

Kind of a
Collective



Introduction

Institutional language creates the illusion of collectivity—deploying words like community, diaspora, resilience, and care to name entities and processes that its logic of power cannot entirely capture. Repeatedly invoking these terms in exhibitions has a function of flattening the very dynamic and emancipatory potential contained within them. As artists contort themselves to create work that speaks to the experience of marginalization within the cultural sphere, they simultaneously grapple with the loss of what could have been, while perpetually gesturing to “other worlds” that may yet come. Lan “Florence” Yee’s exhibition, *What Academia Has Done to Me* articulates this near-untenable position, between tokenization and co-option, in its inaugural question: “what do we lose when we describe ourselves?”

Accompanying the exhibition is *Kind of a Collective*, a six-week knowledge-sharing project tackling issues of creative labour, sustainability, boundaries, funding, led by artists, curators, and cultural workers. We were “kind of” a collective because we joined together through a common interest in the health of our art communities, but had never met before, and would diverge again afterwards. This program functioned as a complementary antithesis to the anxieties and questions asked by the show’s textile artwork.

What Academia Has Done to Me comprised largely of introspective gestures that dealt with

the contradictions of institutional critique through gendered and classed labour as a queer artist in the Cantonese diaspora. Lan meticulously embroidered words into fabric, teasing out their poetic absurdities, leaving the raw edges of each page to be felt. *Kind of a Collective* was an expansion of this practice in a participatory form.

Artists have always formed collectives, but have lacked the tools and blueprints to sustain themselves, in both personal and communal wellness. Particularly for marginalised groups, the pressure of being and producing “enough” with the double-edged sword of visibility can create expectations that undermine frameworks of care. For Lan, this workshop series was a practice of abandoning the idea that any single artistic project can remake the world—choosing instead to see ourselves as part of a larger ecosystem, able to reshape and redistribute itself again and again.

The ten people we brought together were invested in collectivity, yet struggled with questions of labour, sustainability, and marginalization. Through a variety of strategies presented in this publication, we lingered on the uncomfortable and perhaps generative sentiments that emerge from trying to collect each other across many axes of difference. Resources are scarce, and the lingering traces of hurt, conflict, burnout, and self-doubt are equally as present in movement-building work as the lofty goals to which we aspire. The structure of this six-week program, as well as the accompanying publication, thus alternates between actionable strategies and useful tools, to more reflexive exercises in articulating the underlying tensions which can be so difficult to name.

The unique challenges of community engaged practices were known by both the facilitators and participants of this program. We came together, not to commiserate, but because

we believed we had a better chance to move through these challenges as a collective than on our own. We are immensely grateful to the participants of *Kind of a Collective* for their enthusiasm, openness, and patience. Thank you for participating in this pilot project with three pilots. We hope you enjoyed our time together as we enjoyed spending it with you. Whether this was the inaugural or only edition of *Kind of Collective* remains to be seen. In the meantime, we have this publication as both a keepsake and a small offering to other collectives to continue building upon.

Beyond tools presented to address the practical elements like budgeting, grants, boundaries, accountability, and governance, we also hope that readers of this publication are able to connect on some level with the myriad unresolved questions that stay after our time together. What is the future you are reaching toward and how do you take steps towards it? What are you unable or unwilling to do alone? What do you want to do otherwise? The rich contributions of our program participants suggest many openings toward exploring these queries. This record of our many conversations hopes to distill the unfathomable scale of change for a just future into smaller, quieter gestures and ways of relating, grounded in more immediate realities, that may ultimately stay with us longer. By means of this publication, we hope to be companions to you, dear reader, as you think, feel and dream your way to renewed ways of collecting ourselves.

- Vince, Lan, & Mattia

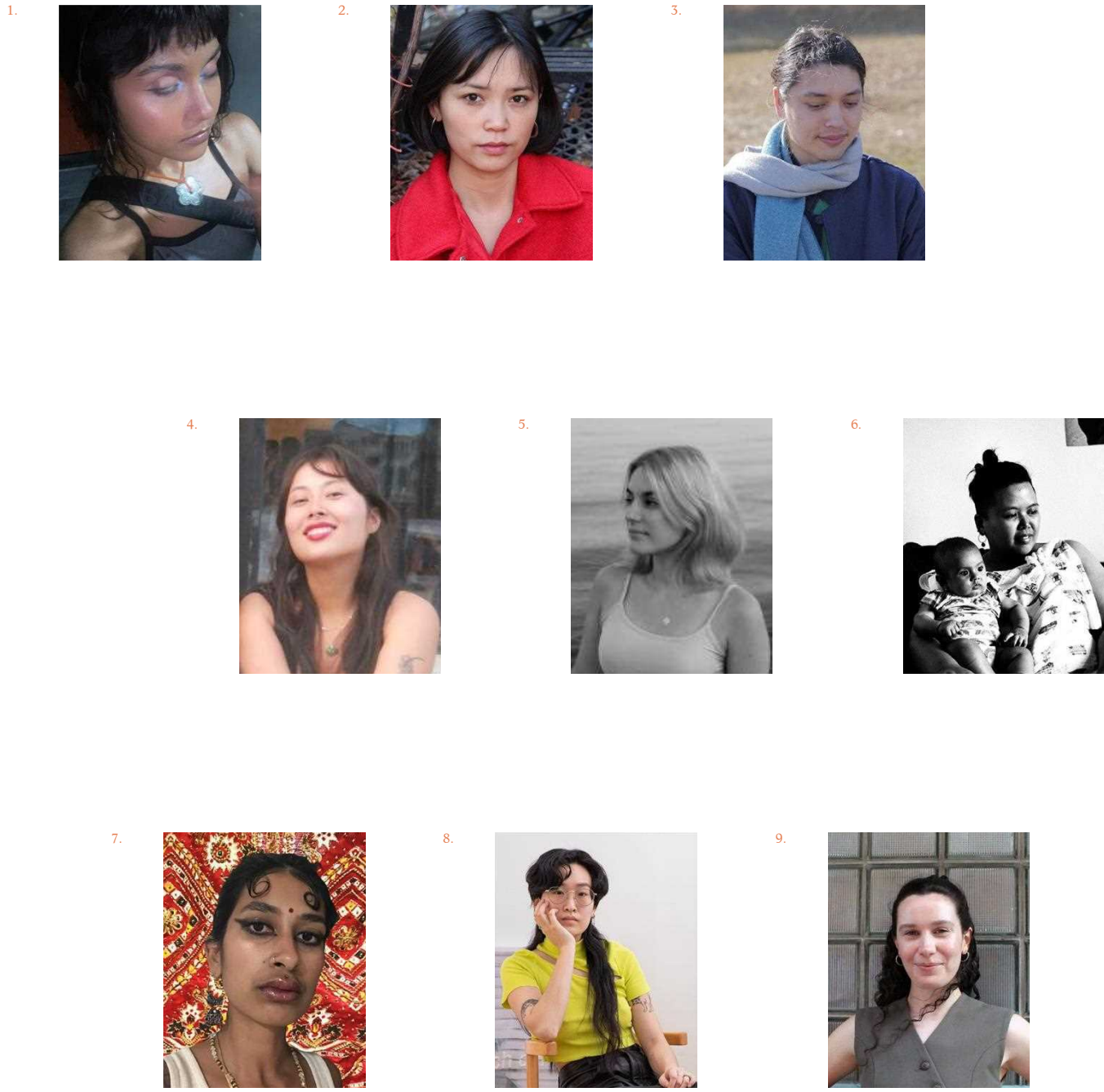
Biographies

NAIMAH AMIN (they/them) is a visual artist and researcher. Their most recent projects touch on topics, such as fiction emerging from intergenerational storytelling and cultural identity examined through commonplace domestic objects. The anecdotal often serves as an impetus for examining wider social issues in their practice as both a visual artist and a researcher. They are currently interested in transitioning their practice in a more collectivist direction.

Born in Nanchang, China in 1995, **DÉDÉ CHEN** now lives in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal where she creates works about the performance of filiation. As an anthropologist, filmmaker and author, she is interested in autoethnography as a source of creative writing. Following the rise of anti-Asian racism during the pandemic and the Adoptee month in 2022, she co-founded Soft Gong Collective. We are artists and researchers who share a common identity, adopted from China to Québec (Canada). Through this collective, we want to build a socio-cultural bridge between our adopted land, Québec, our country of origin, China, and Asian communities. Since 1990, we have had 7,000 Chinese adoptees in Québec and more than 110,000 scattered across 14 Western countries, which is why we decided to come together to meet the needs of this community.

FILI 周 GIBBONS (we/they/them)—interdisciplinary artist, musician, and recording engineer. A lifelong cello player and sound creator from Guelph, Ontario (Canada), their artistic practice centers around exploratory sound projects drawing from music, audiovisual production, speculative fiction, and embodied memory practices. Founding the audiovisual production company Studio Apothicaire in 2018, they often work across a range of community and professional contexts to support and mediate plural voices, expressions, and sonic experiences. As well as leading classes and workshops, they collaborate with other sound and video artists, drawing on listening, memory and intuition as guiding forces in creation practices.

THAI HWANG-JUDIESCH is a writer and multimedia artist, currently living, loving, and creating in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal.



