ORGANISING

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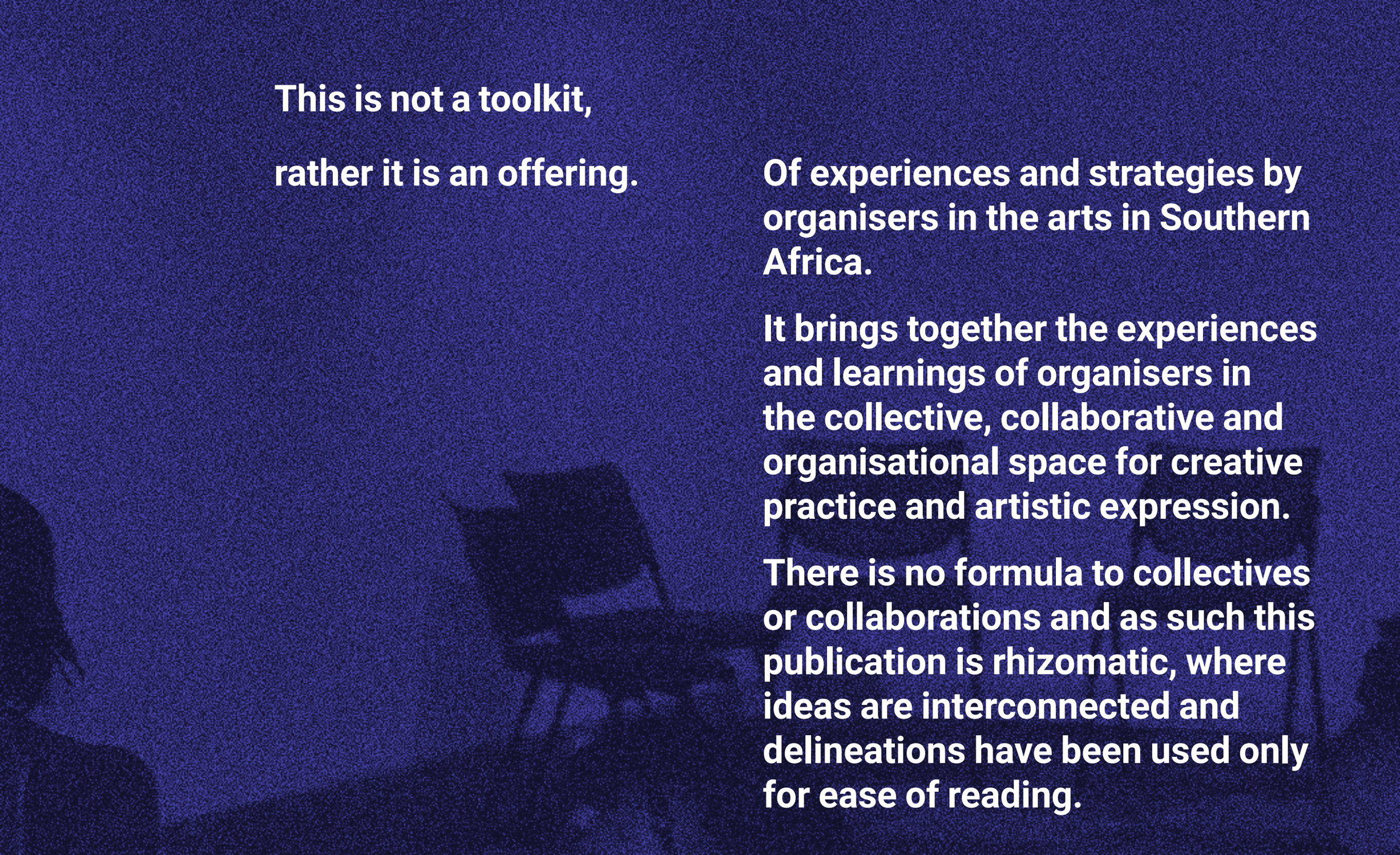
collective, collaborative organising in Southern Africa



This is not a toolkit,

rather it is an offering.

Of experiences and strategies by organisers in the arts in Southern Africa.

