcons become vegetarian? Answer: no. Could they eat the mice that live with the typewriter in the ruined attic, and are learning to type in their own way?

In the next chapter, 'Daily Existence', the inhabitants learn to know each other and reflect on their existence without humans. Relief coexists with nostalgia. Falcons liked to partner with them in hunting, trees enjoyed teaching patience to humans, nobody mends the river banks after the floods, but nobody creates dams upstream, too... We learn that one resource is essential to all : water.

• Negotiating for coexistence

In 'The Decline', thousands of years have passed, all inhabitants have evolved in different directions, and coexistence has become difficult. Who is to blame? We start looking for scapegoats. The rain blames itself for acting randomly, sometimes too scarce, sometimes too abundant. The river valley doesn't like the tree's tendency to organize everything and everyone around it. Most everyone blames the falcon for caring only about its own needs and

blabbering all the time, while the tree finds everyone else too noisy.

Finally, 'Revolution'! To save their common habitat, its inhabitants need to make decisions and start a radical change. Luckily, millenia of evolution has allowed the mice to type (using ink from the tree's fruits), and their writings start the revolution.

Time has flown for the participants as well. Jörgen weaves their stories into one poetic narrative.

• Finding common ground

Reflecting on the workshop, Petra explains: 'Rehearsing the Revolution is a storytelling game, in which we can experience reality from different perspectives and truths, and by doing that, discover what connects us'. 'In Rehearsing the Revolution we want to learn to listen to the voice of the other, to the voice of people but also to other forms of life such as the animals, flora and landscapes around us. We want to develop a new way of dialogue that helps us to have the courage to think in terms of connectedness rather than separation.'

SPACE focuses on polarized areas and situations: Roms in Hungary, the contested zones between Greece and Turkey in Cyprus, refugees in the Netherlands... Its goal is to use co-created stories in order to change reality, because 'reality is made up of stories': by changing the stories together, participants find common ground and realize that they can also change their common reality.

A day with the Science Fiction Committee

This article, written by Juliette Grossmann, is the result of a series of interviews and observations made during the last day of the CSF's residency in June 2022. Here are translated abstracts. You can read the entire article in french.

The Science Fiction Committee (Comité de Science-Fiction) is a collective creative practice that enables a group of students and researchers to create fictional futures with the help of artists. Each year, a theme is chosen to guide the imagination towards a sustainability issue. The goal is to invent paths for possible sustainable futures in which the viability of the planet, and all living things, are preserved. After several scientific conferences organised for the group throughout the year, they meet up in an unusual place (last year it was a convent, and this year, it's a zoo!) for an artistic residency. Artists are here to guide them, stimulate inspiration and open up the students' imagination. At the end, they share their fictions and performances with the public in order to expose scientists and nonscientists to new, more sustainable, and more poetic narratives.
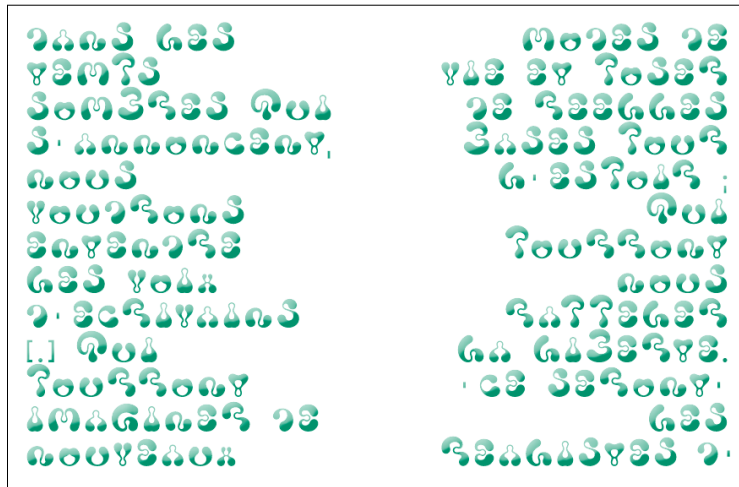
Page 4 of the Cahier du CSF 001, with a quote from a speech by Ursula K. Le Guin (2014): 'Hard times are coming, we will be wanting the voices of writers who can see alternatives to how we live now, and imagine some real grounds for hope ; we will need writers who can remember freedom. The realists of a larger reality'.