1. NAIMAH AMIN 2. DÉDÉ CHEN 3. FILI 周 GIBBONS 4. THAI HWANG-JUDIESCH 5. CLARA LOU MICHEAU 6. DEANN LOUISE C. NARDO 7. SRIDEVI 8. LAN "FLORENCE" YEE 9. MATTIA ZYLAK

CLARA LOU MICHEAU (she/her) is a multidisciplinary visual artist and community organizer. She creates ceramic works about the self, society, and nature. In parallel, she co-founded the *Artists for Climate Justice* collective, was involved at the local and regional level of *La planète s'invite à l'université*, worked for two years for *Concordia's Fine Arts Student Association*, and has volunteered her time for *La Terrière*, *Centre d'art Rozynski*, *Art Hives* and others. She also posts memes on instagram (@cerameme). Micheau cares about art accessibility and creation as a tool to bring people together and mobilize them.

My name is **DEANN LOUISE C. NARDO** (they/she/siya). I am a mother, a poet, cultural worker, and interwoven artist. I show up for my community as mycelium. I know this is a buzzword nowadays but I will take the cringe hit of using this metaphor. I will use it as a chaser for every time we've been made to compete, "pull ourselves by the bootstraps" or internalize our oppression. I want to connect through shared values, metabolize lessons and energies, decompose and regenerate nutrients for/with my community. I see the possibilities and seeing is enough to access what was previously unimaginable.

VINCE ROZARIO is an independent critic, curator, writer, arts administrator, and community organizer based in Tkarón:to/Toronto. They have presented curatorial projects at the Art Gallery of Guelph, Xpace Cultural Centre, the Gladstone Hotel and the Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre. They have published criticism in *C Magazine*, *Momus*, and *ArtsEverywhere*, and contributed to exhibition texts for Whippersnapper Gallery, InterAccess and Gallery 44. They were the winner of the 2018 C New Critics Award and the 2021 Middlebrook Prize for Young Canadian Curators. They are a co-founder of *Bricks and Glitter*, a grassroots, intergenerational QTBIPOC arts festival, and currently serve on the board of Whippersnapper Gallery.

Welcome! I'm **SRIDEVI** (they/them), a creator & community care worker that is currently settled in Tioh'tià:ke (Montréal). I am a queer and trans person of Indian descent with studies in psychology, sociology and studio arts. My artistic and research practices explore the cloudy in-between areas of divinity/mundanity manifest, corporeality and embodiment, and (tr) ancestral tradition. I hope to play within these themes through research and storytelling, by turning to South Asian (her)stories, mythologies, and folk art in order to offer transformational healing and reclaiming back to our shared roots.

LAN "FLORENCE" YEE is a visual artist and serial collaborator based in Tkaronto/Toronto and Tiohtià:ke/Mooniyang/Montréal. They collect text in underappreciated places and ferment it until it is too suspicious to ignore. Lan's work has been exhibited at the Darling Foundry (2022), the Toronto Museum of Contemporary Art (2021), the Art Gallery of Ontario (2020), the Textile Museum of Canada (2020), and the Gardiner Museum (2019), among others. Along with Arezu Salamzadeh, they co-founded the Chinatown Biennial in 2020. They obtained a BFA from Concordia University and an MFA from OCAD University.

MATTIA ZYLAK is an arts worker based in Tiohtià:ke/Mooniyang/Montréal. She holds a BFA in Art History from Concordia University, an MFA in Criticism & Curatorial Practice from OCAD University and an MA in Arts Leadership from Queen's University where she researched alternative forms of governance (or *ungovernance*) within the context of Canadian artist-run centres. She has worked at non-profit art galleries including SBC Gallery of Contemporary art (Montréal) and Gallery TPW (Toronto). Mattia is currently the General Co-director & Operations at La Centrale galerie Powerhouse (Montréal), an artist-run centre dedicated to multidisciplinary and intersectional feminist practices.

NASHWA LINA KHAN (she/her) is a community educator, facilitator, and researcher. She is also a writer and poet and occasionally dabbles in installation and archive that uses narrative methodologies. She holds a Masters of Environmental Studies from York University with areas of concentration focused on narrative methodologies, community and public health, refugee, and forced migration studies. She is currently a PhD student in the faculty of Environment and Urban Change and curating/supporting the On Display/For Review artist residency at whippersnapper gallery. You can find her cultural commentary on the podcast *Habibti Please*.

SERENE MITCHELL

SELENA PHILLIPS-BOYLE

Week 1: Manifesto

What values will inform your future collective?

During our first in-person meeting, we got the opportunity to share space alongside nènè myriam konaté's workshop: *the clapback manifest(o)*. Surrounded by the scents of oil diffusers and nènè's enveloping voice, we were asked to reflect on the origins of our name, our relations, our hopes, and how they carry us forward. It became both an exercise in introspection and one in burgeoning trust, gauging what felt safe enough to share. Some of us were able to ask for what we needed. Some of us decided to remain quiet. All of us received an opportunity to grapple with the fault lines between our desires and our lived experiences.

NÈNÈ MYRIAM konaté is a child of ayiti + mali's diasporas living in tiohtià:ke/mooniyang/montréal. their transdisciplinary practice is concerned with somatic knowledge(s) + storytelling. nènè is the founder of *the clap back* + author of *somatic semantics*. Their writing has appeared in *les corps du texte* + *urgency reader*. they have led workshops, developed curatorial projects + created text-based works for the university of puerto rico rio piedras, articule artist run centre, never apart + aka artist run centre. nènè has also completed residencies at *ada x + artexte* + *sbc gallery of contemporary art*. if everything we want is on the other side of fear, their practice delves into the discomfort we experience when moving through fear – toward desire. through dialogue-based interventions, nènè invites you to consider incongruities between the futurities we seek to manifest in order to shatter illusions of harmony + hold space for divergence.

→ *KIND OF A COLLECTIVE* SYLLABUS, AVAILABLE FOR THE PUBLIC TO TAKE HOME. DESIGNED BY SITA SINGH, 2023. PHOTO BY LAURENCE POIRIER.



NAIMAH

nènè's prompts elicited in me many emotional reactions, some of which were pleasant and gratifying, whilst others coasted on the realm of (necessary) discomfort. The prompt "Who do I love? How do I love them?" functioned especially as a pivotal introspective halt. Knowing that we would eventually be discussing the politics, finances, strategies, and anxieties related to community organizing, reflecting on these questions allowed me to concretize the core values of what occasions in me the desire to transition my practice in a more collectivist direction.

We have all witnessed 'care' and 'community' become (over)used over the years by artists and institutions alike to display sensitivity and intentionality in response to vividly deepening social disparities inside and outside art bubbles. Initially, because I entered the visual arts world through academia from a low-income immigrant background, I would find myself often astounded by the former's ignorance of how material reality affects art production—despite, ironically, artists' obsession with materiality. There seems to be a disjunction between the exhibition of care and community and the enactment of such values. How do I resist these patterns of performativity in my work? In what ways can I create and support caring environments that reflect my personal conceptions of love that are inevitably informed by the marginalizations I experience?

I found foundational answers to these questions residing in nènè's prompts. How I show love to the ones I love depends largely on *their* needs and desires—not my projections of them. Responding adequately and lovingly entails building a relationship based on trust, curiosity, and attentiveness. These values can be brought from my personal life to future community-based practices.



↑ PHOTO OF TWO PARTICIPANTS DURING THE FIRST WORKSHOP.
PHOTO BY LAN "FLORENCE" YEE



THAI

What is the story spun by the words that inhabit you?

My words are always trying to get to something honest no matter how painful. They try to make room for me so the stories can have some space and be expansive enough for me to live in. My words are playful. They break me open and put me back together again.

When are you glad to hear your name?

When it is dripping in love.

DÉDÉ

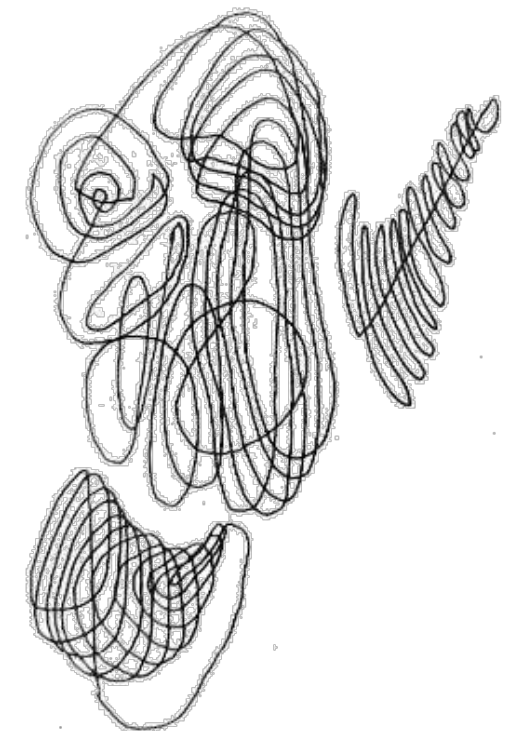
Since high school, I have always believed that it was normal to do volunteer work. Being raised as a Chinese woman in a white family in rural Québec, I wanted to obtain good grades and please everyone through a normative curriculum. This so-called volunteering became invisible labor. Then, the work became more and more political. I devoted all of my time to a historically discriminated community in North America: the Chinese diaspora. I no longer visited my elderly neighbours' houses to play piano, went door to door to gain donations for the Canadian Kidney Cancer Foundation, or helped the International Ethnographic Film Festival of Québec programming committee. I gave my time to help Chinese students at Université Laval and the community of adoptees. I offered art therapy sessions, anthology publishing, conferences; I was underpaid and accepted it because the cause was worth the effort, I told myself. If I do not devote myself, the injustices caused by my absence will be my fault, the guilt gnawed at me, the suffering inner child spoke and breathed louder. I suffered a loyalty complex because of my adoptee identity. I feel I am not going to be loved if I am not involved in my community. Shame, guilt, duty, on repeat.