It brings together the experiences and learnings of organisers in the collective, collaborative and organisational space for creative practice and artistic expression.

There is no formula to collectives or collaborations and as such this publication is rhizomatic, where ideas are interconnected and delineations have been used only for ease of reading.

Intro

There is a shift, it would seem, towards a rhizomatic and lateral approach to creative practice. Leaving behind it the idea of the singular genius artist, this practice recognises community, ideas sharing, multiplicities of skills and the energy of cross-disciplinarity. Collective, collaborative work seem to be carving out space in the Southern African creative landscape. This drive is still young but speaks to a region and socio-political status that provides very particular limitations and specifications for practicing and growing creative practice. The Southern African region presents some of the youngest independent nations on the continent – with stark and challenging issues unfolding over the past 20-30 years around economy, power and the faces we attempt to show to the world. From Luanda to Harare to Johannesburg to Maputo, the Southern African creative space is deeply entangled in the political shifts that present an entirely different social, political and economic space to the creatives of the 1970s, 80s and even 90s. Neoliberal priorities, crumbling independence narratives and increasingly youthful populations emboldened by the connectivity afforded by global technologies, means a region in flux, and a shift in creative practice in response.

duction

This publication is taken from a meeting of arts organisers, artists, writers and other cultural creators working within organising in different ways, from different parts of Southern Africa. The meeting included Ba re e ne re, Maseru; Beyond Entropy Africa and Colectivo Pés Descalços, Luanda; Counterspace, Johannesburg; Kaleni Kollectiv, Windhoek; Inkanyiso, Johannesburg; Invisible Cities Radio, Johannesburg; KinoKadre, Cape Town; Mushroom Hour Half Hour, Johannesburg; Poetavango Collective, Maun; and Village Unhu, Harare. The meeting was held by the Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA) from 2–5 October 2018. The meeting itself emerged out of a report by VANSA, commissioned by the Ford Foundation Southern Africa in 2016/17. The original report was an in-depth discussion on new forms of arts organising in Southern Africa, the state of arts infrastructure in the region, and a longer discussion of the impact of the history of the region. This publication includes some excerpts from that report and brings these together with thoughts and learnings that emerged out of the organising workshop.

The intention of this publication is to have a practitioner-oriented text that can be shared and discussed. The learnings, thoughts and research is intended to impel platforms for deeper discussion and exploration and encourage collectives and collaboratives themselves to drive rigorous engagement with the potential of their own practice.

WHERE WE MOVE AWAY

Contemporary arts organising practices across Southern Africa emerge out of a particular historical and infrastructural context.

The following section gives a very brief – and sweeping – introduction to this context.

Of course, due to its brevity it sweeps over key nuances, and importantly in many of the statements below South Africa has some quite significant exceptions.

With this said it's important to recognise that arts organising in the sector emerges very much out of the basis of historical forms.

A Response to historical contexts

Across Southern Africa formal arts infrastructure was developed in the colonial period, with colonial powers installing theatres and/or museums and/or arts councils at varying levels in different countries, determined largely by the colonial powers, policies and priorities in each territory. At minimum across colonial powers were basic provision of at least one theatre/concert hall and potentially one museum/gallery in the main city of each country (with distinct lack in the French islands of the Southern African region, and some other countries). Importantly this infrastructure was developed for colonial 'expats' who enjoyed largely colonial artistic forms. This means infrastructure was city-based, and extremely limited as it was for a very small population. Only in a few exceptions – Zimbabwe being most notable – was arts infrastructure developed for Africans themselves. In such cases, the focus was on 'traditional African' arts practice and a reinforcing of African creative art practice as separate to global flows.

There were thus significant lacks that needed to be addressed after colonisation. In line with independence era ideology across the continent, a lot of Southern Africa considered creative expression key to the creation of new nations, post-independence[1] (Southern Africa's independence era can be considered to span from 1964 to 1994). This approach to culture's role in post-independence nation building can be seen in the significant infrastructure developed in the region post-independence. Much of it addressed racialised and geographically limited colonial infrastructures, sought to integrate and adapt existing infrastructure, and also aimed at reclaiming and restoring African cultural narratives.

