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Figuring things out together: on the relationship between design and collective practice

Groten, A.

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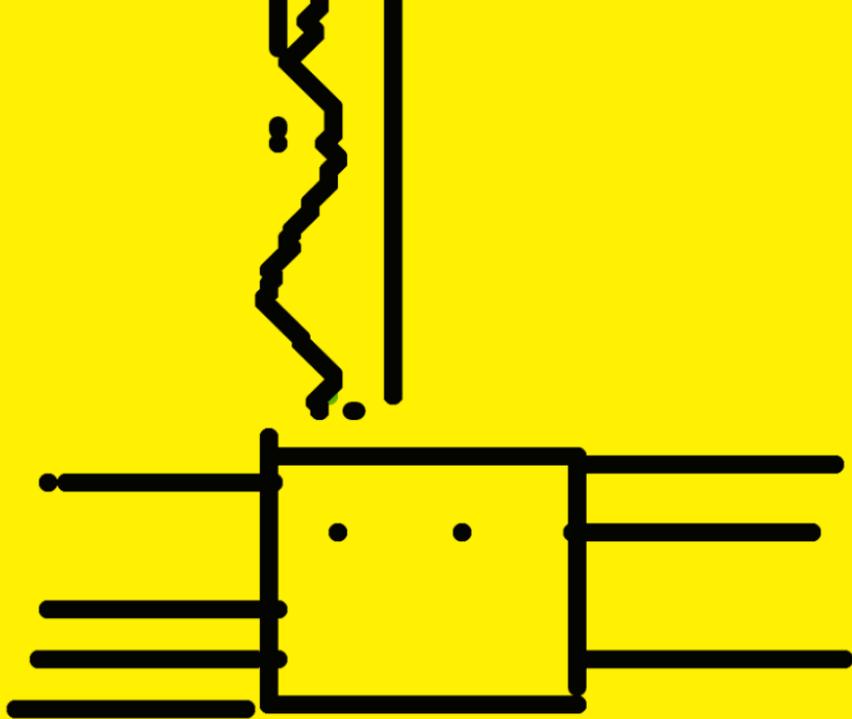
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HACKERS & DESIGNERS
HARDWARE HACKING & MODES OF (RE)-PRODUCTION
WITH KAROLINE SWIEZYNSKI AND ARJAN SCHERPENIEL
THU – AUG 22ND – 19:00 HRS @DEPUNT

HACKERS & DESIGNERS IS AN INITIATIVE THAT BRINGS
TWO PROFILES CLOSER TO EACH OTHER
IN ORDER TO DEVELOP A COMMON VOCABULARY
AND COLLECTIVE DESIGN CONCEPTS.

THERE WILL BE SOUP FOR 3 AND
BEERS ARE 2 EUROS.
COLA – THE REAL THING REVOLUTION
(3,- POST 1903 / OR 5,- PRE 1903)

FIGURE 19



Figure 19: SichuanCucumber.png

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How to organize a summer academy

Preface by Anja Groten, James Bryan Graves, Sally Oldenbacher

Fig. Preface: hackersanddesigners.nl/images/cover.jpg, Groten
Fig. Preface: hackersanddesigners.nl/images/cover.jpg, Bryan,
Groten

FIGURE 20

HOT Algorithms

```
FROM recipes
WHERE
Description LIKE "%spicy%"
AND description LIKE "%salad%";
```

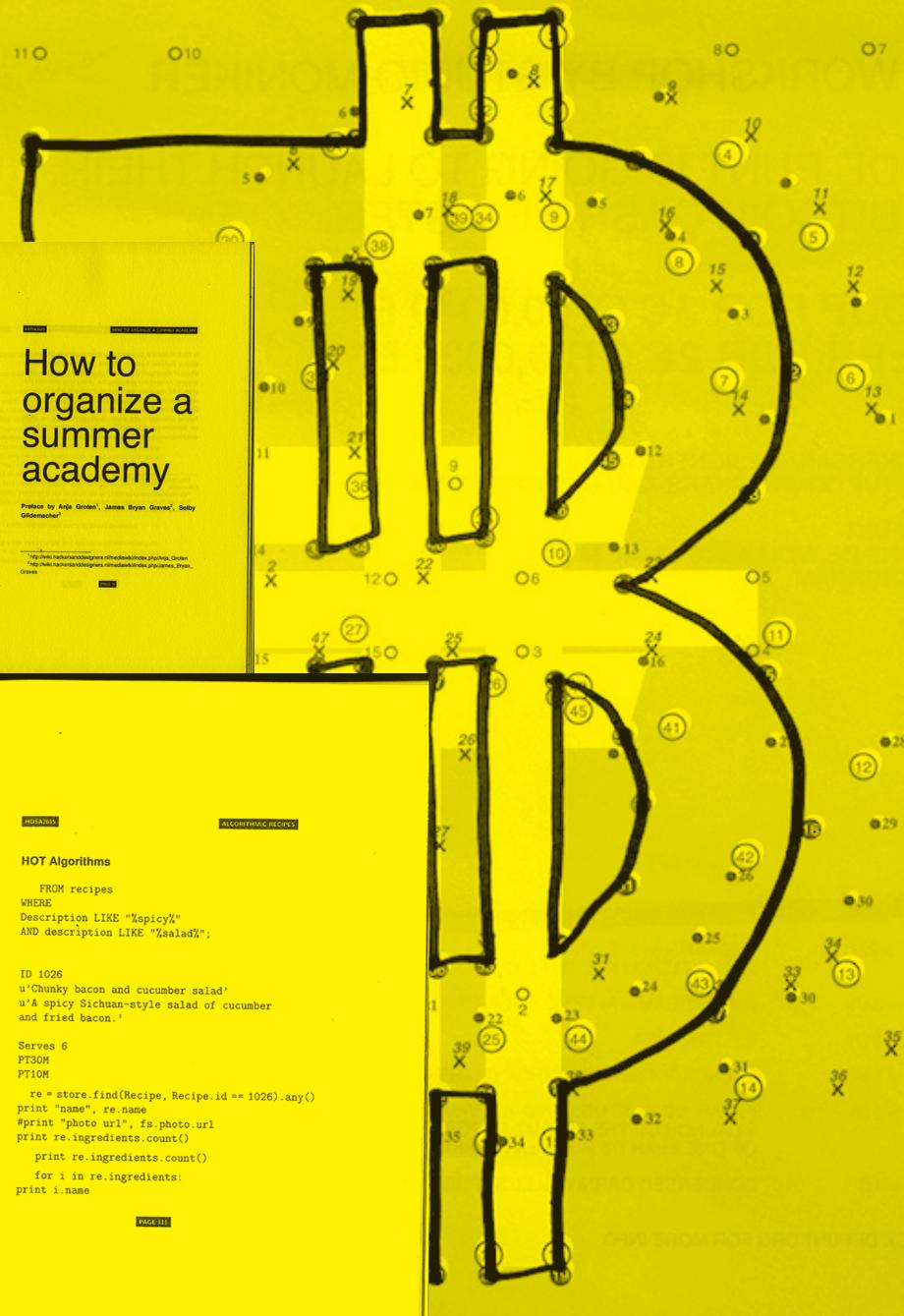
```
ID 1026
u'Chunky bacon and cucumber salad'
u'A spicy Sichuan-style salad of cucumber
and fried bacon.'
```

```
Serves 6
PT30M
PT10M

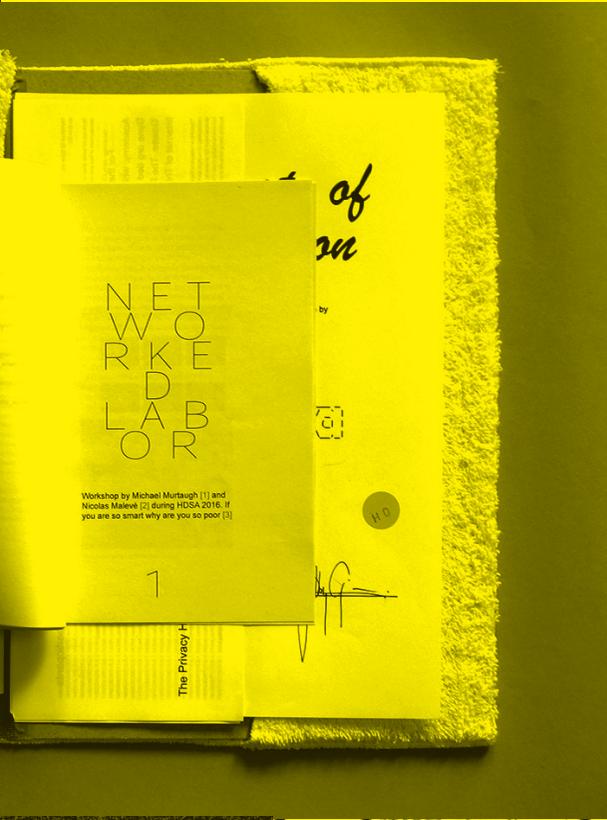
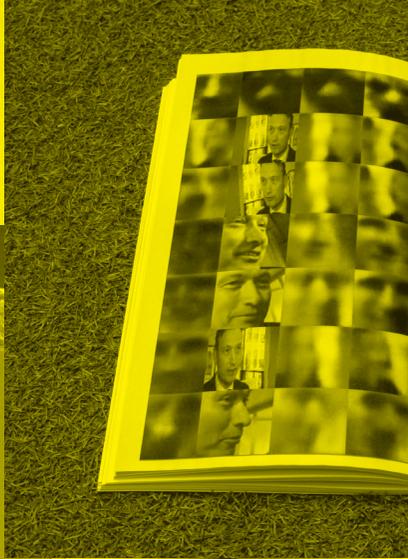
re = store.find(Recipe, Recipe.id == 1026).any()
print "name", re.name
#print "photo url", fs.photo.url
print re.ingredients.count()
    print re.ingredients.count()
    for i in re.ingredients:
print i.name
```

PAGE 111

<MEETUP.COM/HACKERS-AND-DESIGNERS-AMSTERDAM-NL>
<DEPUNT.ORG>

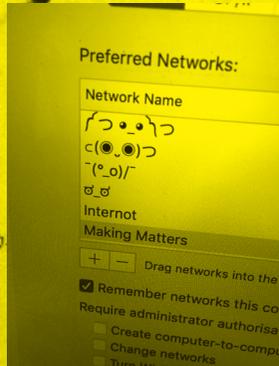


TOP OF HEAD



Handwritten notes on the right side of the page.

Handwritten notes on the right side of the page.





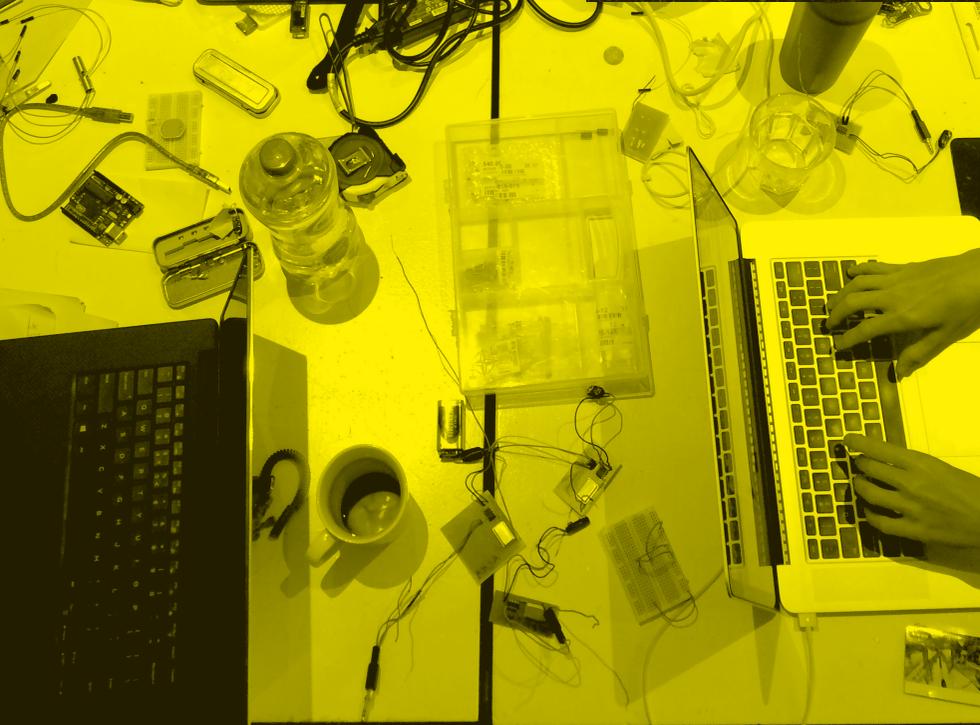
Preserving the Internet Park

Interview with Jon-Zyde Ehoze by Juliette Lysolle, designer and member of Hackers & Designers

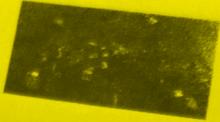
In 2017, Hackers & Designers followed the Pean to the... (text is partially obscured)

Juliette: What is your background and how did you become interested in Peer2Peer?