An emergent QTIBPOC director contacted me to hang out, I think she wanted to be my friend. When we arrived, they talked about their depression and desire to find their birth parents. I referred them to NPO's and collec-

tives. I was very disappointed that our relationship was based on this communality, but not surprised. I am tired of talking about my own experience, so I immediately just nodded my head and switched to a care worker posture. Because it was Friday night at the theater and I just wanted to enjoy my free evening once a week. This type of situation makes me feel sorry, the urge to set boundaries between us, and again the task to create a proper discussion space. A symptom of burnout mentioned by Lan's presentation was to not feel the difference between colleagues and friends. I felt I had lost joy, pleasure; life spheres were becoming too intimate. Wait, what is a life sphere if it overflows in your agenda, like a flood in your house? My life is a calendar marked with coloured blocks.

I try to contribute and found collectives with a social or artistic vocation. Since then, I've felt so drained: dark circles under my eyes, copious coffee drinking, little sleep, euphoria at night, ecstasy in the morning. It was nènè myriam konaté's workshop, *the clap-back manifest(o)* that made me realize that I was constantly working for free through a system.

CLARA



What is your name, who named you, how and why?

Clara, Clara Lou Michéan

What we believe what we CAN & CANNOT embody due to our name and realities

Get out of dualism, open awareness to be everything else

name → point de référence, not flattening gen

DEANN

What are you unable or unwilling to do alone? What do you want to do otherwise?

I admit that I am unwilling to do art alone. Every time I sit down to write, scribble, dribble paint, dabble with scrambling words, I am surrounded by all the visual phrases, auditory pauses and stroked wisdom of my ancestors. Not just blood but by the electricity coursing through the veins of my creative spirit line. An artist I saw as a kid had a specific colour combination that has never left me. The sun graphs light through a tree's leaves like no other. A phrase in a mandatory reading book devastated me. A collection of work from a metal artist left me speechless. A swirl on marbled paper made my ideas of gender quake. I am surrounded.

I was always afraid of the loneliness of a blank page, afraid of leaving perfection, because perfection is cozy, so you stay put. You wrap yourself tight in it until you're dust. Until there's nothing left of you. If I let myself be heard, seen or perceived then perfection slips away and demands being chased. Yet. I am surrounded. The ones who surround me will not allow me to be pulverized. I am held. I am interlaced.

How do I venerate the ways at which I am never doing art alone? How I am fortified and conducted, guided by more than my own hubris. What are the words I have to say, what do I have to make to give thanks to the web of hands that dream me up and shape me? There is nothing louder than a pebble dropped in water. Do. The only way to reciprocate is to make a ripple. You become the ancestor for someone else, cascading waves that you will never see.

Where are you when you feel loved? How do you care for these places?

I am in my body, in my ecosystem, my chosen time, my nature and sphere of love. I care for these places softly, gently, and tenderly but thoroughly.

SRIDEVI

What values will inform your future collective?

Playful & experimental
Integrity and honesty
Inclusivity + accessibility
A little bit of chaos!
Thoughtfulness
Curiosity or openness
Colour! Vibrance!
Interdependence

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Week 2: Community

Who are we accountable to?

Our co-facilitator Vince guided us online through discussions of community belonging, agency, and a practical demonstration of community power mapping. They showed us a graph that plotted organizations and individuals based on their proximity to our values on one axis and their influence in our communities on the other. The exercise is meant to redirect our focus onto the allyships we should be cultivating, and away from the deterrents that do not share similar goals. We asked ourselves what structural issues, power dynamics, and opportunities already exist; what it means to be aligned with our goals; and which partners we can shift towards our desired changes.

FILI 周

In KoaC we loved our reflection that we don't need to be big or impactful - it's ok to work small with a few people in our community, sustainable and developing slowly. It was a reflection that we are free to think in terms of creating a collective space 'serving' a particular demographic group or label, but we also don't have to. We can be free in how we think about community. Maybe it's helpful to think of collectivity as an 'organism' - to be with who/what we connect naturally and go from there...

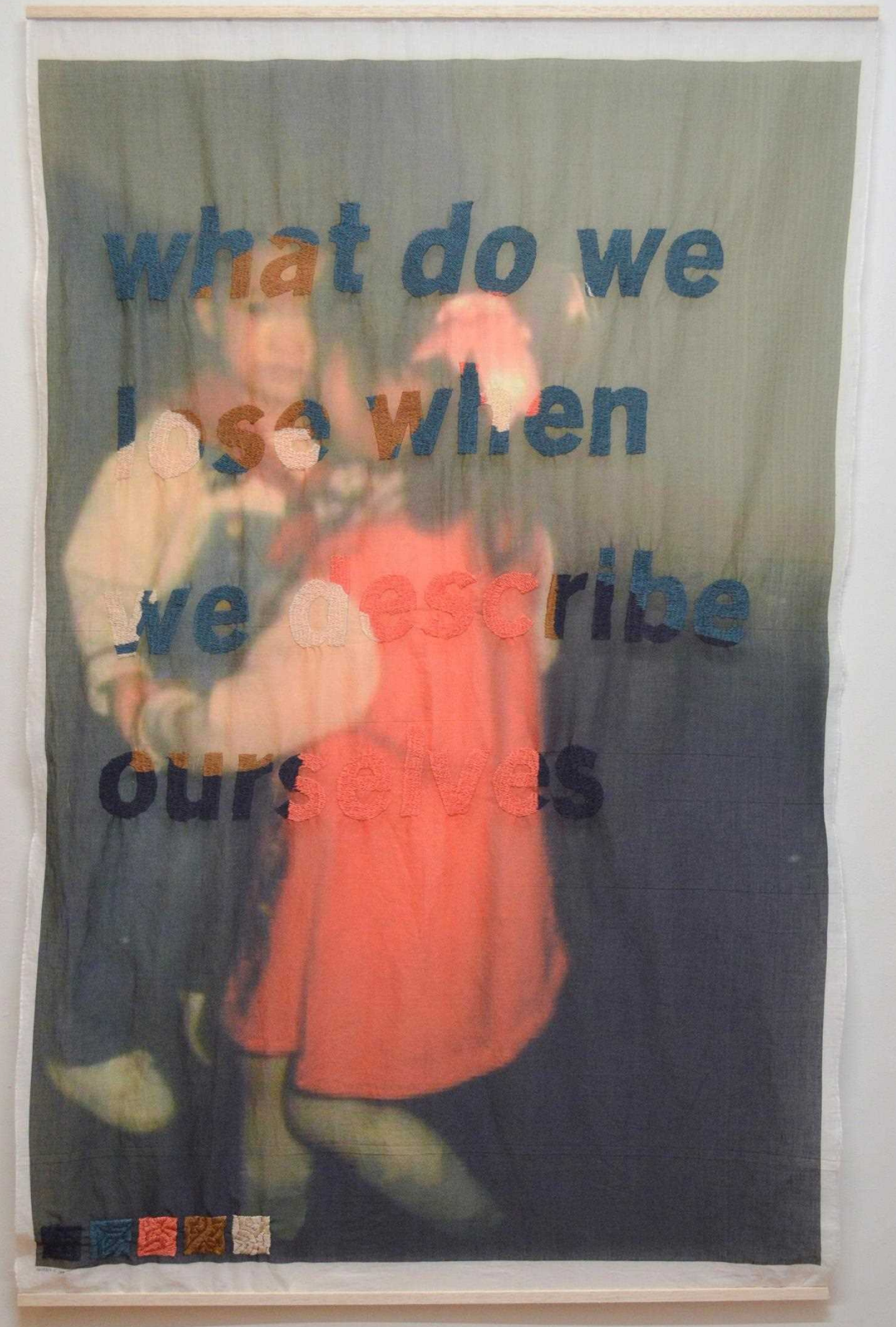
Reflecting what Vince was sharing - when making new connections, it can be useful to build a strong 1-on-1 relationship first (also in-person in these days of Zoom). Uniting based on shared values is a first step, but establishing this trust is essential to

meaningful collaboration. We've experienced situations in community work where the relationship is ungrounded and even competitive, or a misunderstanding escalates very quickly, and this can be very discouraging when trying to unite for a common cause.

We also liked that instead of thinking only about products, we thought about setting 'process goals'. One of our process goals was to fall more in love with what we were doing every day.

Two very useful things to offer if you want to make a collective:

- Food
- Place/way to gather with space to relax and feel good.





NAIMAH

Vince introduced us to a valuable tool called community power-mapping. On a cartesian diagram figuring 'support' on one axis and 'power' on the other, we were invited to situate potential allies and opponents to map out support systems, power dynamics, and structural issues that would potentially surround a collective we would like to start. To help us determine the roles and values of the different actors within our ecosystem, Vince suggests us to deemphasize what we are against and to focus, rather, on what we are *for*.