• Introduction

This morning of June 2022, I have an appointment at the Menagerie of the Jardin des Plantes in Paris to meet the team and participants of the Science Fiction Committee (CSF). Surrounded by animals waking up, I am welcomed by the researcher Anne-Caroline Prévot, initiator and manager of this unusual project supported by Sorbonne University's Institute for Environmental Transition. After several days of artistic and scientific residency, everyone is busy finalising their performances and works. They will present it to the public tonight at the Cité Fertile in Pantin, which is an open, shared place in the North of Paris themed around the 'sustainable city'. Some participants are rehearsing their text leaning against a pillar, others are reading pages from Miyazaki's *Nausicaä* to find one last inspiration, while a group is practicing improvised dance, choral singing and text reading in another room. However, in this effervescence, the supervisors, students and artists take the time to share with me what they experience here.

• Bringing art and science into dialogue

The originality of the project lies - among other things - in the way art and science are brought into dialogue. Anne-Caroline Prévot, director of research at the CNRS and researcher at the Museum of Natural History, explains two of the observations that motivated the project. The first observation is that the main paths and ways of thinking suggested by scientific rationality 'do not allow us today to address the challenges of the environmental crisis, and to consider the sustainable development of life on Earth'. The second observation is that mainstream science fiction 'is very limited when it comes to telling a new narrative about nature and biodiversity'. Science fiction, a literature format that gives us glimpses of possible futures, struggles to engage with today's ecological issues : 'It makes sense that artists don't know the extent and complexity of these problems', says Anne-Caroline.

• Opening up imagination, thinking outside the box

One of the steps to take in order to open up imagination is to engage in experiments, without knowing what will come out of them. While working on their imagined futures, students are not constrained by criteria of plausibility or desirability. The goal is not to identify futures that are likely to occur, but

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to open the mind and body to unsuspected possibilities, to be ready to be surprised. Imagination is key: 'Working with art and imagination is essential, we have to move beyond the predictive aspect of anticipating the future', says Anne-Caroline. She adds: 'When we imagine possible futures beyond the scientific framework, we have liberty to invent weird worlds. The idea was to create an environment conducive to experimentation.' Here, weird is not a bad word. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, weird means: 'very strange and unusual, unexpected'. It appears to be the only way to propose new civilizational paths for the future.

• Exploring paths for the future through storytelling

The relationship between science and fiction goes beyond artistic inspiration. The CSF highlights a lesser-known aspect of science: the importance of narrative. On the one hand, science formulates narratives: it makes us aware of our environment, and tells us something of our world. On the other hand, science opens up new perspectives and, by expanding our knowledge, brings to light the extent of what we do not know. In doing so, they create spaces of mystery that leave room for the imagination. The author Wilfried N'Sondé, who writes novels based on scientific discoveries, said it with a touch of irony during a round table: 'Science is convenient for fiction because scientists know very little, it's an open door to the story!'. Based on one scientific fact, a diversity of narratives can coexist, thus creating different visions of the world.

• Addressing the environmental transition: the problem of impact

By promoting environmental change, the Science-Fiction Committee - supported by the Institute for Environmental Transition - reminds us of the eminently political nature of science. However, there is one question that practitioners struggle to answer, and that is the question of impact, i.e. the effect produced by their project. Nowadays, impact is a key criterion for judging the value of a project: it must have a quantifiable impact, it must produce *something* that can be seen as a return on investment. And above all, it must be able to prove it. Has the content produced by the SFC really inspired new ecological paths for scientists and nonscientists? Quantifying and measuring this kind of effect is close to impossible. How can we be sure of impact when we are trying to do things as complex and ambitious as 'creating dialogue', 'integrating new audiences' and 'implementing new development trajectories'?

• Working with artists

The CSF is a space for artistic experimentation: 'Every year, we invent new formats with the artists,' Anne-Caroline tells me with enthusiasm. Laurent Kloetzer, sci-fi author and facilitator at the CSF, confirms that he can experiment with different tools and methods: 'It's very interesting for me to think about specific tools adapted to the audience and the situation'. As a founding member of the Zanzibar collective of sci-fi writers, it is all the more precious for him to have such spaces where he can create and test Protokools, which are writing exercises to imagine the future together. The important thing is to be able to work together in mutual respect. Or as Anne-Caroline, the head of the CSF, puts it: 'The main thing with artists is to leave them alone: to each their occupation'.

