

IETM REPORT

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LOST IN TRANSLATION?

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Lost in translation?

Jude Anderson's opening statement is, perhaps, apt at a time when social gathering is fracturing, and calls for collaboration are increasingly desperate. What do we value in shared processes? How can we ensure captivating collaborations? What do we have to gain from rejecting autonomous practice? From the outset, this session raised questions surrounding our individual perspectives and desires for international collaboration.

Collaborations are situated in their own context of pros, cons and resources. They function in a beta state and thus exist in a perpetual condition of trial and error. The moderators stressed the importance of avoiding strict rules and strategic plans. Instead, participants were encouraged to impose relevant and flexible methodologies for each collaborative process. Jude Anderson is the artistic director of Punctum Inc, an artist-led Live Arts organisation based in Australia. Referencing Punctum's own manifesto, as well as those of others, the moderators detailed various philosophies for collaboration. These examples did not intend to act as an instruction manual. Rather they inspired listeners to consider the kinds of collaboration they would or would not like to engage in. Following this, the participants were invited to create common manifestos that underpinned engaged principles for collaborative processes.

The participants were divided into four groups, each with a specified focus to consider:

1. The principles of co-operation, co-production, and collaboration with aesthetic and artistic content.
2. The principles of co-operation, co-production, and collaboration within cultural and political contexts.
3. The principles of co-operation, co-production, and collaboration with time,

“Collaboration is a radical disrupter. Like art, its agency lies in its power to disrupt. It creates shift. It is perhaps one of the most powerful disruptors in a climate of fear, fracture and the politics of fear”.



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Moderators:

Jude Anderson - [Punctum Inc](#), Australia

Olga De Soto - Niels Production, Belgium

productivity and management.

4. The principles of co-operation, co-production, and collaboration with intercultural and identity.

To ensure an even mix within the groups, stickers were distributed that identified levels of experience in international collaboration – green stickers for people with

little or no experience and pink ones for those with a reasonable amount. Following group discussion, one spokesperson from each group was elected to present their manifesto.

Aesthetics and Artistic Content

Manifesto

Create a new aesthetic vocabulary that denies an individual one.
 Employ self-validation.
 Curators: consider aspects other than aesthetic.
 Bring your context, not just your 'product'.
 Allow space for divergence.
 Accept that two will not become one.
 Maintain sensuality and human encounters.
 Recognise that joy matters.
 Let the senses come into play.
 Represent yourself, not an organisation or company.
 Do not create a "symbol" of collaboration.

Collaboration does not refer to a perfectly synchronised entity made up of the two parties. Differences will inevitably exist and create friction. Yet this group recognised the value of this awkward and mismatched nature: new working languages can be conceived through uncomfortable realities, thus allowing collaborative models to evolve into a platform for sensing rather than describing.

Cultural and Political Context

Manifesto

What we do not want:

Discrimination.
 Dogma.
 Prejudice.
 Inflexibility.
 Imposition.
 Presumption.
 Censorship.
 Cultural dominance.
 Aesthetic constraints.
 Myopia.

What we want:

Good will.
 A willingness to learn.
 Parameters of freedom.
 Understanding of expectations.
 Generosity.
 Flexible methodologies.
 Celebration of difference.
 Trust.
 Transparency.
 Empathy.
 A clear understanding of party objectives, principles and motivations.
 Communication.
 Agitation.
 Deep reflection.
 Change.
 Holistic attitudes.
 Inspiration.
 New solutions.
 Dialogue.
 Shared power.

This group noted the distinct difference between a shared language and a shared understanding. Whilst someone can have an understanding of the other, it is only in the shared and compromised space that new practices and aesthetics are generated. This discussion emphasised the need to let go of known or past realities in order to accept new ones. Indeed, the collaborative platform should not be a place to prove the worth of your individual practice. Effective collaborations are inhibited by the supremacy of an individual.

Time, Productivity and Management

Manifesto

Start small.
Be realistic.
Aim high.
Have flexible expectations.
Be precise.
Show what you want.
Be there.
Be present.
Be nice.
Understand and play to each other's strengths.
Allow enough time.
Do not rush.
Do not force anything.
Find common ground.
Agree on deadlines.
Find the balance point.
Identify what capacities people have.
Identify what you can offer to the collaboration.
Make time to reflect.
Manage the risks.
Have an exit strategy.
Be mindful of your language.
Do not assume people know what you are talking about.
Money is not a priority.
Identify the conduit for communication.