This led me to reflect on the particular communities I would like to serve. How does one gather individuals who are often left out by our institutions into an alternative collective? Based on the capacities of the people in leadership positions, what communities can the collective cater services to? If such capacities are limited due to systemic privileges the leaders benefit from, how can they be expanded through forming lasting alliances with other existing organizations? Tackling such issues requires constant self-criticism by leaders as well as openness to possible scrutiny and judgment by members and non-members. I am reminded this week of a passage from *Living a Feminist Life* (2021) by Sara Ahmed where the author compares the institution to "an old garment. It acquires the shape of those who tend to wear it; it becomes easier to wear if you have that shape." Some methodologies we employ out of habit because they are hegemonic simulate comfort for all through comfort for some. Community power-mapping can thus help us identify the systems we do not wish to reproduce and build alliances and networks of knowledge accordingly to facilitate justice and equity within the collective.

DEANN

common struggles ≠ common values. These do not always converge!

DÉDÉ

I was trying to fill out the NPO form and rea-

lized how we are just asking the government/state to give us permission to provide forms of social welfare they should be doing instead. The public system is less advantageous than private agencies in public health and law. It feels weird to create a third party, to serve a cause, bigger than individuals, that is making us collectively powerful but also subordinated to its goals. I understand how easy corporate fiscal evasion and non individual responsibility can be hidden behind the corporate body.

SRIDEVI

Institutional language that masks

- COMMUNITY what does that mean? Means something different for everyone
- INCLUSIVITY you can't just SAY you're inclusive and call it a day, you have to actually do the work + continued efforts to BE inclusive, separate yourself from white supremacist methods

Trying to do too much +
lack of resources =
BURNOUT

- Instead:
- What + who are we working with right now
- How can we do best here before branching out + working outwards/towards?

How to start a collab

1. Let's just have a conversation!
 - Find similar values, work
 - Let's see how we can work together
2. Show up!
 - Events, workshops, protests centered around your values

Do we actually all think alike?
Or do we just share identity labels?
What values do we share and how do we want to work towards those?

CLARA

This workshop helped me realize that you don't have to aim for a big goal as the first stepping stone. Just gathering a group of people, and having discussions, is in itself a stepping stone and an act of action. To want to achieve notable things fast is to risk the sustainability of the project and the commitment of the individuals. It is likely that the precipitation will sacrifice the courage, energy and hope of the group.

Vince: "I just want to start talking"
(not say I want to do this, wanna help me)
↳ map out convergences and divergences
"coalition building"
(3 months of just talking)

Collaborating with friends = Know your friends and what is going on in their life:

- do they have the capacity?
- will they be "available" to actually get into the project?

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POWER

This group has potential to derail your change target.

Track their actions and arguments. Depending on how strongly they oppose, it is possible to shift their support.

Decisive Decision-Making Power or Influence

Active Participant in Decision Making

Power to Have Major Influence on Decision Making

This group represents your strongest partners.

Work closely to build power and share resources to achieve your goals.

SUPPORT

Die Hard Against

Active Against

Inclined Against

Inclined Towards

Active Support

Die Hard Support

Due to low influence, do not spend much time on this group, though they are an opportunity to understand opposing arguments and strengthen your messages.

Taken into Account

Can Get Attention

Not on Radar

This group will support your goals.

Collaborate with these people to build collective power and grow influence.

Week 3: Boundaries

How do we avoid exploiting each other and ourselves?

This week brought out some of our most pressing concerns about burnout, community conflict, and unequal power relations in our collectives. Mattia's experiences with the organizational overhaul of an artist-run centre's structure reminded us that policy cannot be the only thing we rely upon to keep hierarchies flat if our working culture has not confronted its roots in white supremacist logic. Lan shared their lessons learnt from the quick expansion and subsequent fallout from a community-based collective. We outlined some practices for interpersonal and administrative changes that can be preventative forms of care. While we work on our flaws in working and relating, we can at least acknowledge the harmful patterns that easily arise when we accept a structure as inevitable.

CLARA



SRIDEVI

Framework of CARE

- Reflect on our relationship to control
- Not done at the expense of well-being of those doing the work
- Accepting that there is no one clear solution
- Patience, permission to try and fail

How do we take care of ourselves when we're doing work and pursuing projects?

- Be honest with yourself about your needs and boundaries
- Take excessive amounts of time for rest and play!
- Be realistic about your goals + break down those goals into smaller bits
- Communicate with compassion and honesty. You can only help yourself if you let others help you too
- Embrace the contradictions and the nuances
- If something doesn't feel good, don't do it. If you need to speak up about



it, do it!!!

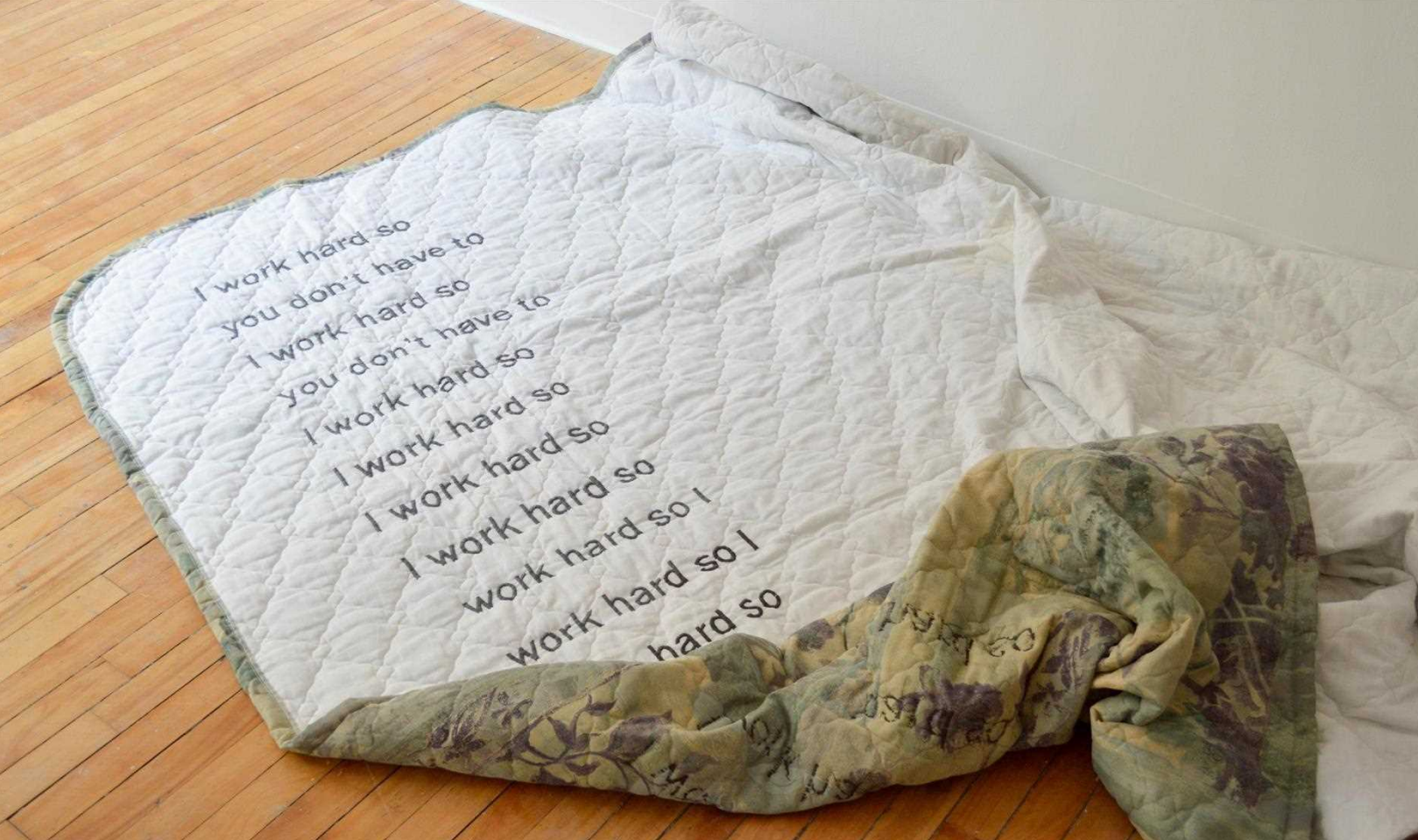
→ If you're not heard, it's okay to quit <3

How can we work with others?

- "intentionally collaborative"
- Going slow, taking time, making sure you're all on the same page instead of rushing into things
- Be inclusive. Do the work. It's a lot of work but it feels so much better when you're taking the time to decolonize your own methods and practice, rather than taking the fastest and easiest way. You're an intersectional

being and intersections don't always work harmoniously. It's okay to encounter conflict and tension, in fact it's normal. But it's about *what you do* with that, and how you all move through it that's important. Are you hearing others (not reacting, but listening!)? Are you consciously making space for others? Are you taking time to sit in discomfort before coming to a decision? Are others offering you the same? → What are the values that form the foundations of this collaborative work? How can these values be manifested in real life?

↑ LAN "FLORENCE" YEE, *PLEASE REPLY III* (DETAIL), HAND-EMBROIDERED THREAD ON ORGANZA, 8.5" X 11", 2019.



→Whiteness will often be centered and it's okay to name it. Not everyone will want to hear it and that's pretty telling that maybe your values don't align.