• The role of the group

Enthusiasm is clearly what brings people together here. To participate, students answered a call for applications. They were chosen for the diversity of their profiles: mixing disciplines, ages, genders, levels of training, etc. 'The purpose of the CSF is to cross disciplines, to mix, to blend, to mingle: today, decompartmentalization is a huge issue, in all aspects. This project is a positive outlier', says Anne Berchon, facilitator of forum theatre at the CSF and initiator of the CoTéAct collective.

At a time of rising anxiety regarding the environmental crisis, fuelled by stories of collapse and war, a space of trust and experimentation such as the CSF is precious. Félix, a participant and doctoral student, has 'regained faith in human beings', i.e. in our capacity to invent and face together the challenges that will come. He concludes: 'Whatever happens - and it will be terrible - now I believe that we can still find joy and sharing'.

Cassie Robinson: 'Collective imagination is a core part of any work around change'

Cassie Robinson holds strategy roles at Partners for a New Economy, Active Philanthropy and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. She is currently Innovator in Residence at Impact on Urban Health, a Policy Fellow at IIPP, a Fellow at the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence and runs the new Centre for Collective Imagination in Greenwich.

Interview conducted by Daniel Kaplan.

A lot of your work in the past few years has revolved around what you call 'collective imagination'. What do you mean by that, and how did you come to this in your own itinerary?

The work around collective imagination came to the forefront of my mind around 2018. I had done a lot of work in UK civil society (in its broadest sense) for quite some time and was feeling a bit underwhelmed by the level of ambition, the sense of what was possible. The last straw for me was whilst running a workshop with some civil society leaders, and realising that nobody in that room could imagine civil society existing beyond the role of delivering services – as if everyone had forgotten all the other ways we can be together !

It also coincided and resonated with Geoff Mulgan and Rob Hopkins' essays about the importance of imagination and the crisis of social imagination. I began thinking about the work that needed doing in that field. I didn't feel that it was the same as speculative design or strategic foresight, although there are links. For me, there was something about collective imagination as a practice, about the need for people to think and feel differently, not just through the lens of futures, but differently about who we are, why we exist, that kind of thing.

Whilst working at the National Lottery Community Fund, I had the opportunity to develop an 'Emerging Futures' program with the goal of building the capacity for collective imagination within place-based communities in the UK. It was initially launched in response to Covid-19, and invested in communities to bring forth their collective imaginations, to seed and centre new narratives and projects that could pattern entirely different futures.

What did you learn while running this program?

Firstly, people aren't often asked to imagine something new or different. This area has really been under-invested in. So there's often quite a lot of pre-work that needs doing for people to even get to that place – the conditions for collective imagination practice to take place really need cultivating. Time and resources are needed for this because everyone's exhausted or overwhelmed, or trying to survive. Switching into a space for collective imagination is quite a lot to ask, we shouldn't underestimate the work we need to do in advance.

I also learned that it is a practice. It's something to develop over time, like a muscle, and that requires ongoing investment and resources. Therefore, what are the containers and the sites that are needed for that to become a regular practice?

We also learned that there is a rigor and a craft to doing collective imagination. It's not as simple as giving communities some money, and letting them go off and imagine together. In the projects that worked well, the communities worked with other people who had those practices as a craft.

Finally, when you talk about imagination, people do think that you're talking about individuals and their creativity. People generally find this idea of the collective harder to grasp. For me, this really is about what the collective can imagine that an individual never can.

Has there been work that tried to take stock of all that experience, to build it into some commonly accessible knowledge?

There is a growing group of practitioners in the UK, however I still don't think the collective imagination practice is very developed. There's so much scope to do more ! Even with socially engaged artists, I still haven't seen many of them start from that worldview that we are all interdependent, starting their practice by not individualizing us. Which leads me to another lesson: there is an infrastructure aspect of this.

What do you mean by infrastructure?