Jon-Zyde: My background is totally unimposed... (text is partially obscured)



BAKING BEER
FOR 7 YEARS



THOUSANDS
UPON
THOUSANDS
OF DAYS



COMPOUNDE
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FROM ONE
END TO THE
OTHER WITH
THE RAIN



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SHOW ME THE
UNIVERSE

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THIS?



the ~~magazine~~ zine

where are the pickles



are you still listening to
pickles

pickles



pickles pickles pickles



yes it is always sticking
their



I don't know if it's still

SEE IT AS
A GAME



ENJOY

PLEASE
DO NOT
LISTEN

HOUT
URE

URE

PRINT
PAGE
PLEASE

FIND A
WAY NOT
TO

AN
EXCISE

Chapter 2: Workshop Production

The workshop is an ambiguous format for time-boxed collaboration. It encompasses a vast range of domains and design practices, crossing boundaries between art and activism, between different disciplines and institutions, between commercial and educational contexts. The pervasiveness and, at times, confusing use of the term ‘workshop’ raises the question; why and how are workshops valued and practiced? My argument draws on different perspectives and understandings of workshops, including the workshop as a site for specialized material production and as a format for assembling groups of people to learn together by practicing new techniques and using new tools. This chapter critically interrogates the workshop as a temporary, dynamic learning environment. More specifically, the significance of the ‘workshop’ as a concept and format for the actualization of self-organized collectives will be discussed.

Introduction

I have been involved in workshops in various roles; as a participant, facilitator, observer and organizer. I have facilitated workshops by myself and with friends and colleagues in the Netherlands and abroad, in art schools,¹ academic and commercial conferences,² art, design and technology festivals,³ within grass-roots

self-organized contexts,⁴ and in the context of client work as a designer.⁵

In fact, workshops have, for a long time, played a prominent role in my work as a designer, educator, and organizer, and have also been central to the Hackers & Designers collective. Yet, it was only after I started this PhD research that I realized I had overlooked the ‘workshop’ as such.

When referring to the workshop ‘as such’, I already touch upon one of the main concerns that is underlying this chapter,—a certain acceptance or unquestionability

- 1 Some examples of workshops I facilitated at art and design schools in the Netherlands and abroad:
 - 2018: ‘Controller Hacking,’ Design Academy Eindhoven, Information Design, The Netherlands. (In collaboration with Heerko van der Kooij)
 - 2018: ‘ctrl-c’, Hochschule für Gestaltung Karlsruhe, Germany.
 - 2018: ‘Challenging interfaces’, KASK, Gent, Belgium.
 - 2018: Live coding workshop, Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Helsinki, Finland. (In collaboration with Jamesy Bryan Graves)
 - 2017: ‘Face the Interface’, 1-week workshop, Design Master, Sint Lucas, Antwerp, Belgium.
- 2 Selection of workshops I facilitated at academic and commercial conferences:
 - 2020: ‘Network Imaginaries’ at ‘Glossary for Undisciplined Design’ symposium, GfZK Leipzig, Germany. (In collaboration with Juliette Lizotte)
 - 2019: ‘Interfacial Workout’, ‘POST Design Festival 2019’, Copenhagen, Denmark. (In collaboration with Loes Bogers and Selby Gildemacher)
 - 2018 Workshop about the ‘Feminist Search Tools’ at ‘Society for Artistic Research’ conference in Plymouth, UK.
 - 2018: ‘Smart Cities’ workshop and talk, University of Twente, The Netherlands. (In collaboration with Dani Ploeger and Lucas Evers)
 - 2018: ‘Tools for co-creation and situated making’, talk and workshop at ‘In/equalities - Narrative & critique, resistance & solidarity Conference’, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary.
- 3 Selection of workshops I facilitated in the context of art, design and technology festivals:
 - 2021: ‘Chattypub’ workshop with H&D at the summer festival ‘DigIt’, at GfZK, Leipzig, Germany. (In collaboration with André Fincato, Heerko van der Kooij and Karl Moubarak)
 - 2017 Zine making workshop at the conference MAKE!, organized by the Willem de Kooning Academy, in Rotterdam, The Netherlands.
 - 2016: Presentation and workshop, FORMS Festival, Toronto, Canada. (In collaboration with James Bryan Graves and Selby Gildemacher)
 - 2016: ‘The Momentary Zine’, Northside Festival, New York. (In collaboration with James Bryan Graves and Selby Gildemacher)

- 4 Selection of workshops I facilitated in the context of grass-roots self-organized environments:
 - 2013: “Our Autonomous Life?” workshop, at the Metelkova squat in the context of the ‘City of Women Festival’, Ljubljana, Slovenia. (In collaboration with Maiko Tanaka, Klaar van der Lippe, and Bart Stuart)
 - 2015: ‘The Momentary Zine’, at ‘Zinefest Berlin’, Germany. (In collaboration with James Bryan Graves and Selby Gildemacher)
 - 2013: ‘Dramatize your Housing Struggle’, 4-day workshop, MilesKm residency, Rood Noot, Utrecht.
- 5 Selection of workshops I facilitated in the context of design commissioned design work:
 - In 2018 I facilitated a ‘paper prototyping’ workshop for a group of gender studies researchers, who commissioned me to develop an online exhibition. The workshop took place at the conference ‘In/equalities - Narrative & critique, resistance & solidarity’, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary. The final website, which I developed in collaboration with Joana Chicau, can be accessed at: <https://footnotesonequality.eu/>, last accessed: February 2022.
 - Between 2013 and 2014, I facilitated monthly workshops with the editorial team at Perdu, a center for experimental poetry in Amsterdam. The purpose of these workshops was to design the monthly printed newsletter ‘Post Perdu’ together. Opening up the design process to the editorial team gave me, as the designer, the possibility to discuss and develop a better understanding of Perdu as an organization, its history, the people who worked there, and the audience. The workshops and the conversations deriving from the workshops served as input for a new visual identity, which I was developing simultaneously at the time, and which can still be seen on the website: <https://perdu.nl/nl/>, last accessed: February 2022.
 - Examples of the ‘Post Perdu’ newsletters/posters:
 - <https://perdu.nl/nl/archief/2013/r/post-perdu-201310/>
 - <https://perdu.nl/nl/archief/2013/r/post-perdu-201311/>
 - <https://perdu.nl/nl/archief/2013/r/post-perdu-201312/>

of the workshop in general terms.⁶ The term ‘workshop’ travels through a manifold of contexts, crossing boundaries between art and activism, between different disciplines and institutions, between commercial and educational contexts. It is perhaps due to its flexible characteristics that it is co-opted frequently. At times, it seems anything can be a workshop. Furthermore, the workshop format is often expected to be highly productive, where outcomes can be achieved, learned or produced within a short amount of time. Some workshops draw inspiration from rapid prototyping,⁷ sprints,⁸ or

- 6 After I began work on this chapter, a conference titled “The Workshop. Investigations Into an Artistic-Political Format” was organized by ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry. I attended the conference and felt affirmed in my endeavor to look closely and critically at the specificities of the workshop, its various lineages, understandings and adaptations in different fields of knowledge. The conference description aligned with the concerns of this chapter, “This international conference will investigate the workshop at the intersection of art, politics, and economy, examining the format both in its historical success and in its relevance for current notions of collectivity.” <https://www.ici-berlin.org/events/the-workshop/>, last accessed May 2022.
- 7 In the context of workshops that have crossed my paths the notion of rapid prototyping broadly describes a process that leads to certain workshop outcomes. To give one example: “Yes, we will be building prototypes in one day! [...] In the first half of the day we will [...] create a storyline and explore sensory aspects to incorporate in the virtual environment. The other half we will spend on building (and testing) a rapid prototype.” Border Sessions, Labs, “Building a VR Empathy Machine” <https://www.bordersessions.org/lab/building-a-vr-empathy-machine/>, last accessed October, 2018.
- 8 The notion of the ‘sprint’ occurs in the context of ‘agile’ or ‘scrum’ sprint cycles for product-oriented software-development <https://www.agilealliance.org/agile101/>, last accessed May 2022. Kelly Waters “All about Agile. Step 4: Sprint Planning (Tasks)”, “How To Implement Scrum in 10 Easy Steps” (October 2007). <http://www.allaboutagile.com/how-to-implement-scrum-in-10-easy-steps-step-4-sprint-planning-tasks/#sthash.jbSG5ulV.dpuf>, last accessed October, 2018.
- The booksprint is another example of time-boxed high-velocity workshop production Mushon Zer-Aviv; Michael Mandiberg; Mike Linksvayer; Marta Peirano; Alan Toner; Aleksandar Erkalovic; Adam Hyde (2010). “Anatomy of the First Book Sprint,” in *Collaborative Futures*. Transmediale, Berlin: April, 2011.

hackathons,⁹ all formats and methods that originate in soft- and hardware development. Alongside the establishment of the ‘new economy’, these modes have become attractive for time-boxed collaboration within tech companies and creative agencies. Such methods frequently appear in workshop outlines at cultural institutions, art and design symposia and festivals, academic conferences, as well as in curricula at art and design schools. In such contexts, the workshop may or may not include soft- and hardware development, however by using such rhetoric (rapid, sprint, agile, marathon), the workshop organizers (perhaps unintentionally) insinuate high-velocity, efficient and result-oriented production.

Taking H&D as an example, it is undeniable there has also been a sustained attraction to the workshop format since the first workshop-based event that I co-organized under the title ‘Hackers & Designers’ in 2013. Since then, the workshop format has been interpreted, practiced and circulated in various ways and has significantly influenced how H&D evolved as a collective. Through the recurrence of the workshop format within H&D’s activities it could be argued that H&D contributes to and feeds off the growing popularity of workshops. In addition, H&D workshops may be implicated in knowledge economies that promote the ease with which the workshop, as a temporary, dynamic learning environment, can be applied to supposedly any context. The overuse as well as confusing use of the term ‘workshop’ and the term’s pervasiveness within this vast range of domains and practices raises the question, why and how are workshops valued and practiced?

- 9 A ‘hackathon’ (neologism of ‘hacking’ and ‘marathon’) is a time-constrained collaborative soft- and hardware development event. The aim of a hackathon is to combine different expertise of soft- and hardware development to come to a (useful, creative, or unique) product or to find solutions to a problem. Hackathons often focus on a specific topic or technology.

A clue may be found in the word ‘work’ within ‘work-shop’. In his book *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (1998), the sociologist Richard Sennett referred to the changing meaning of work and the effects of contemporary flexibilization of work conditions on people’s characters (within the context of Western societies). That is, changing working conditions also influence the ways people build and maintain social relationships. Thus, a person’s ‘character’ does not only imply ‘personality’ but rather describes “the ethical value we place on our own desires and on our relations to others.”¹⁰ In its ambiguity, the term ‘workshop’ blends effectively into the trajectories of contemporary flexible workers who, according to Sennett, do not build carriers in a cumulative fashion anymore. Rather, workers today “are asked to behave nimbly, to be open to change on short notice, to take risks continually, to become ever less dependent on regulations and formal procedures.”¹¹ According to Sennett, the emphasis on flexibility within conceptualizations of work, changed the very meaning of work and the words we use for it.¹² Flexibilization of work may require flexible terms like ‘workshop’ (or ‘collective’, or ‘tool’, or ‘platform’). In its interpretive flexibility the concept and format ‘workshop’ also relates to what sociologists Susan Leigh Star called ‘boundary objects’. A boundary object is “a set of work arrangements that are at once material and processual [...] that allows different groups to work together without consensus”¹³ That is, there is no need for a group to agree on what

10 Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 10.

11 *ibid.* 9.

12 *ibid.*

13 Susan Leigh Star, “This is Not a Boundary Object: Reflections on the Origin of a Concept,” *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 35, no. 5 (2010): 601–617.

defines ‘workshop’ precisely for workshops to be put into practice. In fact, the ambiguity and interpretive flexibility of ‘workshop’ enables it to move between and combine various contexts and sustain various meanings simultaneously. Boundary objects “are at once temporal, based in action, subject to reflection and local tailoring, and distributed throughout all of these dimensions.”¹⁴

Flexible terms such as “workshop” have become part of the common vocabulary used by creative workers, freelance artists, designers and programmers who, according to designer and writer Silvio Lorusso, deal with “disorientation caused by a constant shuffling of the cards [...] ‘living in flexible time, without standards of authority and accountability’ (Sennett, 1999).”¹⁵

My relationship to the workshops is conflicted. On the one hand, workshops’ flexible characteristics have functioned largely in favor of the H&D collective, in the sense that the shared activity of organizing workshops (while simultaneously defining and redefining what that means), is an activity that is equally loose and stable enough to keep doing what H&D’s is doing, and keep those involved in H&D connected. On the other hand, there are certain ethical concerns arising when perpetuating an image of the workshop as a format full of ‘potential’. Building collective ties and practices based on conditions and formats that are flexible, spontaneous and open for interpretation, can become difficult to combine with values such as commitment and responsibility, caring for someone or something long-term. In my view, this tension becomes particularly apparent when workshops are organized with the intention of solving problems or resolving issues. The act of organizing a workshop in and of itself can falsely signal that issues are

14 *ibid.*

15 Silvio Lorusso, *Entreprenariat: Everyone Is an Entrepreneur. Nobody Is Safe*. (Eindhoven: Onomatopoe 170, 2019), 44.

being dealt with, while in reality, it often remains unclear how such issues are being dealt with in the long term, and who is accountable for checking on these issues.