NAIMAH

I am personally fascinated by how everyday practices structure power within organizations, as explored in our weekly reading, the "White Supremacy Culture in Organizations" guide by the Centre for Community Organizations (COCO). This document breaks down common habits that can generate inequity and disempowerment of members within collectives—perfectionistic expectations, inequitable concentrations of power, prioritization of the comfort of people in leadership positions, individualism, and urgency for growth.

Our discussions this week on how attentional power is often mobilized within hierarchical institutions—whose structures we volun-

tarily or involuntarily use as blueprints within independent initiatives—reminded me of Olúfémi Táíwò's book *Elite Capture* (2022), where the author argues that putting standpoint epistemology in practice can take the form of a symbolic "passing-of-the-mic", or a redistribution of (short-term) attention. This may, at first sight, demonstrate an understanding of situated knowledge by an organization, institution, or activist group, as well as a desire to "center the most marginalized." However, these gestures mask essential system-preserving power relations through an illusion of redistribution of power, where "the mic" is not accessible at all times and always needs to be granted by persons in positions of authority. Considering this, I would argue that noticing how attentional power is distributed within day-to-day operations can reveal an organization's white supremacist proclivities at a structural level.

↑ LAN "FLORENCE" YEE, *A LABOUR OF LABOUR*, HAND-EMBROIDERED THREAD ON READY-USED COMFORTER, 7' X 10", 2018.

COCO's guide delineates problematic behaviours that typically arise within collective structures and offers lists of antidotes and self-diagnostic questions to help pinpoint and counteract harm. Some guiding questions I found insightful were in the section on 'Paternalism'. "Do I share my motivations, processes, and structures with others? How do I let others in on my processes and decisions? How are team members involved in the planning, outreach, implementation, and evaluation of projects, programs, or organizations?"

DÉDÉ

Lan's words really relativized my imposter syndrome and good minority model : they are not available for that kind of work at the moment and if so they would be harmful to others and themselves.

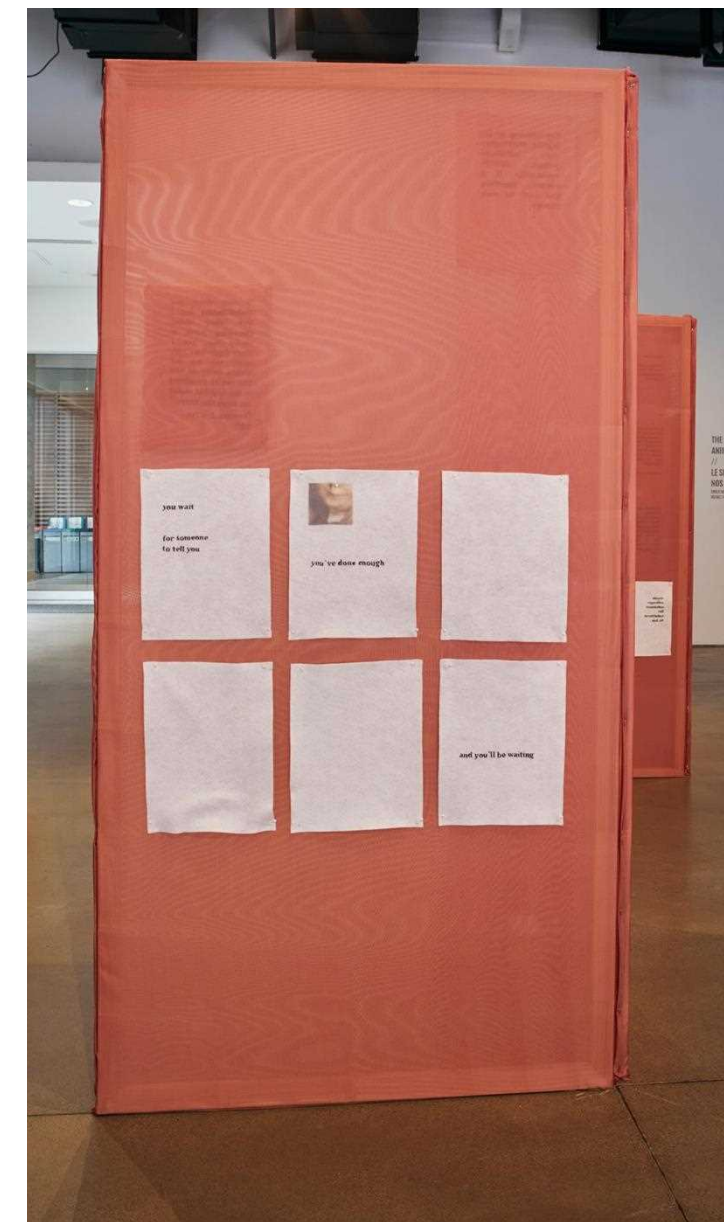
It was a model of self-reflexivity and acknowledgement of limitations at a precise time in their life. Their presentation ranked many burn-out symptoms I recognized. Performance and workaholicism were used by my parents and peers to avoid traumas and I refuse them now consciously. I don't want to freeze my body and thoughts forever.

FILI 周

This discussion made us realize that we didn't actually understand what non-hierarchical could mean as a collective structure or value system. We realized that 'non-hierarchical' doesn't have to mean that power and decision making is equally distributed. We're not sure why but that's what we usually used to imagine when we heard this word used.

Though a structure could be equally distributed in a formal sense, power seems to be often in a fluid interpersonal dynamic, and there seems to be a gradient of possibilities for non-hierarchical practice. In certain situations (such as when working with an elder) a group might agree to allow those who have experience or skills to lead in a certain kind of work, or lead and take responsibility

↑ LAN "FLORENCE" YEE, HAND-EMBROIDERED THREAD ON CRAFT FELT ON WOODEN AND ORGANZA WALLS, EACH PAGE 9" X 12", 2020.



for the collective more generally. Organizations can also have multiple kinds of leadership that compliment each other.

We feel very grateful for this reflection because we always struggled with the way 'non-hierarchical' would be signaled/tagged within community spaces, when in practice (in our limited experience) that space was often either painstakingly trying to be perfectly equal for each member without addressing actual differences of experience, interest, and agency – or in other cases using this label as a front and actually being very hierarchi-

cal on an unspoken level. It made us think that maybe this term is less useful as a tag or identification for an organization, but more useful as a point of reflection internally.

Loosely paraphrasing Lan: non-hierarchical process can also be about how power and agency is distributed, and shared by people in positions of responsibility. To what extent does that process come from seeing, listening, decentralized agency, and sharing input within the collective?

We appreciated Mattia's way of thinking about organizational admin as a creative process: In non-hierarchical work it's not all up to one person to implement a change, but rather making space for people to bring the change that needs to happen. Practicing admin can be 'intensely collaborative' and seek 'non-linear' aims, and this also makes admin work feel meaningful and exciting.

THAI

I think something that came up for me was not giving in to the rush. I have been in collectives that have tried to grow way faster than we were ready for. All of a sudden we are looking around and realizing the real core of what the collective was about has been lost. It can feel exciting when a collective is building momentum. Though especially when the work is primarily coming out of passion, whenever there is this reaching pushing feeling I always take it as a sign to hit pause and re-evaluate.

DEANN

→flat structure ≠ power is flattened
→"Radical inclusion means 'come back when you're ready.'" - Peter Morin
→We need soft landing pads for practicing boundaries. Let us be frogs together and jump onto lily pads!