Infrastructure is stuff that we invest in long term, and is often more hidden. It's the stuff that makes everything else work. For this work around collective imagination to really grow, be valued, and actually change things, we need something like this. In the same way that

people are growing infrastructure around deliberative democracy: we have physical spaces like town halls that we know are vital. What does that look like for our collective imagination? At the Lottery, for example, we brought in an archivist to start archiving the work, because the ideas that were coming out of different communities could be strengthened by each other.

You have left the National Lottery Fund. What are you up to now with this topic of collective imagination?

I still feel strongly that collective imagination is a core part of any work around change. Talking from a UK context, we're living in a world full of fatalism and overwhelm. This work around collective imagination is important because it can give hope and a sense of possibility and potential. It's important because how it's done and who gets to be in those spaces to collectively imagine can genuinely shift where we get to. We don't need the same imagination that has got us where we are today. The act of collective imagination, being practiced by very different people and communities to those that have come before, is key to us getting anywhere different.

Developing collective imagination as a practice is really important, but we also need different ideas. For example: how can the practice of collective imagination hone our skill at recognizing the seeds of alternatives that are emerging?

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) with whom I work with part-time has picked up the work I did at the Lottery. They have committed £1,000,000 to it over the next two years and we're hoping other funders will join too.

The plan is to do a few different things. We are going to hire someone to help grow the community of practice, learning from each other, sharing experiences, and bringing others in to learn the practices. It needs to grow as a field. We don't want to just have some really expensive consultants doing this work in ten years' time. The person looking after the community of practice will also have a fund to distribute micro-grants through - that people in the community can ask to use, for example to do field-trips, learning exchanges, content creation and so forth. We're also going to do more work around narratives, maybe working with more mainstream brands and partners, carrying a more public message that 'Other worlds are possible'.

We're also developing a funding program - for both place-based collective imagination experiments, and also thematic ones.

Finally, we're trying to build academic partnerships, in order to bring some rigor to how we collect evidence and evaluate these practices.

In your experience, what is the relationship, if any, between collective imagination and art?

They are definitely related. However... Maybe I'm a bit biased, because my background is in design, and design is about intent. Whereas when I think of the professionalised art world in the UK, especially in visual arts, I don't feel like many of them are that concerned by the world – a lot of the work feels quite insular and highly personal, which is a shame as artists are well placed to create collective imagination experiences. Recently, I went to something called the Dreamachine. Thirty of us sat there in a circle with headsets on. But how we made sense of that afterwards was not a collective experience. So there was nothing collective about it, other than just being there together.

Collective imagining needs to lead to some collective sense making. There needs to be a layer of interpretation based upon the collective imagining, that I think is more than, or different from art. But that's just my view.

When we think about imagination and real-world change, there seems to be a tension between two directions: is it about telling the right stories, about injecting the right messages in compelling stories that will reach the masses and change them? Or is it about putting people in a position where they're part of the writing of the story?

I think it's probably both, but they are slightly different. People that work in the art and craft of storytelling could come up with some new narratives, and think of clever ways to distribute them. Lots of people are talking about 'deep narrative' change. To me, that's just the same as advertising or marketing. Which is a valuable way of trying to create change, obviously depending on what the messages and the stories are. It may become more interesting when people use those approaches to prompt people in their everyday lives to open up their minds, and then follow up by bringing them together to take part in collective imagination.

This is what New Constellations did in Barrow. They posted billboards up around the town, put things in phone boxes and bus stops... They used some mainstream tactics around prompting people to think differently. But then they took people in the community through deep experiential processes around collective imagination. They also made sure to connect this work to real world change : through a partnership with the local council, which had a budget for urban renewal, the New Constellations community was able to inform how this budget is spent.

Barrows New Constellations poster

You could look at that work on the surface and find it no different from a consultation, a co-design workshop or a citizen assembly. But I believe that the deeper, more embodied, and longer duration of that work actually connected people to their place and to each other in a more profound way. That is what a lot of them said, it actually gave them a renewed sense of pride in their place, and a new sense of what was possible, rather than a 'yes or no' consultation exercise.

Does the process matter as much as the content?
     Content is important, but the process is just as important. If people were honest, they would say the ideas that come out of a lot of co-design processes are often really crap, but people get a lot from the process. I don't think it can only be about the process, though. I don't want to settle for that with collective imagination. What comes from that

process needs to be translated into something that can meaningfully change things.