This upsurge in development has been short lived due to some combination of structural adjustment policies, long-standing political turmoil and economic stagnation across much of the region. Unfortunately, this led to cuts in funding for creative expression infrastructure and a general slump of political will – in some cases exacerbated by the independence and criticality of artists expressing themselves outside of nationalist metanarratives, and in some cases resulting in censorship and even banning of various creative expressions.

[1] There is significant existing literature on this stating particularly with the initial manifesto type statements of the likes of Leopold Senghor, first independence president of Senegal and leading thinker in the negritude movement.

Existing arts infrastructure remains significantly underfunded and understaffed. Theatres may retain the funding to keep the lights on but rarely have funds to host their own companies or develop new productions. Museums likewise don't have budgets for exhibitions or audience development programmes. There remain key challenges in enabling the full potential of infrastructure for creative expression – as it is increasingly considered an unfunded mandate at local, provincial and national levels across the region. Limited skills, capacity and funding towards the development of arts infrastructure across the region remain.

It is very difficult to determine any definitive picture of arts funding across the region. Most states do not release any statistical data at all, while companies and international bodies vary in their transparency about funding. All interviews in this research with country specific experts referred to diminishing funds at national levels. In most of the region, the bulk of funding for creative expression is available through international channels. These include multinational organisations such as the United Nations, cultural attaches of the various embassies, as well as international development organisations dealing with issues such as human rights, that might work through and with culture or creative expression.

Most state and foreign funding that exists for creative expression is aimed at programming, events and festivals. This means that limited to no funding is available for artwork production or practitioners' fees. Furthermore, minimal funds are available for ongoing costs and overheads that keep creative expression alive between major festivals and events. This results in an overall ad-hoc events-based sector, without strong development, growth and sustainability of everyday practice and institution building, and the kinds of professionalism this enables.

Professionalisation of the sector remains a significant lack due to these infrastructural deficiencies. For example, arts education across the region is wide and varied, with differing levels of impact and professionalisation. Arts education at school level is minimal in most of the region, and a large portion of formal training in the arts is at university level, leaving many practitioners unable to access formal education. Even where it exists, it is largely focused on training of artistic skill and not on the other skills required to be a functional artist (business skills etc.), or to support a functional sector. There is a disproportionate and critical lack of infrastructure for the support of young practitioners into the professional arena for creative expression – whether as arts managers, part of the skilled support workforce (technical support, etc.) or seed capital for start-ups, equipment etc.[2]

Throughout the region a relatively strong commercial gallery market exists, to lesser and greater degrees. This commercial sector significantly drives forms of production towards saleable work determined by the interests of buyers. In many contexts this is skewed toward an 'expat' and tourist market and decorative, 'afro-stereotyped' creative practice.

The limitations to infrastructure described above leave a significant gap within the creative expression landscape. This gap is one of an ecosystem of structural support for practice that is non-commercial, new or experimental, developmental in its form or intentions and/or for emerging and younger practitioners. Outside of the market, formal infrastructures that are stable, large scale and consistent should provide support for practice that is either not yet ready for the market or not possible within the market. In developed countries this is provided by state structures such as universities, galleries and museums, theatres and other institutions that provide educational, developmental and emergent processes. Often, where state infrastructures might be too bureaucratic, large and/or unwieldy to meet all needs, they would work with sustained and well financed non-governmental structures, serving as another part of the ecosystem for stronger arts infrastructure.

[2] Pamberi Trust, GRM International Zimbabwe for British Council. Young Urban Artists Needs Assessment Report (2015).

Not an

But even in the case of non-governmental structures, Southern Africa is challenged by less than adequate historical trends. There is a strong civil society history of non-governmental organisation (NGO) or nonprofit organisation (NPO) bodies across Southern Africa, that largely hold connotations of precarity, being overburdend, problematic relationships to international development agencies and potential neo-colonialism.