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Week 4: Support

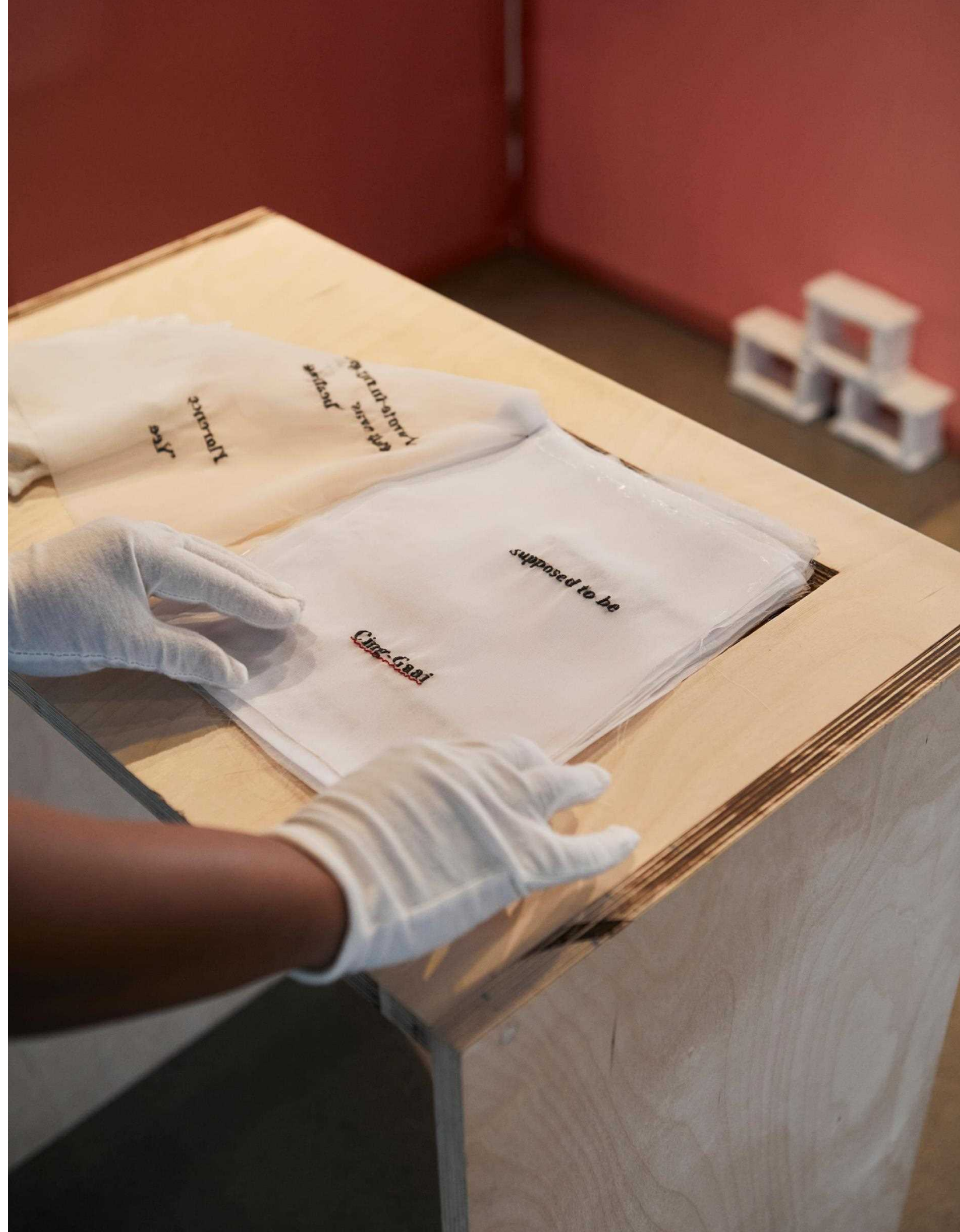
How can we share resources?

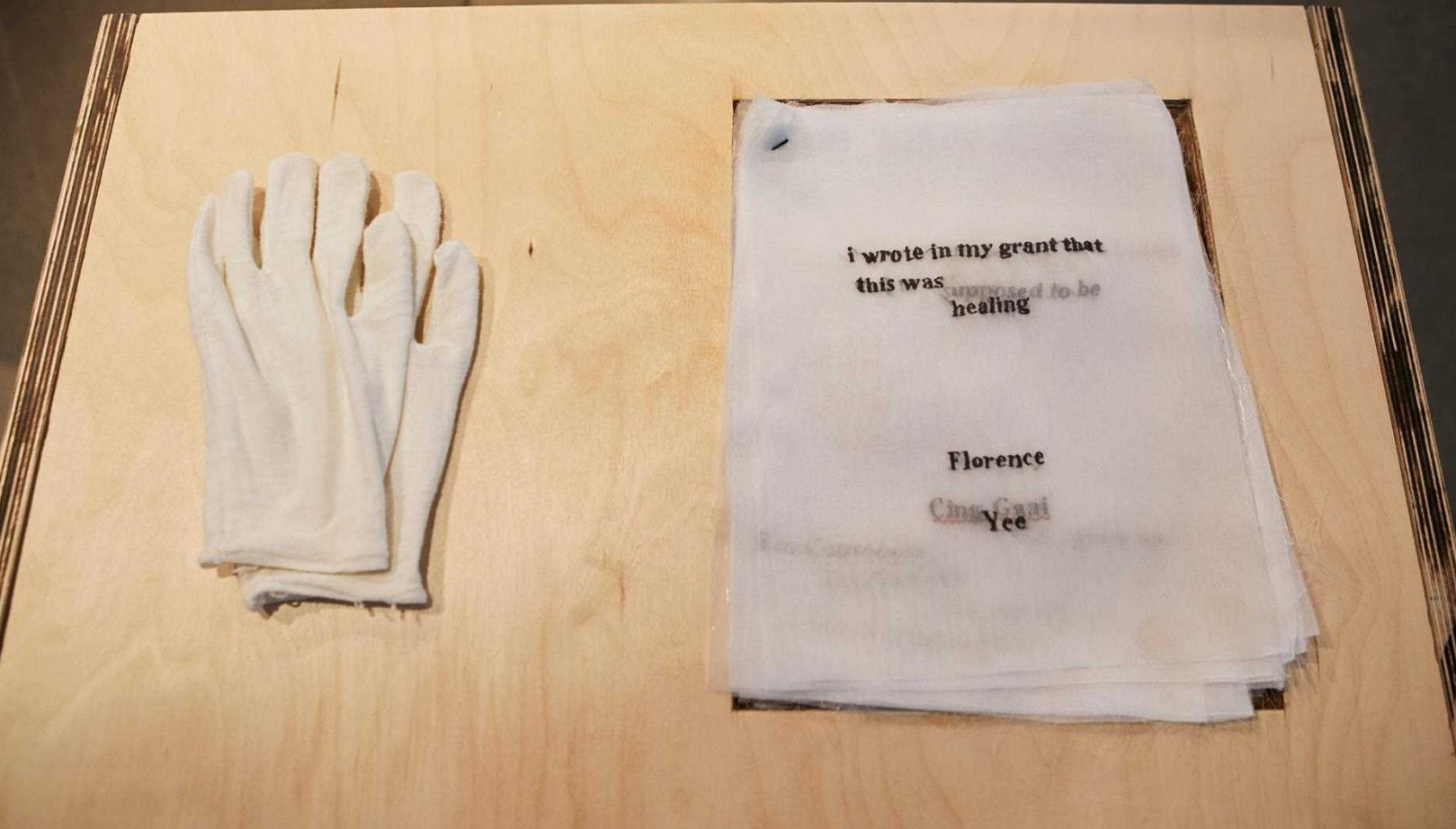
This week we discussed ways of financially sustaining collective work. Lan and Vince guided us through the process of grant writing and applying for funding from the Canada Council for the Arts. The workshop was intended as a practical step-by-step guide to grant-writing, but evolved into a larger discussion of the balancing act that many collectives perform when seeking funding. You need money, but pretend like you don't need it... You need to have a target audience, but don't come off as exclusionary... Exaggerate this, and downplay that... Understanding that grants are not guaranteed, we also discussed alternative forms of support and the value of non-monetary resources like space, knowledge, and time.

SRIDEVI

Funding is big and funding is scary. As a person who was raised to not talk about money, it's hard to be financially literate now as I'm trying to fund my own projects. Kind of a Collective was incredibly helpful in breaking down the process of applying for grants and making it more approachable. I still don't think I'm fully ready to start applying for grants yet, but this made it feel less imposing and like I can stare the grant back in the face a little. After having such a hard time navigating arts institutions, it's difficult to go back and ask for money from them. It's overwhelming to try to fit yourself and your work into the mold of arts institutions when you are aware that your work is not for them but is to subvert them. It's strange

→ LAN "FLORENCE" YEE, *PLEASE REPLY*, HAND-EMBROIDERED THREAD ON ORGANZA, 8.5" X 11" X 1", 2019. PHOTO BY LAURENCE POIRIER.





having to break your project and intentions down into language that is digestible to institutions, but remember that you are doing this for yourself, for your work, for your community. This project is greater than you. And you have to believe in that if you want it to go anywhere. And you may have to navigate institutions, to a certain degree, to see those projects realized. So how can you do that in ways that stays honest to you, and maintains the integrity of your values too?

FILI 周

It felt useful to think about 'soft-money' of an organization – the skills, assets, resources, spaces and things we can offer. Our culture tends to focus on liquid financial means, but there's actually a lot we can do without being fully funded.

CLARA

"When art is blessed with public funding, it is simultaneously cursed by the state's imperialism"

so dictomy between your values, and what to say to the funding org.

→ Grants exist to fulfill an organization's strategic plan.

DEANN

Who can afford to be a full time artist? Some questions about funding and grants: Where does their money come from? How much of my artistry am I compromising? Can I still be in control within these parameters and limitations? How much of the systemic machinations am I able to shake up without disrupting my possible streams of livelihood? Why does it feel like a trap?

NAIMAH

I am reminded this week of an essay from Zinia Naqvi's written piece accompanying her Yours to Discover photography series. In the form of a manifesto, the artist lays out her inner dialogue after being approached by a white curator to create a public art piece for an Ontarian public gallery situated in a predominately South-Asian suburb—one that Naqvi herself is not part of. Does the curator even care about the artist's work, or was she selected because her past work fits within their liberal understanding of Otherness? There seems to be an expectation to include the people of the suburban community in the work, to extend the gallery's gaze into the latter to extract value and generate traffic. "Now, how to subvert this gaze?" Naqvi wonders, "How to give the white curator what she wants so that she will happily pay you, while also working to critically subvert her ignorant premise?" Naqvi then decides to produce a still-life photography series based strictly on her own family archive to satisfy the gallery's mandate of superficially demonstrating concern for diversity and representation. Upon closer inspection, however, amidst its playfulness and appeal to nostalgia, the artwork functions as an institutional critique that refuses liberal conceptions of South-Asian identity.