The difficulty of defining the workshop, or rather the format's inherent flexibility, contributes to the (mis)conception that anything can be workshopped. Due to the format's ambiguity, it is rather difficult to argue *for* or *against* the workshop as an interesting, productive, appropriate, format, and it therefore also remains unclear what the workshop does or might do in different contexts, what is expected from it, who is responsible for the conditions in which it is organized and the effects it has in the long-term.

Thus, my desire to articulate workshops more precisely, relates to a more essential question: Can workshops be organized responsibly? In order to address this question, it is necessary to pay attention to the two sides of 'workshop'. On the one hand, there are the manifold contexts that shape articulations around workshops, different workshop meanings, practices and legacies. On the other hand, there are some circumstances in which a workshop is not only a flexible format that can be 'applied' to different contexts, but a consequence of uncertainties, contingent and fragmented work and social relations. In the following section, I will focus on different, possibly contradicting registers of workshops.

Workshop: Site and/or format?

Workshop / Werkstatt / Werkplaats

In German and Dutch, the Anglicism 'workshop' is used mostly to refer to the more ephemeral derivation of the workshop. Bringing together groups of like-minded people, the workshop, in that understanding of the term, may be an occasion to meet, spend time together, and work intensively on a specific topic, exploring techniques or tools. Such workshops usually take place within a defined time frame and are somewhat exceptional as they tend to occur outside of daily work routines. Throughout this chapter, I use the term 'workshop format' when referring to the particular meaning outlined above and in order to differentiate it from other meanings of 'workshop'.

In addition to the workshop as a format, the workshop may also be understood as a 'site', the artisan workplace or place of specialized manufacture. In German, the word *Werkstatt* or in Dutch *werkplaats* differentiates the site, the artisanal workplace from the workshop as a format. *Stätte* or *plaats* describes a place that brings together tools, machines and materials, to produce or repair goods. The 'workshop site' centers expertise, skillful processes of working with specific materials, equipment and techniques such as woodwork, textile, metal, electronics, glass, ceramics and metal.

In the context of art and design schools where I have studied and taught, both meanings; *format* and *site* seem to merge at times.¹⁶ In these often international

¹⁶ At the time of writing this dissertation, I studied Communication Design in Germany (BA/Diplom) and in Scotland (exchange year, BA), Design in The Netherlands (Master), and in the U.S.A. (exchange semester, MA), taught at Willem de Kooning Academy, Sandberg Instituut Amsterdam, at the Design Academy in Eindhoven, and as a guest tutor in various international institutions.

and interdisciplinary environments where meanings are unstable and travel with translations, the terms workshop/werkplaats/werkstatt are often used interchangeably and describe sites and/or formats for material and knowledge production. In art schools (and here I am mostly referring to the European / Western art educational context in which I was educated), principles of hands-on as well as interdisciplinary learning are practiced similarly to the way they were practiced at the Bauhaus (founded by Walter Gropius in Weimar in 1919). At the Bauhaus, the workshop was regarded as a place that bridged the divide between making and thinking, in addition to disciplinary divisions such as sculpting and painting. The role of workshops at the Bauhaus was to bring together art and technology in an attempt to provide solutions to the social problems posed by an industrialized, capitalist society.¹⁷

Distinct from the understanding of the workshop as a format, the workshop as a site can also be understood as bound to a fixed location as it relies on specific infrastructure, equipment, and sometimes heavy machinery. Committed and skilled people are required to coordinate, maintain and take care of such facilities. The people running these workshops develop a close relationship to the place. Their expertise, as it is obtained over a long period of time, is intertwined with the particularities of the specific place. Having studied and worked with workshop instructors at art and design schools, their knowledge and ways of working seems site-specific. They know how to produce, repair and

17 “[...] to use fundamental craft and design training to prepare young people for the modern, industrially-determined labour market, by bringing art and technology together as a “new unity” to meet the design challenges of the period and to create a new kind of human being by reconciling art and life (Kentgens-Craig, 1998)” Christina Volkmann, Christian De Cock “Consuming the Bauhaus,” *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 9, no. 2 (June 2006): 129–136.

manipulate materials, that is, according to what is available in their specific workshop, aware about its possibilities and limitations.

Workshop instructors shared their knowledge with me, as I have been passing through their workshops as a student and tutor, by explaining how to operate machines, by demonstrating how to apply certain techniques, and by showing off examples with excitement and pride. Donald A. Schön, philosopher and professor of urban planning, described the habitual, embodied forms of knowledge of a skilled maker, as challenging to make verbally explicit. Making processes, according to Schön, entail sequences of skillful judgements, decisions and actions that an experienced maker undertakes spontaneously and without conscious deliberation, a process he terms “knowing-in-action.”¹⁸ The revealing and transmission of such embodied knowledge to others is not explainable solely with words. Rather, it requires demonstration and observation.

In my view, the role of workshop instructor/master as the experienced maker and their acquired knowledge, which Schön has described as habitual and embodied, should not be considered in a vacuum. In a number of workshop contexts that I had access to and was able to familiarize myself with, the demonstration and knowledge of a skilled instructor must be understood in relation to the wider context of the workshop. Importantly, it needs to be considered within the ecology of social relations that take shape within and actively shape a workshop environment. Knowing-in-action is not a solitary process. Rather, it is relational and distributed amongst many. Examples of this relationality are those moments in the workshop when an instructor proudly

18 Donald A. Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1988).

shows off what students managed to create within the specific possibilities and limitations of a workshop. These gestures of slight surprise and astonishment signal a moment of acknowledgment of the relationality of the workshop space.

During two years of studying at the Sandberg Instituut Amsterdam, (master course of the Gerrit Rietveld Academy), I made extensive use of the workshops (werkplaatsen) at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy.¹⁹ I established affinities with certain places. I often visited the printing and book binding workshops. The more often I went, the more I understood what is (im)possible in terms of production. Yet, perhaps even more important, I learned the importance of taking time to get to know the people working there. Workshop instructors developed their own terms which others had to abide by while working in their facilities. Such terms were sometimes explicit but, oftentimes, I had to test the boundaries to find out more about them. I learnt how to read and interpret an instructor's gestures and their implicit ways of choreographing the space. Spoken and unspoken rules seemed necessary to ensure careful treatment of tools and facilities but also to sustain a reasonable and sane work environment.

Workshop sites bring about particular ways of coexisting in the space, social codes and forms of interaction, such as the skill of negotiating the expectations of those who enter the workshop without much experience. I remember rushing into a workshop as a student and taking out my stress, accumulated due to upcoming assessments, on the workshop instructor. My expectations of how much time certain processes would take were quickly recalibrated as they did not align with the

19 The workshop facilities of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie: <https://rietveldacademie.nl/en/page/375/workshops-facilities>, last accessed, May 2022.

wider ethos, pace and culture of the workshop. It was as if the clock ticked slower in the workshops. I had to learn to attune to these slower conditions, to the gentle rhythm and to the prevailing social conduct.

I learned to cooperate, not to demand things, not to enter the workshop with a predefined idea of what I wanted to execute and when. Instead, I learned to approach a workshop with curiosity and openness, to adjust to its 'vibe'. After all, I was a guest in someone else's domain, and I had to adjust to its boundaries. It seemed out of the question that I might change the music in Kees Maas's silkscreen workshop.²⁰ Whether or not I liked jazz, it would become part of my printing experience. I also remember this particular workshop set up as highly efficient. There was no time to waste, no slippages permitted. Conversations were friendly but short and to the point. One needed to stay focused, to not let the ink get too dry.

The bookbinding workshop had an entirely different mood. Chatter and gossip were welcomed. It felt like an informal, laid-back place to hang out in. Asking if it was possible to add paint to the bookbinding glue, Xavier would respond: "Just try and see".²¹ I returned to certain workshops because I was interested in learning about specific techniques and using specific equipment but almost equally important were evolving affinities with specific atmospheres of workshops as social spaces, an alignment with their (implicit) socio-material conducts, that evolved along with the students passing through.

20 At the time the silkscreen workshop was run by Kees Maas.

21 Xavier Fernandez Fuentes († April 17, 2017) studied Graphic Design at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie where he graduated in 2008. He ran the bookbinding workshop from 2008 until his passing in 2017. <https://rietveldacademie.nl/en/page/9927/xavi%E2%80%99s-books-at-the-rietveld-sandberg-library>, last accessed March 2022.

Workshops and events: The first H&D workshop-based events (2013-2015)

Most people I graduated with ended up working 'on their own'. Some say they are 'self-employed', some call themselves 'independent', 'without a boss'; some say they are 'freelancers', and others say they are 'precarious creative workers' or 'unemployed'. What we have in common is that there is seemingly no pre-given structure or system to abide by in our working environments. Having worked as an employed graphic designer in advertising agencies for about two years before I embarked on a postgraduate degree in design, I was equally anxious and excited after my graduation to finally shape my own work life, to set up my own schedules, decide who I wanted to work with and under what conditions.²² Yet, I missed regular contact and exchange with peers, sharing moments, discussions about work-in-progress, learning from, and getting inspired by each other. These new self-organized working conditions were lacking a form of stability or comfort that comes with having peers around, as I had gotten used to during my study time. My personal motivation for involving myself with the Hackers & Designers collective stemmed from my desire to connect and exchange, to continue to learn, organize and make things together, virtues that appeared not to be pre-given in the reality of working as a self-employed designer.

At first, 'Hackers & Designers' (H&D) was the title of a series of workshop-based events (which we also

²² After my graduation at Hochschule Niederrhein Krefeld in Kommunikationsdesign in 2008, I first worked as a graphic designer at the advertising agency 'Cayenne', and then in 2008-2009 as a junior art director at the advertising agency 'Grey Worldwide' in Düsseldorf, Germany.

referred to as 'meetups').²³ I co-initiated H&D in 2013 with James Bryan Graves (software developer) and Selby Gildemacher (visual artist). At the time, Selby and I were running a project space with a few peers, most of whom were fellow graduates from the Sandberg Instituut Amsterdam. The monthly and later bi-monthly Hackers & Designers get-togethers, were organized in



H&D Meetup, September 2013, with Stéfan Schäfer, Johan Otten, <https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Activities/p/ICalligraphy>

a rather spontaneous and sometimes chaotic manner. However the possibility of hosting the workshops at De Punt (the name of the project space) provided a stable venue, which would contribute to their recurrence.²⁴ The interest in sharing knowledge across disciplines and through 'making things' and the possibility for sharing of skills, were some of the distinct characteristics of the H&D workshop-based events. At the time, it seemed that the combination of ad-hoc, self-organized, and community-driven activities with a hands-on practical approach was uncommon and interesting to the communities we were involved with.

²³ At the beginning H&D workshop-based events were announced on the platform meetup.com, which is the reason why the term meetup was often used to refer to these events, <https://www.meetup.com/>.

²⁴ De PUNT was a space in the ground floor of the same building in which I rented a studio/atelier. The studios were offered for an affordable rental price, by the Sandberg Instituut Amsterdam to artists and designers who had recently graduated.

Spontaneity seemed to have been part of H&D's charisma. Yet, it was not without commitment and effort that these workshops-based events were realized. The laborious process however was not always visible, even to us organizers. In the following section, I will briefly clarify how responsibilities were differentiated and actualized, not only as tasks or roles ascribed to people but also actualized more implicitly and therefore less recognizable. I will briefly introduce the roles of the organizer, facilitator and participant, which were not always mutually exclusive roles or explicitly articulated tasks, but in my view have influenced the ways 'Hackers & Designers' workshop-based events were (mis)perceived, valued, and continue to be organized.

Organizing

During the first two years of H&D, James, Selby and I took on the responsibility of organizing the events. However, we also relied on friends and colleagues, and their willingness to facilitate and participate in workshops voluntarily. Next to planning and coordinating the get-togethers, we would frequently participate in and sometimes facilitate workshops. H&D was to some extent an opportunistic project. As self-employed artists, designers and computer programmers, James, Selby and I missed engaging in active exchange and receiving feedback in our daily work lives. We saw H&D as an opportunity to open up our individual practices, to share work in progress in the context of an informal setting, to meet new people and gain new insights.