How can or does that happen? Because in our experience, this is where the practitioners are most unsure.
     This is knowledge that we absolutely need, but we too are learning. One thing that we know makes the difference is : who are the initial partners? With the Barrow project, one of the partners was the local council that was investing in this as an experiment. The group of citizens that went through the New Constellations process still exists, and the council is taking forward the ideas that they came up with. That's the only example right now. Whether there is the money to take the stuff forward matters, and that has to do with the partnerships.

Is there a way of evaluating or measuring those things? Has there been work done on that?
     There's definitely anecdotal evidence. But that's why we're building the academic partnerships within the JRF, so we can work out what to measure. Do we measure wellbeing, social cohesion, sense of belonging? What are the things we could meaningfully measure from that kind of work? A lot of the great academics involved in the Creatures EU project are looking at this.

Project name :
Imagination Infrastructuring

Website :
https://www.imaginationinfrastructuring.com/

Description :
A growing network of people and organisations seeding and investing long-term in imagination infrastructuring, and practicing collective imagination.

Vera Sachetti: 'Through transdisciplinarity, we can find new ways to inhabit the planet'

Vera Sacchetti is a Basel-based design critic and curator. She serves in a variety of curatorial, research and editorial roles, most recently as program coordinator for the multidisciplinary research initiative Driving the Human (2020-2023). Sacchetti teaches at ETH Zurich and HEAD Geneva, and in 2020 joined the Federal Design Commission of Switzerland.

Interview conducted by Chloé Luchs.

Can you describe Driving the Human?

Driving the Human: Seven Prototypes for Eco- Social Renewal – an initiative of which I am Program Coordinator since 2020 – is a research initiative that will run for three years, one time only. It is jointly led by four partners based in Germany: the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design; the Center for Arts and Media in Karlsruhe (ZKM); Forecast, a mentorship program based in Berlin; and Acatech, the German National Academy of Science and Engineering.

Driving the Human was started around a shared ambition to connect and exchange knowledge between art, media and science. The initiator of the program, Forecast, brought the dimension around the importance of learning and unlearning by changing our ways of speaking about certain topics. From 2020 to 2023, Driving the Human has the aim to support, nourish and accompany seven different visions for inhabiting the planet and to transform these visions into tangible realities.

Why was this project started?

We felt we needed to get out of the old dichotomies, visions of the planet that we have been holding on to until now, because clearly, they've brought us to the moment of multiple crises that we find ourselves in today. It is the project's belief that through transdisciplinary ways of working, by connecting perspectives and learning new ways of speaking to each other, we can find new paths of thinking about how to inhabit the planet. How can we ask better questions? How can we come up with different, much needed narratives? This is what we want to explore.

How does the project take place?

The project lasts for three years. During the first year, in 2020, we did a digital launch event (right in the middle of the pandemic) carried out by our partners. Together, we invited a variety of thinkers, artists, scientists, economists to reflect on what is needed and what is urgent today. The discussions varied from a range of subjects such as technology, economy, human and non-human perspectives, access, education, knowledge, among others.

Based on those discussions, we came up with the premise of the project: an open call for visions of sustainable ways to inhabit the planet. We launched the call in different parts of the world and received more than a thousand applications from 99 countries. From those applications, we chose twenty-one, and we invited them to present their work in Berlin last October 2021 as 'visions for eco-social renewal'. It is also our belief that these proposals cannot live only in the heads of their makers. They need to be tested out with an audience, with real people, experts and other creatives. After the experience in October and from the twenty-one projects, we chose seven to proceed to the next stage of the project. Since then, we've been supporting those seven projects through residencies, connecting them with networks of scientists, artists and creatives, supporting how they want the project to grow, and generally nourishing their idea to become something tangible.

On November 25–27, 2022 we will be presenting the results of a year of *nourishment*. The results, presented at silent green in Berlin, are meant to be conversation starters. The idea is that even when Driving the Human ends, the seven prototypes should continue to live on.

How is the project funded?

The project is supported by the German Ministry of the Environment. The seven prototypes we are following have two years with us and one year where we focus specifically on their growth and development. We focus on this because once the funding is over, we hope that the prototypes will have encountered enough people and will have created their own network so they can live on. We want these visions, prototypes, ideas to be taken further and take up different meanings and different forms. The idea is that it's not just about what you see, but also about the invisible connections and relationships as well as the web of connections created around a similar objective.