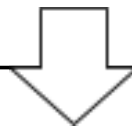
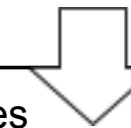
This strategy of subversion is also commonly applied to grant writing. Funding institutions expect the usage of a specific set of lingos, codes, and conventions—accessibility of which almost exclusively hinges on the applicant's

proximity to academic and white supremacist arts institutions. Emphasis is often placed on impact, visibility, and dissemination, which I would argue, despite its benefits, reflects a desire to extend the white gaze into marginalized communities via artists. Of course, it is unrealistic to dismiss grant application as an effective source of income based on the fear of the white gaze. Can this gaze be subverted, or used to our advantage to extract what we need to then create as we wish?

This week, we discussed how projects of a collective can be strategically presented to demonstrate that our needs align with the funding organization's objectives. For instance, when applying for a collective grant, it can be worth giving prominence to the most experienced member's CV to assert by extension the group's ability to undertake the project. Vince says that "granting bodies are very neoliberal in the sense that they mimic the language of investors"—this means that artistic projects are reduced to "goals" and "impacts", but knowing this, a mission statement can in fact be stretched in ways that benefit the collective. One can, for example, present a project by appealing to the funding body's mission to reach audiences that are under-represented in the Canadian art scene while simultaneously deemphasizing how the project in reality aims to critique the white supremacy of Canadian institutions which includes granting bodies.

DÉDÉ

To put you in context my relationship to money, my parents adopted/bought me on a mortgage, always acted on credit, living on the debt economy. Money is a flow, coming in and out. I was privileged growing up in a white family but now I have been denied. As I recognized my degree of literacy, I am filling out funding forms and taking more financial risks for the collective. As an adoptee, I feel like a new orphan and empowered to build new forms of family around community.

Issue/ Context: What need are you trying to address? How have you come to know/ understand this need?					
Goal: What does a solution to the need you have identified look like?					
Inputs	Activities	Audience/ Demographic	Outputs	Short/ Medium Term Outcomes	Long Term Outcomes
What will you be investing in this project? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funding ● Staff ● Materials ● Time ● Supplies <p><i>Writing tip: start by brainstorming what your “needs” are for a project. Be detailed and specific. Also think about who’s gonna be doing what.</i></p> <p>Items listed here form the foundation for your project budget.</p>	Map out all the program elements. Be specific: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is your process/ methodology? ● If there are activities, how many sessions? ● How many hours? ● Is there a curriculum? <p>What possible challenges could you face with implementation?</p> <p>This is also a good place to talk about what sets your project apart.</p>	Be specific about your audience and how your project aligns with them. You may include general data, and indicate whether they are part of a priority or equity-seeking group. You also want to include anecdotal information that is specific to what you have learned working with these audiences/ communities.	What is produced as a direct result of the program? These are usually measurable/ quantifiable. E.g: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● X number of workshops ● X number of attendees ● Direct engagement with X topics <p>Your outputs should align closely with eligibility/ guidelines. E.g. If you're writing a Canada Council “Public Outreach” grant, make sure you really make it obvious how this is a public project and who will be benefiting.</p>	Think of the intermediate step between the broader outcome (usually one or more of the program priorities). <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Outcome Measures</p> <p>What will prove that your program worked? How will you know?</p> <p>E.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● X number of people have Y tools ● X issue has been addressed in a specific manner 	Long term <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>E.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What are secondary outcomes possible from your project?
External Factors: E.g. Cultural norms, Political climate, Social policies, Environmental factors			Assumptions:		

Week 5: Sustainability

What does sustainability look like?

Once a collective gains financial resources, how does it manage them? This week Mattia facilitated a discussion which attempted to reframe budgeting and financial management as a creative process. What story does a budget tell and what can it reveal about the priorities of the collective? Taking the discussion from the practical to the personal, Vince Rozario invited us to interrogate our personal histories with money and reflect on the ways in which these experiences inform our work in collectives. Whether it is because of a lack of financial literacy or anxiety around money, budgets are often considered as inaccessible and intimidating. What types of power imbalances can develop when financial responsibility is in the hands of only one, or a few, members of a collective? Collectives only stand to benefit when all members feel empowered to talk about money.

DEANN

I'm not supposed to be here. I was never taught or encouraged to be an artist. You can be creative but only for a purpose. Sustainability has always been the furthest thing on my mind, that is, until I did one of the most creative things I will ever do in my life. Give birth to my child. No one ever says anything about the discomfort of multiple transformations, nor the exhilarating feeling of taking your hands off the wheel and letting your body do its thing. I took the freshest air I've felt in years after letting go of control. I can plan, I

can dream, I can try to manifest, and that's all I can do. Many people say that people nowadays lack faith. But we are swirling in a tornado of people of faith; faith that all will be okay, faith that making art in an ever changing world is still important, faith that we can animate our imaginations together, faith that all we need is a little bit of hope and hard work. So yes, I am scheming, I am strategizing. How do I get out of this 9 to 5, the comfort zone, and step into this zone where I am not supposed to be but asserting existence in?





NAIMAH

Mattia shared with us that, after having to assume a financial role in an organization she was part of, she at last confronted the ubiquitous fear of handling budgets and now understands budget planning as more akin to strategic planning than to crunching impalpable numbers. The budget section of a project can therefore be interpreted as a project-envisioning tool as well an extension of the collective's story as it encapsulates the latter's values, priorities, and missions. Mattia suggests drawing inspiration from artistic methods by experimenting with

many versions of the same budget plan. For instance, paralleling a fantasy budget to a practical one can help conceive one that is realistic without feeling restricted to take constructive risks.

Another important subject we addressed is how perception of risk and feasibility of a budget can vary from one member to another depending on one's social background and (lack of) access to wealth. I've realized that, now that I am in a relatively stable working-class position (*alhamdulillah*), my past experiences

with precarity, poverty, and deprivation strongly influence the financial decisions I make today as an artist and are at the root of my aversion to risk-taking. During my years as an undergrad, I have observed—and I have yet to come across a citable study that supports my anecdotal evidence—that my discipline is dominated by students coming from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds. This makes sense, as undertaking a career path in visual arts is not the most lucrative of endeavours, and risking precarity and downward mobility doesn't sound nearly as bad if one is star-

ting off with a dependable financial support system. The downside is that norms (of productivity, practicality, etc.) are being set by people whose lived experiences provide a narrow understanding of material reality and how it intrinsically shapes artistic processes. The fact that most are not transparent about their background further complexifies this issue, as coming from wealth cuts through the illusion that we are self-made and translates to loss of relatability and thus loss of social capital. "The power of bourgeois ideology, which spreads over everything, lies precisely in the bourgeoisie's ability to name but itself remain unnamed." (*The Habit of Ex-Nomination*, Anannya Bhattacharjee, 1992) This is a long discussion that I think is important to have in the arts in general, but when it comes to discussing budgets within the context of a collective, transparency around positionality is especially crucial to foster trust and cohesion within a group.

FILI 周

We loved that a lot of our session was about unpacking budgets as something often felt as intimidating, dry or mechanistic. We appreciated our reflections around 'budgeting values' and we found this opening question very helpful: "based on our values, what should we be budgeting for?"

This helped us to move away from less fulfilling questions such as "how much?" or "what product/output?"

We realize that writing budgets can actually be super creative because it is a chance to express our process goals in terms of the material world. We might compare objectives against how money is actually being directed, and this can allow us to be much more intentional, and show us ways of working to step into that alignment.

This also made us reflect on the amount of work that isn't typically budgeted in artistic professions – personal admin, grant-writing,

↑ LAN "FLORENCE" YEE, *A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN, TO BE SHARED WITH OTHERS*, 4-CHANNEL LED SIGNAGE, EACH 10" X 67" X 5", 2022. PHOTO BY LAURENCE POIRIER.

emails etc. It made us curious about creating a personal time-budget that considers intangible time and energetic inputs as a way to find more clarity on what is actually sustainable, what is actually 'work', what we need, and what are our boundaries. In this same way, we might think of a budget as a way to be more accountable and take better care of ourselves and the people we work with.

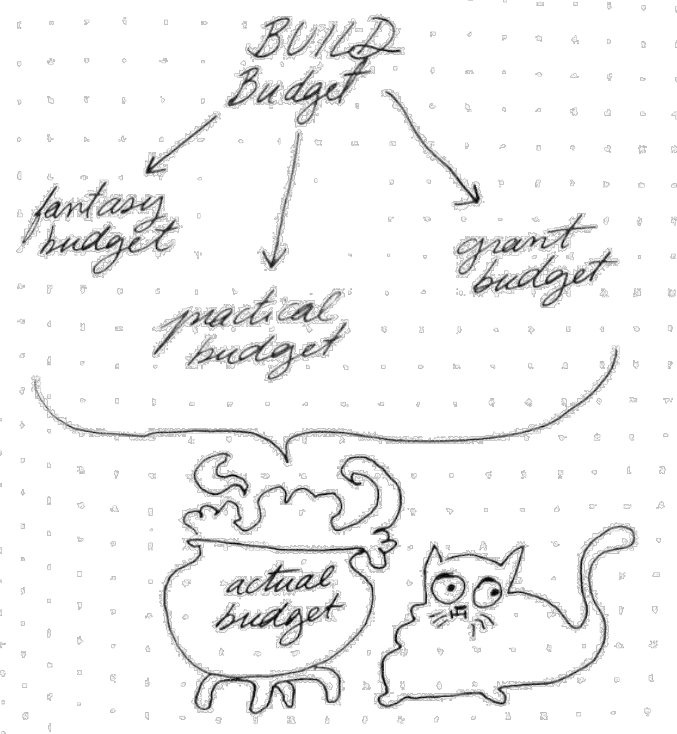
It's empowering to choose our ways of defining and understanding 'work,' 'community work,' 'volunteering,' 'participation,' 'research', and what actually goes into it, rather than how it is expected to be. How do we support those things, and how this impacts intangible things within an organization's process that often go overlooked - quality of time, agency, ability and space to bring who we are.