How are shared processes envisaged? What practicalities do you need to negotiate? How do you manage elements such as financing and developing working structures? This group represented these considerations by adopting an informal slogan for their manifesto - mind the gap. As stressed by one participant, it is necessary to acknowledge the difference between coordination and collaboration: where coordination deals with the organisation of something, collaboration demands an ownership and accountability for oneself.

This group also discussed the investment of time. They believed that exchanges often occur within time scales that are too short. The collaborative journey is an organic one, and it takes time to develop new languages and ways of working. The group urged each other to give careful consideration to how much time is needed to give and receive effectively.

Interculture and Identity

Manifesto

Create new communities and revel in what is forged.
Appreciate the power of body language and recognise that this may be lost through platforms such as Skype.
Acknowledge temporary communities.
Be an empathetic listener.
Recognise that we cannot be the other.
Embrace the new entity that you form together.

Who are you when you speak? What frame do you gaze through? Different identities exist everywhere. This group argued that diverse collaborative processes can occur within small geographical areas as well as on global scales. By considering their own habitats as rich sources for collaboration, the participants noted that multiple perspectives and working methods can be sourced from within cities, towns and streets.

Technology is also a concern. It is undeniable that the world is more immediately accessible through social media and online communities. But is the sensual and human side of collaboration sacrificed when technology comes to the forefront? If the digitized world puts this notion in jeopardy, perhaps it could be considered as an inhibitor rather than an enabler. Face-to-face and physical contact appears to be essential to the effective functioning of shared processes. If so, how can we overcome the limitations of working exclusively with oral tradition?

It is, perhaps, interesting to note that of the approximate 50 people who attended the session, only two people chose to tackle the topic of identity.

Evaluating Collaborative Processes

When evaluating the product of a common process, it may be beneficial to neglect the normative concept of quality. We should, perhaps, consider the idea of relevance instead. By relevance, let us consider contexts that go beyond the walls of the partnership and instead speak to the cultural, political and social contexts that each party may represent.

Jude recounted several experiences that reference the contextual relevance of collaboration. For example, she acted as a volunteer performance maker in Chile with Compagnia Espiral. The company was, then, under considerable threat from Pinochet's military junta. Despite this, the company worked with international artists in the lead-up to the plebiscite that eventually ousted Pinochet. Another example was Jude's work with queer performance in the New York Drag Queen scene. At this time, queer performance was instrumental in shifting attitudes towards HIV and Aids. It also greatly informed radical and social action performances.

Collaborative processes do not need to exist as individual entities. Jude was also the artistic director and curator for 'Migratory Complex', a three-year project for the Ailleurs en Folie MONS 2015 (European City of Culture) in Belgium. This project witnessed an exchange between twelve Australian artists and twelve Belgian artists. Rather than representing 'Australia', the focus was to open questions of intercultural identity. This culminated in the creation of sixteen new works that tackled themes of migration, de-colonisation and contemporary artistic expression in Australia. The legacy of the project is clear: over 300 Belgian participants were engaged and the Belgian artists still continue to work with the Australians.

Session Outcomes

This session armed participants with a set of critical questions to refer to during future exchanges. What is collaboration a catalyst for? What is different in your language before and after the collaborative process? How large is this chapter of collaboration in a book of collaboration? Whilst the session did not provide solid answers, it seems that these questions should not be answered. The 'rules' for collaboration are uncoded and should be renewed through dialogue in each exchange. However, an underlying ethos should still be present.

Common thoughts linked the participants despite the different themes of discussion. All four groups acknowledged that an absence of dialogue could prove to be detrimental as, at its heart, collaboration relies heavily on human exchange. Participants also highlighted the need to disregard previous knowledge in favour of the unknown. The Australian writer, Richard Flanagan, wrote, "a writer belongs both to the homeland of the people they love and to the universe of books, and can never renounce either". Shifting focus to the artist, Jude adapted the phrase to say, "an artist belongs both to the homeland of the people they love and to the universe of their art form and can never renounce either". By stepping in both pools, the individual requires agility throughout a collaborative process. Indeed, whilst the title of the session, Lost in Translation, seems to nod towards ambiguity and the need for dexterity, the outcome of this session was that to be lost is to be in an effective and productive place.

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