In the lead up to the H&D events, we initially invited people from within our circles of friends and colleagues to ask if they were interested in facilitating a workshop, most of whom were also self-employed and worked at the intersection of technology, design,

art and education. After a while, more people approached us with proposals and we would add them to the program of upcoming H&D events. The events were rather informal, the setup more or less the same at each of them. We planned two workshops of 30-45 minutes at each event. There was a self-run bar, people chatted in



H&D Meetup, January 2015, with Heerko van der Kooij, <https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Activities/p/Toyhacking>

and outside of the space. Nobody was paid. No profit was made. Thus, we did not offer a fee to the workshop facilitators, which may have been the reason that it became challenging to find people who were interested in facilitating workshops, after organizing the events for about two years. After all, preparing a workshop requires time and energy, even if it is very short and spontaneously organized. It seemed we had exhausted our community, and it started to feel as if we were asking for favors. Yet, at the same time, it also felt as if we had established an expectation within our community and a responsibility to continue. I remember being increasingly tired of preparing and cleaning the space and chasing people. Eventually, H&D in the format of

workshop-based, evening events became less regular and eventually we stopped organizing them.²⁵ In parallel to the waning of these events, other opportunities for organizing and facilitating workshops arose, including invitations by cultural and educational institutions and we began organizing the H&D Summer Academy, which took place for the first time in 2015.²⁶ For the HDSA we received a grant from the Dutch Creative Industries Funds, which allowed us to compensate workshop facilitators and ourselves for the organization.

Participating

In the early H&D workshops, the number of participants spanned from 5 to 50. Registration was not required. Therefore, we did not know how many people would join until the event commenced. Participants had often attended H&D workshops before, though there were usually a few first time attendees. Participants represented a wide range of backgrounds. There were visual artists, photographers, film makers, graphic, architectural and web designers, software engineers, system administrators, backend developers, some were educators in art academies or technical universities, others were students, some working and paid for their work. Often-times, workshop participants had been workshop facilitators at a previous H&D event, or planned to facilitate a workshop at a later date. The community of attendees grew mostly through hearsay and our announcements

25 H&D started organizing informal meetups starting again in 2021. Examples: https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Activities/p/H%26D_Meetup_3%3A_Filesha https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Activities/p/H%26D_Meetup_2%3A_Feminist_Search_Tools, last accessed March 2022.

26 i.e. by organizations such as Waag, Bits of Freedom, or Fiber Festival, V2, or the Willem de Kooning Academy

on the platform [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com).²⁷ Attendees seemed to be drawn to the practical and informal approach of H&D, moving away from verbal exchange as the primary means of getting to know and learning from each other, and toward an approach that centered hands-on, material experimentation.

Facilitating

Workshop facilitators prepared a topic, technique or method, which they proposed to explore together with the group of participants. The workshop themes and names of the facilitators were announced prior to the event. As aforementioned, the practices and expertise of participants and facilitators varied. Thus, facilitating a workshop at H&D required taking into consideration different levels of expertise, experience and interests. When facilitating a workshop that involved basic programming markup such as HTML and CSS, it could not be assumed that participants were acquainted with such markup languages. The workshops were not primarily instructive or explanatory, but prioritized learning-by-doing and learning together; about each other's practices and approaches in a non-hierarchical manner. Rather than taking the position of an expert, a workshop facilitator would introduce a subject they were not yet familiar with, something they were curious about and wanted to explore together. Furthermore, the finality or perfection of workshop outcomes was not important. Thus, the focus was not on the product but the *process*,—on learning how to let a plant tweet when it needed water,²⁸

27 Later we also sent out email newsletters and built a website for H&D to announce and archive our activities.

28 Lightning workshop by Arjan Scherpenisse: https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Activities/p/Hardware_hacking, last accessed January 2022.

drawing calligraphy with self-made tools,²⁹ turning battery powered toy cars into drawing robots,³⁰ programming browser animations,³¹ planting dead drops,³² creating generative typefaces,³³ and learning about tricks for color separation in offset printing.³⁴

Sociality

In comparison to the kind of knowledge exchange that would occur in a traditional artisan workshop, a space of specialized production, H&D workshops (particularly those of the early days) only briefly touched upon topics and techniques. The emphasis was not so much on transferring specific skills or tools, but rather on offering an occasion to witness how *others* do and make things. As a designer, I could experience (even though only briefly) how the approaches of practitioners from different disciplinary backgrounds, and different levels of expertise *diverged* from what was familiar to me. Vice versa, others could ‘see’ or experience me doing and making things in my particular way. Observing and learning from each other’s approaches (some of which diverged, some seemed familiar) created a particularly

- 29 Lightning workshop by Stefan Schäfer: <https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Activities/p/ICalligraphy>, last accessed January 2022.
- 30 Lightning workshop by Heerko van der Kooij: <https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Activities/p/Toyhacking>, last accessed January 2022.
- 31 Lightning workshop by Jonas Otten: <https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Activities/p/ICalligraphy>, last accessed January 2022.
- 32 H&D meetup ‘NSA’: <https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Activities/p/NSA> during which we ‘planted so-called Dead Drops. “Dead Drops’ is an anonymous, offline, peer to peer file-sharing network in public space initiated by artist Aram Bartholl. “USB flash drives are embedded into walls, buildings and curbs accessible to anybody in public space.” <https://deaddrops.com/>, last accessed January 2022.
- 33 Lightning workshop by Moniker (present were Luna Maurer and Jonathan Puckey): https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Activities/p/So_if_you_are_so_smart..., last accessed January 2022.
- 34 Lightning workshop by Karoline Swiezynski: https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Activities/p/Hardware_hacking, last accessed January 2022.

generative condition. It is particular as it cannot be entirely foreseen by any of the participants. The uncertainty of the moment, the not-knowing, is what workshop attendees had in common.

In her book *In Catastrophic Times* (2015), Isabelle Stengers wrote that divergence does not belong to a single person. Rather divergences “are related to the situation and not to persons, [and] are propositions whose truth derives from their efficacy.”³⁵ I came to



H&D Meetup, January 2014, with Moniker, Emilio Moreno
https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Activities/p/So_if_you_are_so_smart...

understand these short workshops as occasions for trying and testing articulations of diverging practices, experimenting with making oneself understood and understanding the other through different registers; verbal, aesthetic, technical, methodical utterances. At the time, I was interested in getting to know more web developers and to learn about coding, seeing how they work through issues, hearing how they speak about or respond to issues, and also trying to learn to code myself. It was not my intention to become a programmer myself. While working on websites as a designer, I noticed a kind of discrepancy between my ideas, con-

- 35 Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*. (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 143.

cepts and desires and the ‘reality’ of web programming (in terms of technical feasibility but also the time it takes to realize things). In my experience of designing websites at the time, I thought it required design mock-ups (sketches that look like websites but do not function as such) to be handed over to a programmer, rather than working on the design and development of a website side-by-side. Furthermore, it seemed that I did not always speak the same language as the developers I worked with. There was difficulty with our communication.

To recap: To some extent both the artisan workplace and what I have called the ‘workshop format’ require a certain openness, flexibility and attunement to their socio-material dynamics. The ways of doing and making amongst practitioners often diverge. Discrepancies between what one is used to and how things are done in a particular workshop do not necessarily have to be overcome, yet becomes a condition that requires attention. As such, workshops (sites and formats) may always be peculiar, temporary social spaces that are uncontrollable to some degree. Besides methods, techniques, tools, and protocols, such environments bring about social dynamics that evolve from the particular composition of participants, facilitators and organizers, the environment they find themselves in, as well as the tools, techniques and materials they are dealing with.

In H&D workshops, workshop organizers, facilitators, participants, environment and tools shape and reshape the dynamics of the here and now. Producing a concrete result, for example a functioning prototype or learning how to master a particular skill, may not necessarily be the goal. Conditions that factor into the composition of the workshop and workshop outcomes are not fully in control of any of the participants or facilitators. On the contrary, a workshop may become an opportunity to escape the pressures of producing some-

thing final or instantaneously useful. When the stakes are low, a unique condition for learning and making things is established. The goal is not to accomplish or finish anything beautiful, functioning or impactful. Yet it would be dismissive to say that nothing is produced, or that it does not matter what is being produced, or how it is being produced. In *Meeting the Universe Halfway Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007) feminist theorist Karen Barad wrote

“the point is not merely that knowledge practices have material consequences but that practices of knowing are specific material engagements that participate in (re) configuring the world. Which practices we enact matter—in both senses of the word. Making knowledge is not simply about making facts but about making worlds.”³⁶

By establishing an informal context in which final products or expert knowledge allegedly does not matter, the notion of “nothing really is at stake” becomes accepted and appreciated. Due to *repeatedly* organizing such workshop-based events from 2013-2015, under the same title ‘Hackers & Designers’, the manner in which they were organized and talked about, H&D’s workshops became known as easy going, easy to join, and easy to organize, and as such, this very fact of ‘not mattering’ started to matter.

The workshops were also ‘packaged’ as events and resonated partially because they were enjoyable activities outside of working hours. Scheduling them in the evenings created an entertaining atmosphere.

³⁶ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2007), 91.

While the workshops were often a laborious process for all who were involved (organizers, participants, facilitators), they were held outside of working hours, and therefore outside of the scope of ‘work’, which shaped the way they were perceived. These workshop-based events blurred the line between work and leisure, friendships and work relations. The spontaneous approach to ad hoc organization may have been perceived as ‘easy going’ or ‘easy to do.’ Yet this spontaneity was also accompanied by stress, often caused by lack of clarity around numbers of attendants. Often we would not know how many people would turn up. At times, a sense of failure was felt if not many people turned up. At other times, it would be overwhelming if more than we could accommodate turned up.

The incentive of H&D workshops has been to create exceptional learning environments. The workshops break with disciplinary routines, habitual ways of doing and making, emphasizing instead collective hands-on experimentation. Simultaneously, the repeated organization of workshops and the particular conditions in which they were organized, also became a kind of practice or routine, which was upheld by the organizers, facilitators and participants, all committed to a particular way of workshoping together. Similar to a workshop instructor who develops certain socio-material skills and conducts that evolve from the activity of coordinating and hosting students and colleagues in their workshop, I have also learned and practiced context-specific social-material skills through the coordination and hosting of hands-on workshops in the context of H&D. Though I practiced this coordination in a manner that aligned with the fragmented experiences of the self-employed creative practitioners involved. Such workshop-based events

reflected and perpetuated a certain culture of flexible work and contributed to a perception of workshop organization being effortless.

The evolving workshop market

Self-organized learning

A student by the name of Lucy once asked me: ‘Why does everything have to be a workshop these days?’ In my understanding the question arose out of a certain workshop fatigue,—an exhaustion with the ‘workshop market’, and perhaps a general disappointment in what workshops are actually capable of. I had asked the design students at the Sandberg Instituut to develop and host workshops in smaller groups. The workshops took place throughout the course of one semester and were intended to function as occasions where the students could teach each other a skill, a subject or a curiosity. I have taught this class several times and usually contextualized the course with a presentation that contained examples of workshops I had co-organized and participated in, in the context of H&D. I also added some historical examples of self-organized extracurricular activities in the 1960s and 1970s that were taking place, in addition to or outside of the regular curriculum of universities, art and design schools. Examples include the ‘Free International University’ (Germany, 1973–

1988),³⁷ ‘Anti University’ (UK, 1968),³⁸ ‘Non-school’ (France, 1966),³⁹ and the aforementioned Haagse Vrije Academie that lasted significantly longer (Netherlands, 1947–2015).

Interdisciplinarity, unconstrained learning and egalitarianism seemed a common desire in these self-organized collective learning environments, some of which run by artists. The Free International University founded by Joseph Beuys after he was dismissed from his professorship of Monumental Sculpture at the Düsseldorf Academy “for his involvement in sit-ins and for disregarding the usual admittance procedures for students (he permitted anyone to enter his class).”⁴⁰ The FIU was an artist-initiated counter-educational initiative to democratize education. Beuys wanted “to free schools and colleges from the control of the political parties and the state.”⁴¹ Beuys’ intention was to fundamentally renew and extend the educational system. (For his “expanded concept of art” the renewal of the entire

educational system was necessary both, the methods and content of teaching and in the organization of research and teaching.”)⁴² George Brecht’s and Robert Filliou’s Non-school of Villefranche rejected any pre-established program. The artists proclaimed “[p]erfect freedom, equality, availability to all, mindfulness, are enough. This is where [the Non-School differed] from “anti-universities”, which seem to carry the hangover of the patterns they inherited from the universities they wish to replace.”⁴³ The Non-school, was a critique on “the expanded commodification and capitalization of art in the 1960” and fittingly, rarely left any material trace. It only existed in the form of an official-looking letterhead “[T]he artists seemed systematically to refuse to advance beyond the phase of ideas and processes.”⁴⁴

In sharing these examples from the past with the students, my intention was to convey a certain emancipatory potential in student-led, self-organized educational formats, to appeal to the students’ own ability to take things into their own hands, rather than relying too much on a given curriculum. It seemed to me as if the format of the workshop as it is interpreted and actualized in the context of H&D, is carried by comparable energies as the aforementioned historical examples of self-organized educational initiatives of the 60s and 70s. Self-cultivation seems to be valued also in the context of H&D, and articulated through notions such as learning-by-doing, experimentation with new techniques and methods independent of established disciplines, institutions or daily work routines. However, the examples of experimental self-organized learning initiatives need

37 Founded by Joseph Beuys in the early 1970’s in Düsseldorf, Waldo Bien “The Founding of F.I.U. Amsterdam with Joseph Beuys,” FIU Amsterdam, 2007, http://www.fiutamsterdam.com/html/f_i_u__history.html, last accessed 17 June 2022.