(c) Camille Blake

Do you have an example of what these projects look like?

For example, Sedekah Benih is a project that comes from Bandung in West Indonesia, and the team running the project is composed of artist Vincent Rumahloine, community leader Mang Dian, and a large network in Bandung and in Indonesia. They started a community garden during the pandemic, which quickly became a network of community gardens that act as meeting points for people to exchange knowledge about plants and gardening techniques.

This project recuperated connections to ancient agricultural techniques that have been erased by colonization in Indonesia, and spread it again. The ancient ways of working with plants pre-colonization have a lot to do with music, and include the use of a specific instrument called the Karinding. Sedekah Benih recuperated the knowledge of playing Karinding in specific ways during the planting and during the harvesting. These community gardens also became a meeting point for people part of a demographic population that might not talk to each other, as some of the participants belong to the LGBTQ community and are not accepted in this part of the country or, they might belong to different social classes, etc.

With Sedekah Benih, the local impact is huge and the exchange of knowledge visible : from the community leader to the scientist, from the botanist to the artist, together, they are trying to find ways in which these spaces can continue to be productive, creative and free for imagination and knowledge exchange.

Another project that we are working with is called Monsters and Ghosts of the Far North. It's run by AlternA, a team of two architects, Andra Pop-Jurj and Lena Geerts Danau, from London and Belgium respectively. They have been developing an alternative cartography of the Arctic territories. In a time of climate change and political tensions, the Arctic has become a very contested territory – it always has been, but even more recently so.

Traditionally, mapping is a way of othering and creating a distance to the things that you are seeing. They are working from non-human perspectives to create a connection to the other actors from this territory and to understand its many layers differently. Last October, they presented a video game from a simulation generated by data that had been collected. The video game presented how you could engage with this territory through the eyes of, let's say, a Methanobacterium stuck in the ice, a sheet of ice, a bird, a fish... By playing this game, you can understand this territory in a more embodied way – a way that is not distant to you, a way in which you can experience it.

(c) Camille Blake

How would you define the method?

The method is present in the overall structure of the project. It uses strategies developed by Forecast and builds on the importance of collaboration. Collaboration in the way guest experts are invited, in the way in which the projects are presented to the public (at regular intervals so that they can be tested, questioned and probed), and in how these projects situate themselves in the public setting and how they progress, or not.

Also, the four partners behind Driving the Human are shaping the project constantly by choosing the priorities and bringing their ideas to the table. It is through a collaborative effort that ultimately the prototypes are chosen or not. These decisions are informed by a cohort of experts invited at significant steps in the process.

How do you evaluate if your project works/worked, or not?

There are no boxes to be ticked. I think the project needs to make sense for the goals we set at Driving the Human. The selected group of seven prototypes is quite an international group, and the themes that are touched upon range on a diversity of issues. From indigenous knowledge to cartography and mapping; from non-human agency to ambitiously deviant uses of AI. We have a very technological side and a hands-on, making-type side. We have a scientific side with for example the prototype of Human-Bacteria Interfaces, and an artistic side with The Backpack of Wings project, which gives inner life to Jonas, a migrating stork.

If we pre-create borders for ourselves when we interact with these types of projects, we will never be surprised. There are already too many preset ways of seeing the world. If we don't allow ourselves to be surprised, we will never get out of the dichotomy we questioned at the start of Driving the Human. Whatever the goal is, it has to respect the ambition of those diverse perspectives. I would say that the ultimate goal of the project is to support visions for eco-social renewal. The prototypes need to tick that box, but it's a very big, vague, and gigantic box.

(c) Camille Blake

What change would you like the project to produce?

Because the project is funded by the German Ministry of the Environment, the ambition is big. It's not a project that we want to keep exclusive: if the government is supporting a project like this, it means that the results of Driving the Human will reach the level of policymaking, and government officials. Of course, we already know that they are already having conversations about these topics, but it's also very good that they are willing to experiment and to support a process that is so open-ended and empirical. It's a good thing that Driving the Human will reverberate at those levels, it needs to be a conversation starter to change policies.

What publics do you work with, why, and what do they do together?