Largely NGOs are seen by a younger generation as old fashioned and not able to keep up with the changes of their contexts. Their limited and clunky governance models, precarity and dependence on international donor funding is often seen to deaden impacts in favour of bureaucracy, therefore limiting independence in order to meet paternalistic regulations. Through this research we observed how the image of the NGO has become significantly less attractive to new and younger organisers. In the field of creative expression in a time of limited funding, a flexibility and potential for creative response is vital. In a world of globalised creative practice there is a sense that the reliance of 'development for Africa' donor funding is an incredibly limited way of working and it is understood to be unsustainable, with livelihoods of NGOs being subject to the whims of how long an international donor remains interested.

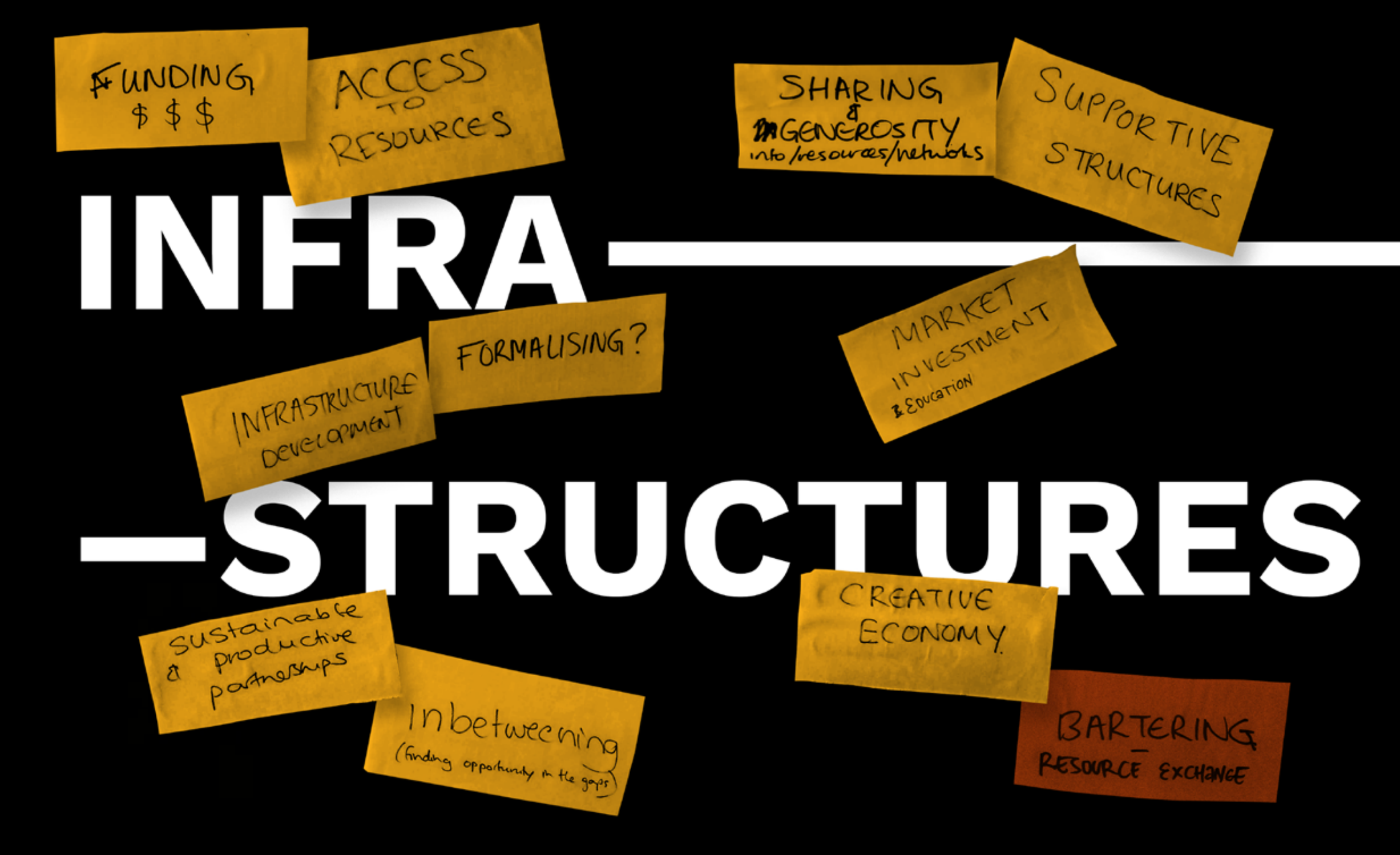
NGO

Many groups and organisers we interviewed indicated that they did have some formal registration. Groups registered as non-profits indicated they have done so primarily "for the certificate" to be recognised where necessary and to access formal grant funding. However, the status of non-profit did not mean much for the organisations' vision, way of functioning or governance, with formal procedures seldomly followed post registration. A number have registered as for-profit entities as a way to formalise for recognition's sake but without the additional burdens of non-profit governance, which are seen as a significant waste of time and resources. A third of the groups interviewed were not registered at all. This didn't necessarily correlate with the most flexible structure, with organisations such as KinoKadre, a film collective based in Cape Town, choosing not to register to remain independent and free of enforced bureaucratic processes but holding one of the most considered and intricate organisational structures of all the groups. Other unregistered groups saw themselves as interim, project-based or autonomous enough not to require formalisation. For many of the groupings the idea of registration often connotes being overtaken by administrative responsibilities at the expense of creativity.

WHERE WE STAND.

Emerging out of this context, young arts practitioners are needing to find other ways of operating that do not rely on deficient systems and infrastructure. They are carving out space to enable new forms of practice, and in some cases to ameliorate some of those very same deficiencies. The negotiation of the NGO format is just one example of many ways that practitioners are hacking the systems to create formats and structures better suited to the realities of their contexts, and the making of work that is urgent, challenging and deeply creative. Practitioners are bringing together resources and networks, to create work otherwise not possible within the formal nationalising narratives and structures, and also not possible to do alone. They are largely self and mixed funding models with self-driven and loosely structured entities, focused on the production of new forms and/or content in creative expression.