38 “The Antiuniversity of London was a short-lived and intense experiment in self-organized education and communal living that took off at 49 Rivington Street in Shoreditch in February 1968.” <https://maydayrooms.org/portfolio/antiuniversity-of-london/>, last accessed February 2022. “The group included the anti-psychiatrists R.D. Laing and David Cooper; veterans of the Free University of New York, Allen Krebs and Joe Berke; the feminist psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell; and the cultural theorist Stuart Hall. In February, 1968, the Anti-University of London opened its doors.” <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/remembering-1968-the-campus-of-the-anti-university-of-london/>, last accessed May 2022.

39 Founded by Fluxus artists Robert Filliou and George Brecht, in Villefranche (1966), Natilee Harren “La cédille qui ne finit pas: Robert Filliou, George Brecht, and Fluxus in Villefranche,” *Getty Research Journal*, no. 4 (2012): 127-143.

40 Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, “Beuys’s Legacy in Artist-led University Projects,” *Tate papers*, 31, (2019).

41 <https://web.archive.org/web/20110910110005/http://www.beuys.org/fiu.htm>

42 <https://web.archive.org/web/20110910110005/http://www.beuys.org/fiu.htm>

43 Robert Filliou “La Fête est Permanente / The Eternal Network,” *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts*, first published in 1970.

44 Natilee Harren “La cédille qui ne finit pas: Robert Filliou, George Brecht, and Fluxus in Villefranche,” *Getty Research Journal*, no. 4 (2012): 127–143.

to be understood in relation to the specific time and contexts in which they occurred, and to which they responded. It seems to me as if such initiatives were driven by a particular kind of urgency, and can also be understood as a form of protest, act of resistance or defiance. Workshops, as they are organized today, in my view, do not exclude those aspects. Nevertheless the emphasis in workshop organization seems to lie on the workshop being a format that is easy to access, easy to organize. A workshop is a flexible format for doing things differently, *in* or *outside* of institutions or daily work routines. In my view, ‘taking things into one’s own hands’, changes its meaning within institutional context, and in a time when taking things into one’s own hands seems to have become the norm.

Alternative or complementary learning communities sprouted throughout the 1960s and 1970s “as organizations for underground activism and political education. [...] They were also known as experimental colleges, open education exchanges, and communiver-sities. [some] moved their programming off-campus and continued to exist as a venue for ‘lifelong learning’.”⁴⁵ Following principles of learning-by-doing, education as an emancipatory practice was not to end with the boundaries of the prevailing learning institutions. As John Dewey wrote “I believe that education [...] is a process of living and not a preparation for future living.”⁴⁶

Around the same time *The Whole Earth Catalog* promoted the importance of self-education in the format of a product catalog that was published between 1968 and 1972 in North America.⁴⁷ It compiled information on

45 Bill Draves. *The Free University: A Model for Lifelong Learning* (New York: Association Press, 1980).

46 John Dewey “My Pedagogic Creed,” in *The School Journal*, 54 (January 1897), 77–80.

47 Stewart Brand, ed., *The Whole Earth Catalog: Access to Tools* (1968–1972).

how to build and get access to tools and infrastructures that cater to essential forms of hands-on production and self-education. The emphasis was not so much on mastery of such tools, but learning as much as necessary about them to get around, and to live a self-determined life, independent from industrialized, and capitalist society⁴⁸. According to Florian Cramer, the occurrence of *The Whole Earth Catalog* also marked a turning moment: “the convergence of proto-“Maker Culture,”⁴⁹ Thoreau-inspired counterculture and DIY superstores. As both a manual and a product catalog, it gave ‘access to tools’ (its motto) for squatters as well for homesteaders. Its publisher, Stewart Brand, went on to become a Silicon Valley entrepreneur.”⁵⁰

Notions such as self-motivated self-cultivation, the desire for independence from prevailing educational and governmental bureaucracy, seems to align well with the so-called ‘learning economy’. In her article “Lifelong Learning and the Professionalized Learner,”⁵¹ artist researcher Annette Krauss turns towards European policy papers on lifelong learning. She described developments such as ‘life-long learning’ and the ‘learning economies’ as examples “of progress-oriented accumulative models of learning that pervades institutions and subjectivities today.”⁵² According to Krauss, “learning from preschool to post-retirement, lifelong learning [encompasses] the

48 Jeroen van den Eijnde “A Hall of Mirrors of Art Production,” in *Materialization in Art and Design*, Herman Verkerk and Maurizio Montalti, eds. (Sandberg Instituut and Sternberg Press, 2019).

49 Florian Cramer “Does DIY mean anything? - a DIY attempt (= essay)” (2019), originally commissioned for Anrikningsverket *Journal #1* by Norbergfestival, Sweden, http://cramer.pleintekst.nl/essays/does_diy_mean_anything/, last accessed February 2022.

50 *ibid.*

51 Annette Krauss “Lifelong Learning and the Professionalized Learner,” in *Unlearning Exercises. Art Organizations as Sites for Unlearning* (Valiz, Amsterdam and Casco Art Institute Working for the Commons, Utrecht, 2018).

52 *ibid.*

whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning and is tightly interwoven with the commodification of education.⁵³

Thinking back to Lucy, the design student's expression of frustration with workshops, I understand her question "Why does everything have to be a workshop these days?" as a critique of a certain pervasiveness of workshops. The question stayed with me as I started to wonder if workshops' characteristics of being ephemeral, non-binding, solely produce an image of empowerment, while simultaneously perhaps also weakening collective ties. In the context of the students' assignment to develop workshops for each other, and the implied appeal to self-organize collective learning environments, I question whether I have tried to help students in becoming independent thinkers/learners/designers or if I am preparing them to abide by work conditions that are uncommitted, short-term, in which it is left up to the individual to self-sustain and to continuously self-improve. To formulate it more broadly, is a course that focuses on developing workshops, as a way to encourage students to self-organize their own study environments, reinforcing superficial collaboration and fragmentation of work conditions, rather than strengthening connections between them and enabling long-term collaboration?

Postponing accountability

There has been an increase of extra-curricular workshop initiatives, many of which are student-run, some attempting to address structural problems of the academic institution. An example of a student-run self-organized initiative is PUB, an interdepartmental publishing platform, started by a student from the design department,

53 *ibid.*

Daniel Seemayer, who was looking for opportunities to exchange with students of different departments, as well as more opportunities to focus on matters of (self-) publishing. Many students became involved in PUB⁵⁴ and were granted financial support by the institution to continue organizing publishing related workshops, and projects. Other initiatives are Unsettling Rietveld Sandberg,⁵⁵ and HearHere!⁵⁶ and a manifold self-initiated student unions.⁵⁷ The organizers of such initiatives are students, tutors or staff. Usually the motivation to start organizing these initiatives starts from a frustration, in Daniel's case the lack of interdepartmental exchange on publishing matters; others address the lack of representation of certain groups, or a lack of communication between different departments of the institution. The workshop seems to be a recurring format within all of these initiatives. Oftentimes external experts are invited to induce their knowledge by facilitating workshops,

54 PUB is an trans-departmental initiative funded and run by students of the Sandberg Institute. For further information see: <https://pub.sandberg.nl>, last accessed May 2022.

55 Unsettling is a bottom-up initiative that supports "existing initiatives, while also developing outreach programs, drawing in new perspectives, and making the context of the academy more inclusive to other voices, minds and bodies—those who are here and those who are not, yet." For further information see: <https://unsettling-rietveldsandberg.net/>, last accessed May 2022.

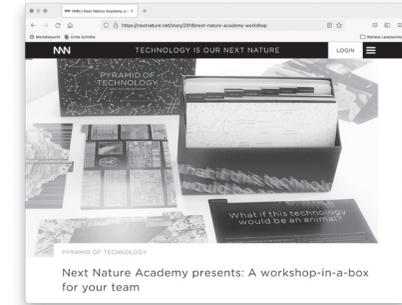
56 "Hear! Here! is an experimental listening and dialogue platform that [...] works to encourage a culture of dialogue for students and staff of Rietveld and Sandberg." For further information see: <http://www.hearheredialogue.nl/>, last accessed May 2022.

57 The student-organized unions are organized bottom up and aim to represent underrepresented voices in the academy. Examples are the Asian student union <https://www.facebook.com/theasianuniongransandberg/>, last accessed May 2022. <https://www.instagram.com/the.asian.union>, last accessed May 2022, the Black Student Union: <https://www.instagram.com/blackstudentunion.usb/>, last accessed May 2022, the Near East Union: <https://extraintra.nl/initiative/near-east-union/event/near-east-union-gathering>, last accessed May 2022, the Latin American and Caribbean Union: <https://extraintra.nl/initiative/latin-american-and-caribbean-student-union/event/lacu-dinner>, last accessed May 2022.

for example, on issues of inclusivity and diversity, to sensitize and train teachers, students and staff in creating safe(r) learning environments. To give an example, two workshops I participated in were organized by the initiative ‘HearHere!’ who invited two coaches to facilitate a workshop on “Non-Violent Communication,”⁵⁸ and by ‘Unsettling Rietveld Sandberg’ who invited Camille Barton to facilitate a workshop about “White Privilege”⁵⁹ for tutors, coordinators and administrative staff.

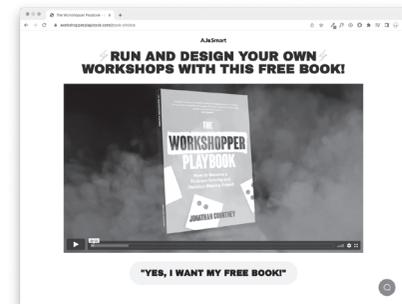
The hope is that workshops can actually lead to structural change in an institution such as an art academy. These workshops intend to empower educators and students but I came to wonder if such workshops merely satisfy an instantaneous need momentarily, by providing a format for superficial engagement of participants with serious issues that run deeply in the fabric of an institution. Workshops are short-lived one-off instances, workshop participation is often non-obligatory and commitments remain brief. How issues are followed-up with, are continued and practiced in the everyday reality of students and staff often remains unclear. The risk of the workshop is that it becomes an evasive strategy in certain contexts. Issues are outsourced to freelance coaches, (often also artists, designers and educators that already work under precarious conditions)—along with the responsibility of creating structural change.

Another question that arose for me is, in promoting temporary learning formats, in privileging processes



Next Nature “Workshop in a Box,”

<https://nextnature.net/story/2018/next-nature-academy-workshop>



Jonathan Courtney, The Workshopper Playbook, “Jonathan Courtney is a facilitation genius who designs and runs workshops for the coolest companies on the planet.

This book contains his secret formula – so don’t just stand there, read it!”, quote by Jake Knapp, author of Sprint : how to solve big problems and test new ideas in just five days (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016),

<https://www.workshopperplaybook.com/book-choice>, last accessed March 2022.

58 “HH#2 Non-Violent Communication /w Cara Crisler and Mirjam Schulpen” <https://extraintra.nl/initiative/hear-here/event/hh-2-non-violent-communication-w-cara-crisler-and-mirjam-schulpen>, last accessed May 2022. The workshop facilitators work under the name ‘Connecting Communication’ <https://connectingcommunication.nl/our-offer/>, last accessed May 2022.

59 “Unsettling Workshop /w Camille Barton” <https://extraintra.nl/initiative/unsettling-rietveld-sandberg/event/unsettling-workshop-w-camille-barton>, last accessed May 2022.



Another example of a workshop-in-a-box “The crazy thing about Workshop Tactics.

It’s now sold tens of thousands of copies all around the globe. To consultants, managers, professors and doctors. Designers, engineers, managers and CEOs.

It’s trusted by folks at the BBC, Microsoft, IBM, Google, Apple, Meta, Stanford University, and Lockheed Martin. The list is endless.” Charles Burdett, founder of Pips Decks

<https://pipdecks.com/products/workshop-tactics?variant=39770920321113>, last accessed March 2022.

over outcomes, do workshop initiatives (which Hackers & Designers is also an example of) contribute to the valorization and commodification of the workshop, and therefore the commodification of learning as such? Does the ‘image’ of the workshop as a potent format, economize the sphere of education? While being occupied with sustaining a space for experimentation, reducing the pressures of finding solutions to problems, or producing final outcomes or products, the process may have become a product.