The audience of our project is young, in their late teens and twenties. They are also a generation of young people that do not feel represented by the political class. If you inspire a younger generation as well as a generation already determining today's culture and politics, and if you make sure to reach a variety of age ranges and social backgrounds, clearly these types of projects will echo and inspire youth to also get involved in change-making.

Driving the Human is about showing possibilities, it's not about finding the solution like a discourse that goes towards solutionism. It is not

about finding the perfect five-point plan – we have seen that these approaches don't work. It's about opening up, and allowing people to dream, to be inspired, to think of different narratives, to tell themselves and tell others different stories.

And, why not? We have a young generation and an official ministry supporting the project so we are getting attention from different places in the spectrum... And then, who knows what's going to happen?

How can you tell a project succeeded?

When you have a funding body, you need to conduct reporting and evaluations. The easiest of these are the ones that measure how many people we've reached with our events, how many people follow us on Instagram, how many people read our newsletter... In this sense, the prototypes at the heart of Driving the Human participated in several different exhibitions in different parts of the world; they also did residencies in places like Iceland and research trips to Peru. And maybe that's a measure of success.

However, I think the measure of success is ultimately something that you have to agree on with whoever wants to support you. Because you will always be asked for guarantees of success. When you are going into sets of experiments, there are no guarantees of success, so if people are open enough to support this kind of work, I suppose they can question what the traditional guarantees of success are. If you are okay to question methods of doing, you also have to question how to measure its success.

Are there references you'd like to share

The major theoretical reference behind Driving the Human was Critical Zones, the exhibition and research project at ZKM. Bruno Latour's ideas, as they manifested in [Critical Zones](), were definitely a starting point. One that informed the making of the first festival of Driving the Human, at the start of the whole initiative

Project name
Driving the human

Website
[drivingthehuman.com]()

Description
Driving the Human is a catalyst for experimentation, shaping sustainable and collective futures that combine science, technology, and the arts in a transdisciplinary and collaborative approach.

From 2020 to 2023, the scientific and artistic collaboration Driving the Human developed seven tangible prototypes responding to complex contemporary scenarios. The project is led by four partner institutions: Acatech, Forecast, the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design, and ZKM.

Throughout the project development, the community of participants, experts, and the larger audience that Driving the Human brings together explore diverse phenomena such as the social impact of global warming, energy cycles and technology-driven disruptions, the impact of collective decision making, and contemporary processes of exchanging values and objects. The results of these explorations deploy strategies for action in the form of physical experiences, with a strong individual and collective impact. Ultimately, they will create tools that enable new ways of envisioning and inhabiting the world.

conclusion

Laying the first stone of a field of practice

After almost a year of designing the experimentation, organising gatherings, and studying the issues raised during the course of the Collective Creative Practices project, time has come for us to lay the first stone of the field of practice we are trying to create. This booklet, made up of the 15 articles that we published in 2022, combined with the Library of Collective Practices accessible online, gives an overview of the different practices and practitioners that we encountered. Throughout our research, debates and encounters, we identified three main concerns (hence the three parts of this booklet) that run through these practices of collective imagination: the use of narratives to open up to new possibilities; the aim for political transformations; and the necessity (as well as the challenges) of leaning on and creating collectives. These concerns come with common issues and unresolved questions:

- Can we evaluate the effects of collective creative practices on parti- cipants? And more generally, on society?

- In a world of storytelling, can collective creative practices escape from instrumentalisation (and therefore reach their political ambition of change)?

- Can the different collective creative practices unite around a common intention, and therefore scale up towards larger transforma- tions? Is it desirable?

We do not hope to give definite answers to these difficult questions, but rather to create spaces for debate in order to enrich the practices and enable new paths of actions. The aim is to help the practices define, legitimise and recognise themselves.

Because other organisations and projects share the objective of creating a field of practice (or equivalently, creating infrastructures for collective imaginations), we want to form an international group of practitioners and researchers to engage with in shared reflections and dialogue on our diffe- rent approaches, building the common grounds for a community of practice.

The constitution of this network will lead to an international event in 2024, and to a common publication. In practice, while continuing the actions undertaken in 2022 (international scientific watch, agoras, interviews, articles), we want to:

- Create a typology of practices;

- Continue to identify common issues and lessons learned;

- *Tell the stories* of the practices we encounter to make them more accessible (or even reusable) while enhancing the richness of expe- riences and processes.