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

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Propositions

1. Contemporary collective design practices are mutable and at times fragile structures that lean into the complexity of issues while resisting the impulse to 'solve' anything. That differentiates collective design practices from purposeful organizational frameworks for living, working or being together such as 'teamwork', 'collaboration', or 'cooperativism'.
2. Through their semi-committed and fleeting character, workshops can facilitate temporary critical publics who potentially disrupt and challenge implicit assumptions about how things should be done or made.
3. In processes of collective tool building, digital tools can take the function of material 'gedanken experiments,' sustaining a condition in which tools are not presumed as an inevitable outcome but as ongoing and discursive.
4. Collective platform-design experiments can develop and sustain ways of designing and working together with and through technical objects that are neither utilitarian/solution-driven nor antagonizing.
5. Design theories are still too attached to, and therefore insufficiently question, the notion of a 'purposeful' relation between design and collectivity.
6. The field of design and design education is still too result-oriented and too occupied with the role and functioning of individual designers.
7. Collective design dilutes disciplinary boundaries as well as the divisions between user and maker, product and process, friendships and work relations, student and teacher.
8. The relationship between design and collectivity is mutually entangled and shaped by often unforeseeable socio-economic, socio-technical conditions. Collectives therefore require approaches to working and designing together that resist linearity, and a progress-based understanding of the design process.
9. Outcomes of collective design practice cannot be considered examples of collectivity, in a sense that an example can be reproduced.
10. Collective design is a response to, as much as a result of, issues such as fragmentation and flexibilization of cultural work, as well as the economization of art and design education. It is not an instrument to resolve the issues at stake.
11. The refusal of efficiency, usefulness and finality carries potential for subtle but effective forms of resistance against a general acceptance and normalization of unstable, precarious times and working conditions.