Commodified learning

The workshop format seems to function well within the context of commercial conferences, incubator programs, and creative retreats and at times it seems the workshop is understood as a product itself. Taking place outside of the daily work routine, workshops ought to be fun while enhancing the participants’ CV. *Next Nature* a Dutch organization that describes itself as “a network of makers, thinkers, educators and supporters [...] interested in the debate on our future—in which biology and technology are fusing”) designed a workshop-in-a-box.⁶⁰ Here, the workshop takes on the format of a saleable card game and is described as a “2-hour dynamic crash course [that] helps you to better understand and discuss technology.”⁶¹ It might not be intended as such, but this workshop-in-a-box comes across as an ironic commentary on compulsive self-improvement, learning-by-doing and the pressure to

60 “Are you working on projects where technology and human interaction are involved, and are you looking for a new approach? As of today, we offer a brand-new workshop concept for you and your team. In just two hours you learn how to work with the Pyramid of Technology toolbox in an active, dynamic and 100% analogue way!” <https://nextnature.net/story/2018/next-nature-academy-workshop>, last accessed March 2022.

61 *ibid.*

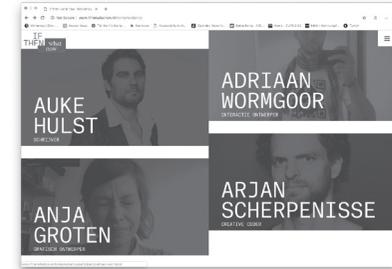
participate in one workshop after the other. The implication of presenting a workshop as a neatly packaged product is that the workshop in and of itself is a highly productive format that can be reproduced easily.

The ‘workshop market’ promises collective experiences as opportunities for self-improvement, and as a return for investment especially if the workshop leaders are renowned, influential players in their professional fields. The free spirit of experimentation is easily replaced by coercive forces of a neoliberal workshop market, the fear of missing out on latest workshop trends and the pressure to constantly engage in processes of self-improvement. I participated and organized workshops in various contexts and frequently encountered a general assumption that the workshop format can save the day, that it is able to offer magical solutions to an array of problems. I found such ‘workshop magic’ depicted astutely in a particular scene of the popular Netflix series *Broad City*, in which one of the protagonists, Ilana, is caught by surprise when invited by her professor to the front of the auditorium to present her research project. She is obviously not prepared to do so, yet she walks to the front, confidently claps her hands together and shouts: “Let’s workshop this!” The phrase “Let’s workshop this!” stands in for what is not (yet) there.

In March 2018, I participated in a workshop by invitation from a friend who worked at a design and technology lab at the time.⁶² I was one of four invited participants. The personal email invitation from my friend emphasized the experimental character of the session and the opportunity to collaborate with a unique group of makers, consisting of a writer, and two pro-

62 The foundation Lava Lab, which profiled itself as a design and technology lab, was founded by the Amsterdam-based design company Lava and dissolved in 2017.

grammers.⁶³ My friend asked me to join because of my expertise as a designer and my involvement with the H&D collective. In the following section, I will reflect upon this workshop as it allows me to highlight certain dilemmas that I have come across frequently, which, in my view, relate to the unquestionability and popularity



Screenshot of the workshop website, ‘If Then What Now’, which is no longer online.

of the workshop that have created certain expectations of the workshop that posit it as a compelling format in and of itself. I refer to this workshop as a hackathon-like workshop, as in my view it is exemplary of the ways principles of different fields—such as software development, travel and change meaning through workshops. In this case such traveling principles that remind of hackathon principles, produced issues that are exemplary also for the commodification of workshops, in the sense that the workshop is often assumed to be a highly productive format (productive in neo-liberal terms).

In its initial meaning a ‘hackathon’⁶⁴ (neologism of ‘hacking’ and ‘marathon’) describes a time-constrained collaborative event that focuses on soft- and hardware

63 Other participants were: Auke Hulst (writer), Adriaan Wormgoor (developer), Arjan Scherpenisse (developer).

64 According to Dictionary.com a hackathon is usually “a competitive event in which people work in groups on software or hardware projects, with the goal of creating a functioning product by the end of the event”, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/hackathon>, last accessed May 2022.

development. The aim of a hackathon is to combine various expertise of soft- and hardware development to come to a (useful, creative, or unique) product or to find the solution to a problem. Hackathons usually focus on a specific topic or technology. According to the OpenBSD (a security-focused, free and open-source, Unix-like operating system) website, the first event termed ‘hackathon’ was organized in 1999 and developers from around the world gathered.⁶⁵ Since the mid to late 2000s, hackathons started to become popular formats in technology companies as a way to quickly develop new software technologies.

In my understanding, the term “hackathon” seems to combine work and leisure and can be found on event pages and symposia schedules within the cultural sector in the Netherlands, particularly in the context of workshop-based events that target artists and creative technologists.⁶⁶ In that context, the hackathon-like workshop often promises a hands-on practical approach and sometimes involves technology production but not necessarily.⁶⁷ Participants are often unpaid and work towards concrete solutions or products in a compressed amount of time and often within a competitive setup.

65 See: OpenBSD website: <https://www.openbsd.org/hackathons.html>, last accessed May 2022.

66 Thomas James Lodato and Carl DiSalvo, “Issue-oriented hackathons as material participation”, *New Media & Society* 18, no. 4 (April 2016): 544.

67 <https://waag.org/nl/event/ai-ai-barbie-hackathon>, last accessed March 2022.
<https://waag.org/nl/article/hoer-zorgen-we-ervoor-dat-vergroening-van-steden-even-urgent-blijft>, last accessed March 2022.

Sometimes a jury selects the most innovative project, which is then awarded a prize.⁶⁸

Upon arrival at the hackathon-like workshop all participants were asked to engage in an introduction game to get to know each other. The game required physical exercises. One participant refused to take part. The others went along with it although all we had met before in other circumstances,—perhaps to placate the workshop facilitator, who was hired especially to support the collaborative process. What followed were two days of intensive ‘brainstorming’.

We were asked to tackle the following challenge in collaboration: “Create an interactive story that is set in the future. And use code.” The workshop space was well-equipped: markers, sticky notes, and walls covered with paper to sketch on. While intentions for outcomes of the workshop were communicated openly at the beginning of the workshop, during the two days, a certain collective expectation of a tangible, presentable outcome arose. The group’s collective ambition led to producing a functioning prototype, an interactive installation that would be presented and tested at a public event at the end of the workshop process. While it is impossible to fully locate this emerging ambition and determine how it came about, in my recounting of this workshop experience, I realize it may have been related to the fact that one hundred people had been invited for the final presentation before the workshop had officially started. Posters and flyers had been printed and distributed. I felt pressured to ‘perform’ due to the expectation of output, to live up to the expectations of an audience but also feeling conscious of not letting down my friend

68 Hackathons have been criticized for exploiting the willingness of participants to perform free labor.
<https://www.hackerearth.com/blog/developers/good-bad-overrated/>, last accessed March 2022.

and fellow collaborators. Furthermore, our workshop facilitator seemed highly motivated to mediate the ‘idea finding’ process. Drinks and snacks were frequently offered to bolster our energy. A videographer was hired to interview every participant about the qualities and challenges of our collaboration.⁶⁹ The video interviews were published on social media platforms and on the project website.⁷⁰



Video documentation, *if then / what now: the making of*, June 2018,
<https://vimeo.com/273102715>

Towards the end of the second day, the tension was mounting. It became clear we would not be able to produce a functioning prototype within the constraints of the given timeframe. To be able to present a convincing demo to the audience, some of us would have to continue working on the project in our free time. A whole enterprise of workshop facilitation arose, which contributed to keeping up the image of a workshop as a short intensive format for collaboration. In this estimation, a workshop can produce ‘magic’, although the consequences of this were that some participants had to over-compensate working into their leisure time in order to uphold the image of the workshop as full of potential.

69 Video documentation, *if then / what now: the making of*, June 2018,
<https://vimeo.com/273102715>, last accessed December 2021.

70 The workshop website, ‘If Then What Now’ is no longer online.
 Information can still be found on: <http://www.letterenfonds.nl/nl/entry/1910/if-then-what-now>, last accessed May, 2022.

To clarify and temper an overly negative representation, there were also joyful and inspiring moments and shared excitement throughout the days of gathering. However, in my experience as a participant in the workshop, some challenges became apparent that I have also experienced as a workshop organizer and facilitator in other contexts. I found myself in the role of the over-facilitating mediator. I have also been responsible for documenting workshops, capturing the most outwardly collaborative and productive workshop moments, in order to prove to a wider audience, to the funding institutions, but also to myself, that the workshops had in fact taken place, that there was a good turn-out, that something valuable had been produced and that participants had had a good time.

This example demonstrates the extent to which workshops are often ‘dressed up’ as highly productive, creative or inspiring. In reality, these workshops often lack a clear intention or purpose, while the parameters are often tightly defined and inflexible. Furthermore, workshops are often only considered successful if a tangible result is produced: a product or prototype that can be presented to a wider audience. By organizing a public event as the concluding moment for the workshop, the organizers introduced additional pressure to the process. The perception of the success of a workshop then becomes dependent on the result, which in the case of the hackathon-like workshop, needed to be tangible, finished or at least presentable to a wider audience.

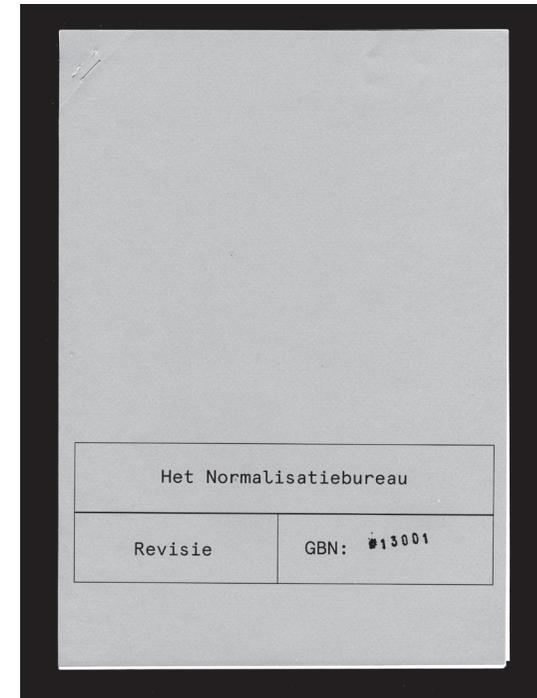
Over-facilitation of the workshop was another pitfall. By introducing a mediator, unnecessary exercises, a wide range of workshop equipment, along with elaborate modes of documentation (external photographers, videographers conducting interviews), the workshop organizers established a controlled environment and decreased the chance for unexpected turns. The arbi-

trairness of the assignment (“Create an interactive story that is set in the future”) combined with an imposed hackathon-like setup (“And use code”) implied there was a problem that needed to be solved. In my view, without providing the time and space to investigate commonalities or an understanding of the necessity of producing something together in the first place, the workshop became an end in itself.

Through introducing a range of recognizable workshop props a workshop may produce certain aesthetics and articulations, reproducing an image of workshops that emits productivity and professionalism, while criteria for working together, or definitions for productivity remain obscure. Workshop documentation (photos, notes, mind maps), workshop equipment (sticky notes, whiteboards, projection screens), mediation and entertaining presentation formats (video documentary, public evening event) sustain a certain perception of workshops. However, such an overload of probably well-intended facilitation might not align with the actual experience as a participant, and can even create coercive dynamics and discomfort.

