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Topsoil

OF

COLLECTIVE
LEARNING

QUALITIES

OF COLLECTIVE LEARNING

As a curatorial and research collective, an important aspect to our work is forming encounters with other collectives to learn from their modes of collaboration. This pamphlet emerged out of a series of planned conversations with different artists and collectives throughout the year 2022. From these conversations we learned that there are many reasons for gathering and many ways of working collectively, as well as a multitude of conditions and intentions that shape collective practices and endeavours.

As part of our process as a collective, in order to help us digest what we discover and learn, we often create visual documentations, representations and categorisations of thoughts and moments that might otherwise become untraceable. This exercise in translating our conversations into—what we have come to term as—maps, has become central to our work. Therefore, in a similar vein, for this publication we have created an inventory of qualities that characterise collective work based on our series of conversations.

We met the artists and collectives presented in this pamphlet without knowing where the project itself would go, but with an intention of openness and curiosity to allow for encounters to flow idiosyncratically from one group to another. It was nothing short of beautiful that we were met with similar stances of openness, curiosity, and a wish to exchange without clear agenda from those who participated in these conversations. Later, when reviewing our encounters, we realised that for all of the participating collectives there was something present yet elusive that we wished to learn

from them. Something that had struck us about how these people worked, conversed, or thought collectively. This “something” we here call quality. We appreciated certain elements about each collectives’ ways of doing, elements that were not always possible or easy to grasp.

Yet still, we wanted to find a way for our collective to absorb and be transformed by the elements of these practices.

As a collective we wish to be porous and for our ways of doing to be actively influenced through our relations. By conversing, we slowly teased out what we wanted to absorb and integrate into our practice. We approached each distinct collectives’ qualities, deciphering what was important to us through images, associations, descriptions, and thus translating them through different registers. You will find the results of this in this pamphlet.

We like to think that transformation can be exercised. We have therefore turned the identified qualities into exercises that we believe can help to rehearse different conditions and aspects of collective work.

The conversations that form the basis for this publication were held in the context of School of Commons*, an initiative for self-organised learning, where we had the chance to continue our research on friendship as methodology for Experimental Pedagogies. For our project, we met with the collectives *Panta Rhei*, *Just Listening*, *How to Love in Many Ways* and *Ubungxenywe*. This pamphlet is a way of saying thank you for letting us learn from you.

CONVERSATION

Rabbit hole



Casual thinking
Fragile theorizing
Enthusiastic flow
Sense of clarity

Take a map.

Draw lines and shapes freely onto it.

Go to the mapped place and try to follow your lines and shapes.

Get into a conversation with whoever you meet on your way, with walls, grass, clouds, humans, ideas.

STRUCTURES
(STEP BY STEP)

Trip to the pub after finishing a project



Micro-steps
Forward looking
Joy of planning and designing together
Commitment and pragmatism towards meeting expectations
Sense of clarity

Get together.

Each person has 3 minutes to talk about what they love about each other or the collective as a whole.

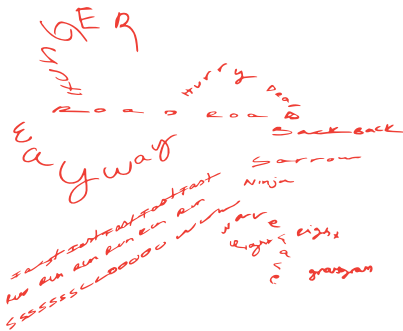
Each person has 3 minutes to talk about what their dreams for the collective would be.

Each person has 3 minutes to contemplate what can be done to reach these dreams pragmatically.

Spend 15 minutes brainstorming, doing research, creating shared folders/documents and creating to-do lists in order to take the first steps to reaching these dreams.

TRANSLATION

A group of people playing ball



Alternatives to representation
Movement across multiple forms

Get together.

Each person listens to their surroundings.

Each person follows a sound that attracts their attention and draws its quality.

Each person looks at all the drawings and connects words to them.

Create a collective poem from your drawings.

Read the poem to each other, feel into it and tell each other what images come up or where in your body you most sense it.

SILENCE

Sunday morning calmness



Slow rhythm
Every voice has a space
Physical presence
Dialogue with the environment
Generosity with time

Observe your own breathing.

Become aware of the sounds around you, just listen to them for a while.

As soon as you feel like it, focus on the sound that has most attracted your attention.

Connect to the sound.
Create resonance

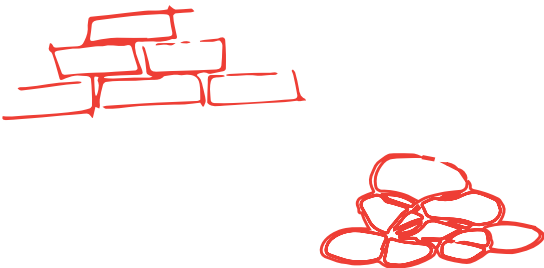
Reinforcing means to sustain and strengthen vocally or mentally.

If you lose touch with the sound, you can wait in silence until another sound attracts your attention.

Place-making exercise
based on Environmental Dialogue
by Pauline Oliveiros (1975 / 1996)

DIFFERENCE

On top of a mountain, looking back, thinking about how you got there



Opening and holding
Communicative about process
Construction and dispersion
Swiftly changing methods
Meta-reflections

Lie down on the ground and close your eyes.

Make sure your feet are hip width apart your arms are at your sides. Begin to take deep breaths, sending each breath down to a different body part.

You may start with your toes. See how that body part feels and try to mentally sketch the shape of that body part. Would you sketch your feet as a rectangle or your belly as a circle?

Try to keep it simple and remember the shapes as you go from your toes to the top of your head.

Keep on doing this until you breathe into all parts of your body.

Try to imagine all the shapes you have drawn and pile them on top of each other. Observe what your body could look like on an alterante plane. Take one last breath and as you breathe out blow onto this pile of shapes. Watch your shapes float around.

* School of Commons (SoC) is an initiative dedicated to the study and development of self-directed Peer Learning, located at the Zurich University of the Arts. SoC represents an international community of practitioners, artists, designers and researchers who focus on matters surrounding the production and mediation of knowledge.

SoC LAB series

Qualities for collective learning

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