It also revealed how important it was to understand ourselves and tendencies in budgeting. Considering the frameworks that inform our understanding and tendencies around money... class and privileges, culture, past experiences. It feels important to be able to try and see these things and communicate this with the people we are working with, and we appreciated learning some tools to do this.

THAI

I had my first grant writing experience last March. It was really challenging to work through. A lot of questions came up-namely how much we would be paying ourselves. This became a larger question of what we needed as a collective to stay sustainable. Working in community spaces, my peers and I can be very accustomed to free labor, doing stuff because you are passionate about it. However, in this grant writing process we wanted to prioritize sustaining ourselves as organizers and give ourselves fair compensation.

CLARA



WHAT ARE BUDGETS?
 → project envisioning tools
 → project planning tools
 → a story about your collective

NOTES

Week 6: Collectivity

How do we collect ourselves?

For our last workshop, we reconnected in-person at the FOFA Gallery. Lan led a discussion with Kama La Mackerel. Kama was honest about the challenges they have faced in building and sustaining collectives, and reflecting on their own experiences challenged us to reconsider our notions of what a “successful” collective looks like. Like many things in life, a collective, and the people who make it, has its own time and place. Longevity doesn’t necessarily mean success. Our closing event was a mixer with invited Montréal collectives: Cyber Love Hotel, ffiles, Parc-Ex Curry Collective, and VOLTA Collective. Providing more proof that food brings people together, we enjoyed Parc-Ex Curry Collective’s delicious offerings as we reflected, connected, and collected ourselves one last time.



KAMA LA MACKEREL



KAMA LA MACKEREL is a Mauritian-Canadian multilingual writer, visual artist, performer, educator and literary translator who believes in love, justice and self and collective empowerment. Their practice blurs the lines between traditional artistic disciplines to create hybrid aesthetic spaces from which decolonial and queer/trans vocabularies can emerge. With wholehearted engagement in ocean narratives, island sovereignty, transgender poetics and queer/trans spiritual histories, their body of work challenges colonial notions of time and space as these relate to history, power, language, subject formation and the body.

CYBER LOVE HOTEL is a Montréal-based artist studio and organizing space fostering collective making, care, and healing through practices of co-working and creating exhibitions, workshops, and residencies.

The **FFILES** (fka XX Files) is an intersectional feminist media collective grounded in community radio. Through innovative programming, the collective produces work that explores our current technological landscape in the broadest sense. Their work reflects an interest in themes that center around but are not limited to transmission practices, sound healing, electronic music discourse, noise, techno-feminisms, the voice, and much more.

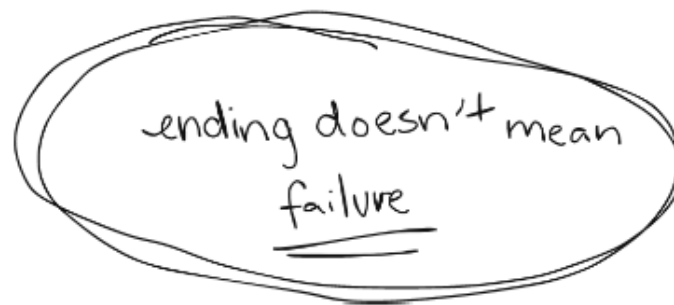
PARC-EX CURRY COLLECTIVE is a mutual aid initiative that provides catering and food distribution services in Montréal, Québec, Canada. This community-led project provides a means of financial support for women in the Parc-Extension neighborhood by hiring them as the main chefs. They aim to help support women in the neighborhood who face employment barriers because of their precarious immigration status.



Through poetry and art, **VOLTA COLLECTIVE** calls for anti-carceral & transformative justice in our communities by responding to current issues.

THAI

This is something I have been meditating on



since this discussion. My partner recently “broke up” with a collective they founded. It had gotten much too big for them. They said, maybe it was the people I grew to be in relationship with along the way that was the real aim of this collective. Knowing when to end things is such a wonderful and valuable skill. You can walk away from something you invested time and energy into and it needn’t be a failure.

NASHWA

Community is a loaded term, one that has different and similar meanings to people shaped by their own social locations, experiences, and ways they exist in the world(s) around them. Community *can* be a tapestry woven from shared experiences, values, and aspirations. Community *can* be a dynamic entity that transcends physical boundaries and exists in the collective consciousness of its members. In this written piece, I/we explore what community looks like, how it is cultivated in creative spaces, and how it sustains its existence through relations that bind us/them.

What makes us feel at home.

At its core when we operationalize a community and by extension collectives general consensus leads us to think of this in the simplest way as a group of individuals who come together with a common purpose, shared interests, or a sense of belonging. Communities and collectives manifest in various forms - geographic communities, online networks, cultural groups, etc. The bond that unites its members, fostering a sense of solidarity and support is what makes a community and distinguishes it from forced interaction.

Community is a mosaic of connections, everyone is not the same and will never be the same. Everyone does not have to agree in every way and that is okay but everyone does play a role and piece of a larger group. Collectives are one way/method that brings individuals together, giving them a sense of belonging and purpose, giving them community. Collectives, like flowers, flourish through shared values, communication, collaboration, and inclusivity. A vibrant community sustains itself through trust, empathy, and adaptability, strengthening the bonds among its members. Like a garden it needs tending and care.

As we navigate the complexities of the “modern world,” times that are very unsure and feelings apocalyptic in nature, the significance of community remains undiminished. The people you can text that you need a check in, the people who check in, the people who show up with food, the people who show up with coffee, the people who show up with care, the people who show up to listen, get you to a deadline, the people who write you letters, the people who tell you how you make them feel, the people who show up with flowers, those who water your garden.

Only our collective efforts *can* create thriving communities, enhancing the lives of all who call them home. Let us cherish and nurture the communities we belong to, for they are the threads that weave the fabric of our lives.

DEANN

The importance of food: food in the budget is not an afterthought. How do we feed each other our ideas, our passions, our imaginations if we aren't fed? How do we sustain a community of people if you don't feed them? I have thirty four years in this colonized body and I constantly forget I even have a body. I operate so much within a top heavy framework-it's all in the head, and I am made to forget that I have a body. A body capable of embodying knowledge and feeling into lessons from my ancestors. The land I'm on and the one I come from tugs at the threads that bind us together, but I am too muffled to feel it, let alone return it's longing for connection. So yes, we need to be fed, to feed each other and reconnect to the places that miss us.

How to facilitate lessons from one generation to another and make sure lessons live on and are transmitted effectively? -Kama La Mackerel

Collectives do not always stay a collective, but the teachings stay. It does not stay as one organism, it propagates and spreads from the multiple people that the collective is made up of.

Rethink the possibilities of transmutation - it's not always what you think. It's not just a linear string of lessons. It can be web-like, messy, and chaotic, but the lessons are never lost.

Archiving is so important! It is putting ourselves into history and helps people find you.

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Resource list

A list of texts, organizations, and inspirations mentioned during the workshops:

[Home is Not a Country](#), by Safia Elhillo

Aisha Mirza's Substack [off-grid baby](#), specifically a post entitled (tw: suicide) [if i want to die so much why am i so careful when i cross the road & other stories](#)

Vince Rozario's text in *C Magazine* 'A Long Project Between Gudskul & 7 Toronto Collectives'

Midnight Kitchen: <https://midnightkitchen.org>

Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures: <https://decolonialfutures.net>

LOJIQ: <https://www.lojiq.org/english/>

Chantiers Jeunesse's Social Impact Accelerator Projects: <https://www.cj.qc.ca/en/our-programs/social-impact-accelerator-project/>

Québec government: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/employment/young-volunteers>

Rising Youth: <https://www.risingyouth.ca>

Tema Okun on her Mythical Paper on White Supremacy: <https://theintercept.com/2023/02/03/deconstructed-tema-okun-white-supremacy/>

'White Supremacy Culture in Organizations' by Centre des Organismes Communautaires (COCO)

Rags to Reasonable Salary Worksheet: <https://www.ragstoreasonable.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Salary-Worksheet.pdf>
Freelance Rate Calculator: <https://www.freelanceratecalculator.com>

RAAV: <https://raav.org/ressources/>

CARFAC Fee Schedule: <https://carfac-raav.ca>

Curator Fee Schedule Report, Clayton Windatt for CARFAC

Kind of a Collective accompanied *What Academia Has Done to Me*, the exhibition by Lan "Florence" Yee presented at the FOFA Gallery at Concordia University, Montréal, Québec from May - June 2, 2023. We would like to express our gratitude to the FOFA Gallery's team for generously lending their support, guidance, and time to make *Kind of a Collective* a reality.

The FOFA Gallery is located on unceded Indigenous lands, and we recognize the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation as the custodians of the lands and waters we now call Montréal. Tiohtià:ke/Montréal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montréal community.

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<https://www.concordia.ca/fofa>
info.fofagallery@concordia.ca



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