Je haalt je schouders op . ‘Het is lekker weer.’ ‘En dat is het.’ ‘Ga je naar het park?’ ‘Uit een tas steken een stokbrood en de hals van een fles rosé. Je ex knikt . ‘Even genieten van de zon.’ Maar je wordt niet meegevraagd , zodat je opeens zeker weet dat in het park een verbeterde versie van jou wacht . ‘Het park is echt opgeknapt,’ zegt je ex . ‘Is dat zo?’ ‘Er wordt in geval niemand meer aangerand of bestolen.’ Je kent niemand die er is aangerand of bestolen . Je haalt je mobiel uit je zak , kijkt naar de tijd . ‘De supermarkt gaat zo dicht,’ lieg je . In de supermarkt sta je eindeloos voor de schappen met chips , in de koelte van de airco . Blonde tieners in Appieblauw duwen kratten door erehagen van kruidenierswaren of staan in een groepje te giebelen rond een kassamedewerker . Je bent een huichelaar , ontken het maar niet , ook al is het uit zelfbescherming . Loochening is onvermijdelijk temidden van de oprukkende Normalisatie . En tegelijk is het van alle tijden . Denk aan de equivocatie van katholieken , die zich in de zeventiende eeuw dubbelzinnig uitlieten om aan

waar je ze in de steek hebt
gelaten. Want dat heb je.
Maar nog niet genoeg.
Jegaat zitten aan de
keukentafel, opent
eerst de rekeningen.
De zuurstofnota is weer
omhooggegaan – het
zal ook eens niet.
Maar betaalt toch
maar, voor je wordt
afgesloten. Je kunt wel
boos zijn op Shell,
dat de
exploitatie rechten
heeft gekocht met de
toezegging de
luchtkwaliteit te verbeteren, die
niettemin achteruit



Outcome of the workshop: A script produced and designed through an interactive installation. A visitor/reader/listener would be provided with headphones and listen to a text written by writer Auke van Hulst with the title "Het Normalisatiebureau". Furthermore the visitor/reader/listener would be connected to different sensors, i.e. a sensor that measures their body temperature and one that measures their heart beat. While listening to the text a script of the text would be produced. The type size and styling of the text is adjusted according to the sensor data. Eventually the visitor/reader/listener received a print-out of the script, designed according to their personal data.

Temporary critical publics

Resisting finalization

In contrast to the hackathon-like workshop mentioned above, the aim of workshops in the context of H&D is not primarily to fix a presented problem. There is usually no imposed competitive element, and making processes do not necessarily result in producing finalized outputs.⁷¹ On the contrary, the artifacts produced during the workshops have the characteristics of disposals rather than proposals. They are the side-products of a process.

In a talk on Free Jazz improvisation with children, German journalist and cultural critic Diedrich Diederichsen asked if it can be the purpose of the workshop to never finish a thing?⁷² Indeed, the permission *not* to produce anything can be a crucial asset in workshops. In fact, it is often the shared activity of postponement, of usual chores and obligations that offers an opportunity to rethink productivity together.

Shifting the focus away from a preoccupation with producing finalized outcomes towards processes of material, technical, social exploration, can make space for a perspective on personal and collective relationships

71 An exception is the HDSA 2021, where Zimbabwean maker Bongani Ricky Masuku, asked participants to work on and out elements of a DIY water pump. The participants then documented the process and created small publications. As organizers we send Bongani the electronic parts back so he could continue his project in Zimbabwe.
https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Summer_Academy_2021/p/Building_On_Demand_Water_Solution_for_the_City_of_Harare_with_Bongani_Ricky_Masuku, last accessed March 2022.

Furthermore H&D workshops at times consist of game or play elements and timed exercises that could be interpreted as introducing competition into the workshop.

72 “Diedrich Diederichsen (Vienna): “Free Jazz with Children,” <https://vimeo.com/547117231>, last accessed March 2022.

with the inner workings of technical objects, their subjectivities and implications. As Thomas James Lodato and Carl DiSalvo write:

“a distinction needs to be made between the prototype and prototyping, as an activity. [...] The object is crucial, but it is a product of the social process of conceptualizing and expressing the wants and needs. The activity of prototyping, then, is dialogic in that its structure is one of exchange and its purpose is the discovery and elucidation of the conditions or factors of a design.”⁷³

As typically temporary and to some extent uncommitted collective environments, workshops create a condition for questioning obligations or dependencies between people and their digital tools. As alluded to in the previous chapter, a workshop at H&D that involves people and technical objects creates collective conditions that uphold possibilities for discontinuation of relationships between them in the future. This is possible because the ties of those involved are loose. For example, the three-day workshop *Internet of Bodies* took place during the HDSA in 2016 and was facilitated by Simone Niquille and Carina Namih. The workshop facilitators invited participants to reflect on the manner in which computers ‘look at’, measure and assess bodies. In one of the exercises, participants were equipped with a map of facial feature points as well as a map of Henry Dreyfuss’ human scale measurements.⁷⁴ Using one sheet of 1m by 2m paper, the

73 James Lodato and Carl DiSalvo, “Issue-oriented hackathons as material participation,” *New Media & Society* (Georgia: 2016).

74 “Henry Dreyfuss Associates’ classic Humanscale design manuals to be reissued,” <https://www.dezeen.com/2017/07/25/henry-dreyfuss-associates-classic-humanscale-design-manuals-to-be-reissued/>, last accessed March 2022.

participants were asked to form groups of three in order to map each other's bodies onto the paper, according to the points on the provided maps. They used the tip of their nose as a starting point for their measurements.⁷⁵

The exercise was a rather tedious and intimate process, at times awkwardly funny but also uncomfortable for some. Participants covered each other with spot stickers, using string and measuring tape to capture their dimensions. This process resulted in a series



"The Internet of Bodies", workshop
by Simone Niquille and Carina Namih, 2016.

of life-size scale data portraits. In another exercise, participants were asked to use an open source 3D scanning app to scan their bodies, and use the Blender app to create new collective avatars—combining several body scans into one image.

The Internet of Bodies is an example of how a workshop may not prioritize finalizing products, but use propositions for outcomes (data body maps, 3D scans, animations, and prints of 3D body renderings) as markers within an evolving explorative learning process. These materializations, of which some were physical artifacts, digital renderings and performative expressions, function as occasions to gather, discuss and

reflect within different constellations—in smaller groups, individually or with the entire group. The workshop was narrated and structured all the while leaving room for participants to explore freely, discuss, reflect, and at times refuse to participate, or change the terms and conditions for their participation. The physical mapping exercise caused some discomfort and probed the limits of some participants' personal boundaries. Therefore, some of them refused to be mapped or to map other people's bodies, which eventually led to a lively discussion around the transgression of personal boundaries in the digital realm. That is, when the 'gaze' or 'touch' of a machine, or algorithm cannot not be directly or immediately felt.

In my view, the potential of the workshop as a space for experimenting with new forms of social-technological interaction lies in it being dynamic and non-conclusive, which makes it a difficult format, impossible to fully control or reproduce as a model.

Critical public

"I respect your difference [of opinion]' is a rather empty thing to say, which smells of tolerance and commits whoever says it to nothing. On the other hand, what can enter into communication with the word "honor" is something that will be apprehended not as a particularity of the other, but as what the other makes matter, what makes him or her think and feel, and which I cannot dream of reducing to the "same" without being insulting [...]"⁷⁶

75 https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Summer_Academy_2016/p/Internet_of_Bodies, last accessed March 2022.

76 Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 143.

In the earlier example of the hackathon-like workshop, I illustrated how a public event at the culmination of a workshop can influence the ambitions and expectations of a temporary collective. Knowing a large audience had been invited and that we were required to present a final outcome, shaped my expectation of the workshop. An external audience needed to be convinced our workshop production was worthwhile. However the members of the temporary collective of a workshop can also be understood as a temporary public of sorts. Workshop participants and facilitators gather in a somewhat exceptional manner. That is, the workshop takes place in a limited timeframe and outside of daily obligations. A usually implicit, perhaps intimate work routine is, to some extent, exposed in a novel context. The workshopers may apprehend what Stengers described as “what the other makes matter, what makes him or her think and feel.”⁷⁷ The fleeting character of a ‘workshop public’ may become even confrontational, as future, or long-term relations are not a necessity. Yet it seems to me a workshop public is committed enough to bring to the fore, differences of opinions or differences of manners (methodically and in terms of behavior). As temporary socio-technical compositions, ‘workshop publics’ are semi-committed to each other and therefore differences can arise and persist.

Expressing differences

In the following section, I recall a workshop I facilitated with H&D at the Libre Graphics Meeting (LGM) of 2016,⁷⁸ which elucidated my understanding of the wavering

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ See Libre Graphics Meeting 2016, <https://libregraphicsmeeting.org/2016>.

commitments of workshop publics and the ways in which they can bring to the fore and sustain differences as opposed to collapse into consensus.

In 2015, H&D developed an instant publishing tool that we refer to as *Momentary Zine*, and which we experimented with in different workshop situations.⁷⁹ The tool could be described as a publishing-karaoke machine. It uses speech input to instantly produce printed output. By speaking into a microphone, participants



Momentary Zine—walk-in workshop at *ZineFest* Berlin, 2015

can produce a printed zine—a publication containing image and text.⁸⁰ The person interacting with the zine station enters into direct conversation with the tool, which simultaneously produces the publication. The experience of producing a zine is informed by the immediacy of speaking and instantly creates printed output. The reader is then confronted with unexpected results. Not every word will be recognized accurately by the software, and the result of the image search might be unexpected. The zine is generated in an improvisational manner. This project was presented and ‘workshopped’

⁷⁹ The code for *Momentary Zine* is available at: <https://github.com/hackersanddesigners/momentary-zine>.

⁸⁰ A zine is a small-circulation self-published work of original or appropriated texts and images.



Momentary Zine—walk-in workshop at ZineFest Berlin, 2015

in various contexts.⁸¹ It is an entertaining and accessible tool that allows you to produce a publication instantly. The production is easy, fast and cheap. People generally enjoy the surprise effect.

H&D submitted the *Momentary Zine* as a workshop proposal to LGM.⁸² The *Momentary Zine* uses different programming interfaces (APIs),⁸³ one for the translation of speech to text, and one to extract images from the internet. Using the web API provided by Google caused some controversy during the workshop. As the LGM's code of conduct states, the conference exclusively promotes the development and use of free and open-source software graphics applications.⁸⁴ One of

81 Some examples of contexts in which the Momentary Zine has been activated are: https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Activities/p/The_Momentary_Zine
https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Activities/p/Get_the_Font_and_Zine_Karaoke
https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Activities/p/Publishing_Karaoke%3A_A_Workshop
https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Activities/p/Momentary_Zine_in_Bucharest%21
https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Activities/p/Momentary_Zine_at_Neulab, all links last accessed March 2022.

82 See Libre Graphics Meeting 2016, <https://libregraphicsmeeting.org/2016>.

83 In computer programming, application programming interfaces (API) are closed and controlled systems. They are also a set of definitions, protocols and tools for building software.

84 "LGM Code of Conduct," <https://libregraphicsmeeting.org/lgm/public-documentation/code-of-conduct/>, last accessed March, 2022.

our motivations for participating in LGM with the *Momentary Zine* was to explore alternatives to Google API / Webkit. During our workshop's introduction it became apparent that we had implemented Google APIs in the software, which caused immediate resistance on the part of two participants.

The choice to use the Google API as a fundamental part of the software was conceived of as unacceptable in the context of an open-source software conference. The two participants left the workshop after clearly and vocally opposing and disregarding our contribution to the conference. Around fifteen participants remained to continue the workshop. The workshop took a different turn than we had planned. We had initially prepared a few exercises that would give direction for producing publications in smaller groups, taking a 'telephone game' approach.⁸⁵ Yet, inspired by the protest against the Google API, the *Momentary Zine* became a kind of documentation tool for a discussion about working with proprietary software and whether it should be fully abandoned in the context of a conference for open-source software graphics applications.

As the workshop proceeded, zines were produced and vital conversations were had. Admittedly, it was not a moment I look back on fondly. Yet, I do think about the workshop frequently because of—to borrow Isabelle Stengers' words—its 'stupidity'. The workshop and the reasonably critical response to it were a result of our lack of attention for the contexts within which it took place, a conference that has been organized since 2006 out of a need to create an occasion for developers,

85 Also referred to as the 'broken telephone', or 'transmission chain experiments' are, usually is about information passing from one person to the another. In our workshop, we initially planned to proposed the participants would use the Momentary Zine as their telephone and explore the unreliability of the speech recognition in this way

artist and designers to gather and exchange ideas about using and improving free and open-source software graphics applications.

The explicit rejection, the vocality of disagreement and the drastic departure on the part of the two participants made an important contribution to the workshop. As Stengers wrote they made "divergences present and important [which] has nothing to do with respect for differences of opinion [...]. It is the situation that, via the divergent knowledges it activates, gains the power to cause those who gather around it to think and hesitate together."⁸⁶ I have seen other forms of resistance in workshops. For instance, participants may silently disengage, roll their eyes and sneak out. Sometimes, they stay in the room to boycott or nag throughout. While our workshop continued without the two protestors, their message was clear and remained with us—made us hesitate and think together. It became part of the workshop and continues to stay with me as a sore spot that sometimes reappears when preparing for a workshop.

Explicating workshops

The H&D Summer Academy (2015-ongoing)

At the time of writing this dissertation, the H&D collective has grown from three to nine members, has been organizing workshops in different formats for nine years, and is starting to plan the eighth edition of the H&D Summer Academy (HDSA). The HDSA is an annual one to two week intensive workshop program, taking place in the summer in Amsterdam. With the first edition in 2015, H&D's approach to organizing workshops

86 Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 143.

changed. After two years of organizing ‘Hackers & Designers’ as a workshop-based event series that took place during workdays in the evenings, we envisioned the HDSA as a more committed format, a temporary school of sorts, that would give us an opportunity to expand on the preceding shorter evening events and experiment more with the workshop format as such.

Since then, each edition of the HDSA has been organized in a slightly different manner, taking into consideration learning from previous editions and experimenting with new approaches. In 2018, during the organization of the fourth edition of the HDSA, for the first time, we did not differentiate workshop participants from workshop facilitators in our open call. People who were interested in joining the HDSA would all apply by submitting a workshop proposition. Thus, they would commit to facilitating a workshop and participating in the full duration of the two week long workshop program. No prior experience in teaching or facilitating workshops was required. As part of the preparation towards the HDSA in 2018, we introduced a peer review process during which workshop proposals would be reviewed by everyone who had submitted a workshop. That way, we involved workshop facilitators in developing each other’s workshop preparations and created connections between them before the actual HDSA began.

However, it seemed that the lack of specificity as to what exactly characterizes the ‘workshop’ as a format, made it hard to describe, defend or critique the proposed workshops in a peer review process. The submitted workshop descriptions remained brief. They either reflected on the subject of the workshop or on the technicalities, but rarely did they address both, or in ways that invited suggestions and feedback on the workshop. The proposals did not incorporate descriptions of how a workshop

would actually play out in a space, over a certain amount of time and did not take the different needs and levels of expertise of the participants into consideration. This observation led me to submit a workshop proposal with Shailoh Phillips, who was at the time my colleague at the



Anja Groten and Shailoh Phillips behind a glass window observing how the workshop executes ‘itself’, *Work the Workshop*, H&D Summer Academy 2018.

research consortium ‘Bridging Art, Design and Technology through Critical Making’.⁸⁷ Our workshop would take place at the beginning of the HDSA and would focus on the format of the workshop itself. The title was *Work the Workshop*.⁸⁸

87 My PhD research project was made possible due to a full-time research position at the NWO funded research project ‘Bridging Art, Design and Technology through Critical Making’. The consortium was later renamed ‘Making Matters work group’ and has organized two symposia and one publication in the period of 2017-2022. <http://making-matters.nl/about/consortium>, last accessed May 2022.

88 https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Summer_Academy_2018/p/Work_the_Workshop, last accessed March 2022.
Workshop script of later workshop iterations: <https://etherpad.hackersanddesigners.nl/p/hdsa2020-how-to-workshop>, last accessed March 2022.
<https://etherpad.hackersanddesigners.nl/p/student-workshops>, last accessed March 2022.

A Workshop about Workshops

I remember arriving on the first day and I think it was you Anja together with Shailoh that led the ‘Work the Workshop’ workshop. I remember being so excited about the possibility of throwing out everything that I had prepared before, and creating something entirely new that was particularly built on the relations that were performed in that initial encounter with everyone.

Quote from a conversation with H&D summer academy participant Lucas LaRochele, published in *Hackers & Designers—Network Imaginaries*, self-published in October 2021.

We formulated exercises that were meant to offer different perspectives on everyone’s workshop plans. The exercises were intended as an invitation to view the workshop itself as a medium, something that could be externalized, tweaked and reiterated. The first exercise was to imagine the workshop as a set of instructions, almost like an algorithm or script that could be executed without the workshop facilitators being present. We also presented this exercise as a script—delivered without us workshop facilitators being present in the space. We prepared the script and workshop kit in such a way that it would explain itself. This exercise was inspired by THE THING,⁸⁹ an automatic workshop. Writing up a complete workshop script that can be executed without a facilitator present is a tedious process.

⁸⁹ Participant description of her experience at “The Thing”: to dwell in a space where there is not a clear cut answer”, ‘The Thing. An Automated Workshop’, concept and creation by Ant Hampton & Christophe Meierhans. <http://www.anthampton.com/thething.html>, last accessed March 2022. http://www.contrepied.de/soon/portfolio_page/the-thing-an-automatic-workshop-in-everyday-disruption/, last accessed March 2022.



Workshop toolkit from *Work the Workshop*, H&D Summer Academy 2022. Each prompt was clipped to a piece of paper. The prompts instructed participants on what to do with the piece of paper. The workshop was intended to be self-explaining—executable like a ‘script’ without a facilitator.

Aspects of the workshop that might usually be improvised, needed to be scripted and explained. Unexpected outcomes needed to be anticipated. However, it was also important to leave some space for interpretation and improvisation.

The second exercise asked participants to attend to what we called ‘workshop props’—materials and equipment that frequently appear in workshop settings, such as sticky notes, a white board, a projector, chairs and tables arranged in a circle, in addition to cookies and coffee. First, we asked the workshop facilitators to create an inventory of their workshop props and then replace them with other self-made props in order to play out the consequences. The last exercise invited participants to physically rehearse the workshop at a high speed. Workshop facilitators had to physically move their participants’ bodies around, in the way they imagined participants would be taking up space throughout their workshop.

This ‘meta’ workshop about workshops did not intend to provide a recipe or protocol for the perfect workshop. Rather than showcasing best practices, the intention behind facilitating a workshop about workshops, was to explore the format of the workshop itself as it has become a substantial ingredient for H&D’s activities but had remained mostly unquestioned and never clearly articulated. With every new group we are used to slightly adjusting the ways in which we approach the workshop. We wanted to attend to the ways the workshop format itself can be conceptualized and designed, including unforeseen aspects.

Furthermore, we wanted to facilitate exchange regarding past workshop experiences and expectations in order to find ways of articulating similar and different incentives for facilitating and participating in workshops. As we were all facilitators as well as participants, we

had a shared interest in having a discussion and exchange about how we wanted the workshops to play out, how we would support each other with feedback, and perhaps how we would take the opportunity to rethink the workshops within their specific context.

The way a workshop unfolds depends on many variables, which are conditioned by the environment the workshop takes place in. It was useful to hear about the various workshop experiences and expectations of participants, in addition to articulating collective desires but also insecurities that were specific to that particular temporary group—a first step in making individual and collective intentions explicit and in creating a workshop atmosphere before and along with embarking on the workshop program together.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have paid attention to and questioned the implications of the ‘workshop’ format, which I have come to understand and appreciate most cogently in the context of H&D. Characteristics that I have brought to the fore in the context of H&D workshops are learning by doing in addition to learning and doing with others in a semi-committed manner, exploring topics, methods and technologies, without claiming authority over knowledge. In such workshops, the understanding of productivity shifts from focusing on producing finalized products to processes. The emphasis is on opening up such processes in a social environment.

I have explained that ways of doing and making things are, to some extent, exposed in such workshops. By partaking in each other’s ways of doing and making, diverging approaches become the subject of attention and potential questioning. By opening up making processes that are usually implicit or solitary, they can be

called into question when they fail to meet expectations of how 'things are done'. The process of determining what is considered (un)productive, (un)important or (un)-acceptable becomes part of a dynamic presence of diverging practices and creates, in my view, an exceptional environment in which 'not-knowing' is what people have in common. Such workshops are therefore also occasions to experiment with making oneself understood across different practices and registers, i.e. through demonstrating, gesturing, discussing, peeking over one's shoulder or just through co-inhabiting in the same space for a while.

The value of workshops can be located in their semi-committed, contingent and non-conclusive characteristics. These characteristics also make them impossible to reproduce in the same way twice. Such workshops can offer opportunities for encountering and experimenting with *other* processes and manners of socio-technological interaction and articulation, testing and trying without the pressures of producing anything final or ultimately useful. Yet, as I have also addressed, a number of issues come to the fore when attending to the pervasiveness of the workshop, as it travels through various domains, often without clear articulation of intentions, expectations and long-term consequences.

As a flexible term, 'workshop' lends itself to adaptation across various contexts. However, workshops as temporary semi-committed collective environments, need to be considered also as a consequence of uncertain, contingent and fragmented work and social relations. While offering short-lived occasions for collective material experimentation, workshops also perpetuate a certain work and learning culture of self-reliance and a lack of care for long-term social and work relations. Furthermore, repeatedly organizing workshops in a

particular manner perpetuates an image of workshops that detracts from the reality that workshops are in fact a lot of work.

That is, by nourishing an informal egalitarian atmosphere, by removing the pressure of producing polished end products, and by organizing workshops outside of working hours (in the case of H&D, often in the evening or during holidays) workshops are moved out of the scope of 'work'.

Despite (or perhaps because of) its entanglements with neoliberal dynamics in the creative sector and the economization of education, I do not want to abandon the workshop as a format for collective practice. My proposition is to remain with the workshop as a format and a concept that crosses boundaries, and to work against its ambiguity. I hope to have contributed to its disambiguation to some extent in this chapter. What are the implications of remaining bound to the workshop format? For me, it means always taking into account the fact that the workshop is a fundamentally questionable format that requires critical attention. Organizing workshops responsibly requires context-specific interrogation of *how* and within which frameworks a workshop may be organized. This question cannot be answered in general terms. Thus, it must be revisited again and again and is perhaps most pertinently answered according to the terms of each particular workshop composition—of people, resources, tools, infrastructures and environments. Another important question relates to how to self-organize temporary collective learning environments, while also developing relationships that are committed and long-term, thus counterbalancing flexibilization and fragmentation of work and life. How to not perpetuate but rather work against the insecurities and disorientations that come with that reality?

Over the years, the H&D collective developed social and technical conduct that could be compared to the workshop instructors' who take care of maintaining their spaces, in terms of facilities, as well as hospitality. The workshops H&D organizes seem instantaneous but there are aspects of continuity and long-term commitments that evolve alongside. The continuously evolving technical infrastructure around collective organization includes collaborative online notepads and spreadsheets, the websites H&D uses to announce and document workshops, the server on which our websites and tools and our emails are hosted, as well as the H&D mailing list. Furthermore, there are certain expressions that evolve along with the organization of H&D workshops that enter into a collective vocabulary. They are mentioned once and are then picked up by others and repeated in different workshop contexts.

The notion of the 'workshop script' evolved from commitment towards the workshop but also to staying connected throughout the global COVID19 pandemic. The workshop script became another 'thing held in common', a boundary object, a concept and artifact, something that was shaped and reshaped collectively and could be referred to while members were distributed and trying to continue organizing, facilitating and participating in workshops remotely.

Collective utterances such as the workshop script express a particular (not universal) relationship to the workshop format and explicate collective efforts of staying connected, even while there are other forces at play that seem to work against that effort. Rhetoric such as rapid, sprint, agile, marathon, insinuate and reproduce a general perception of the workshop as a recipe for high-velocity or result-oriented production. By resisting one definition of 'workshop', for instance

by including participants, organizers and facilitators in questioning and redefining the particular conditions of workshops every time there is a new occasion, the workshop as such becomes less 'agile', less of a 'panacea', less adaptable to all and any context.

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Relevant links

- “The Workshop. Investigations Into an Artistic-Political Format.” ICI Berlin, international Conference organized by Kai van Eikels and Stefan Hölscher, (March 26-28, 2021) <https://www.ici-berlin.org/events/the-workshop/>
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 “Diedrich Diederichsen (Vienna): Free Jazz with Children”
<https://vimeo.com/547117231>
<https://libregraphicsmeeting.org/2016>
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<http://making-matters.nl/about/consortium>
https://hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Summer_Academy_2018/p/Work_the_Workshop
<https://etherpad.hackersanddesigners.nl/p/hdsa2020-how-to-workshop>
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<http://www.anthampton.com/thething.html>

http://www.uni-lueneburg.de/personal_fuehrung/index.php/Workshop

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<http://www.workshopproject.org>

Workshops in a box:

Next Nature: <https://www.nextnature.net/2018/06/next-nature-academy-workshop/>

Pipdecks Workshop tactics: <https://pipdecks.com/products/workshop-tactics?variant=39770920321113>

Forkshop: <https://2018.transmediale.de/content/fork-politics-in-post-consensus-cryptoeconomics>

'Hackathon-like workshop': 'If then What Now'

<http://www.ifthenwhatnow.nl/>

"The Thing An Automatic Workshop"

<http://www.anthampton.com/thething.html>

Iowa's Writers Workshop: (1936)

<https://writersworkshop.uiowa.edu/about/about-workshop/history>

Workshops: Designing and Facilitating Experiential

Learning: <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzQ2|NzA3M19fQU41?sid=07f63ba4-6326-4362-b33c-22e0e92b561f@sessionmgr4010&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1>

Workshops: Optimal vorbereiten, spannend inszenieren,

professionell nachbereiten: https://books.google.de/books?id=y9Eph3xdRlIC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_atb#v=onepage&q&f=false

Workshops, Seminare und Besprechungen: mit Kreativität

und Methode zum sicheren Erfolg: https://books.google.de/books?id=WENiPpEEwAC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_atb#v=onepage&q&f=false

Video reports of H&D Summer Academy 2018, concept

and design by Juliette Lizotte, development by Heerko van der Kooij:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVqCS7wPUh4&ab>

_channel=Hackers%26Designers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YANEHZd-MbQ&ab>

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