These spaces and practitioners are also, in various ways, enabling the professionalisation, development and internationalisation of creative expression in Southern Africa, filling some of the infrastructural gaps discussed above. Much of this is self-developed, ad-hoc and learned on the fly. And for many practitioners who have now been doing this for some time, significant lessons have been learned, key challenges have been identified and some of the impacts are now evident. This next part explores some of those lessons, challenges and outcomes.


FUNDING
$ $ $
ACCESS TO RESOURCES
SHARING & GENEROSITY into/resources/networks
SUPPORTIVE STRUCTURES
INFRA
FORMALISING?
INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT
MARKET INVESTMENT & EDUCATION
-STRUCTURES
SUSTAINABLE & PRODUCTIVE PARTNERSHIPS
INBETWEENING (finding opportunity in the gaps)
CREATIVE ECONOMY
BARTERING RESOURCE EXCHANGE

Barter / resource exchange

João Orecchia,
Johannesburg

An anecdotal example I could give of barter/ resource exchange is for my recent exhibition. I had musicians perform at the opening, but I didn't have money to pay them the kind of fees they should have been paid. I told them right up front, when I first approached them, I could potentially pay them a much lower amount than what they should be paid, or we could do a kind of trade or bartering based on their needs.

One of them is a violinist and needs to put together a good, small recording set up that would allow him to collaborate with people in other cities. He doesn't know enough about the technical side of it and asked me to do some research for him and recommend a starter recording setup.

A double bass player with an interest in modular synthesisers asked me to record some specific types of synthesiser sounds for his next album, and to give him an introduction to how modular synthesisers work.

It's important that this is discussed right from the beginning so that everything is clear and there aren't unmet expectations. It also helped in this case that the barter was music specific, so both sides have a good sense of the hours required for each thing, and the associated value of each thing. This might be more difficult between a musician and someone from a completely different background, but in my experience, if this is approached with mutual respect and willingness, then solutions can be found that make both sides feel like they are getting something more valuable than money.

We start first with the continued challenges. Of course, financing and resourcing is often the ongoing concern. However, for many of the practitioners we spoke to, it was the practicalities of organising that dogged their work as much, if not more, than the funding limitations. Below is a discussion of some of these.

Conflict management

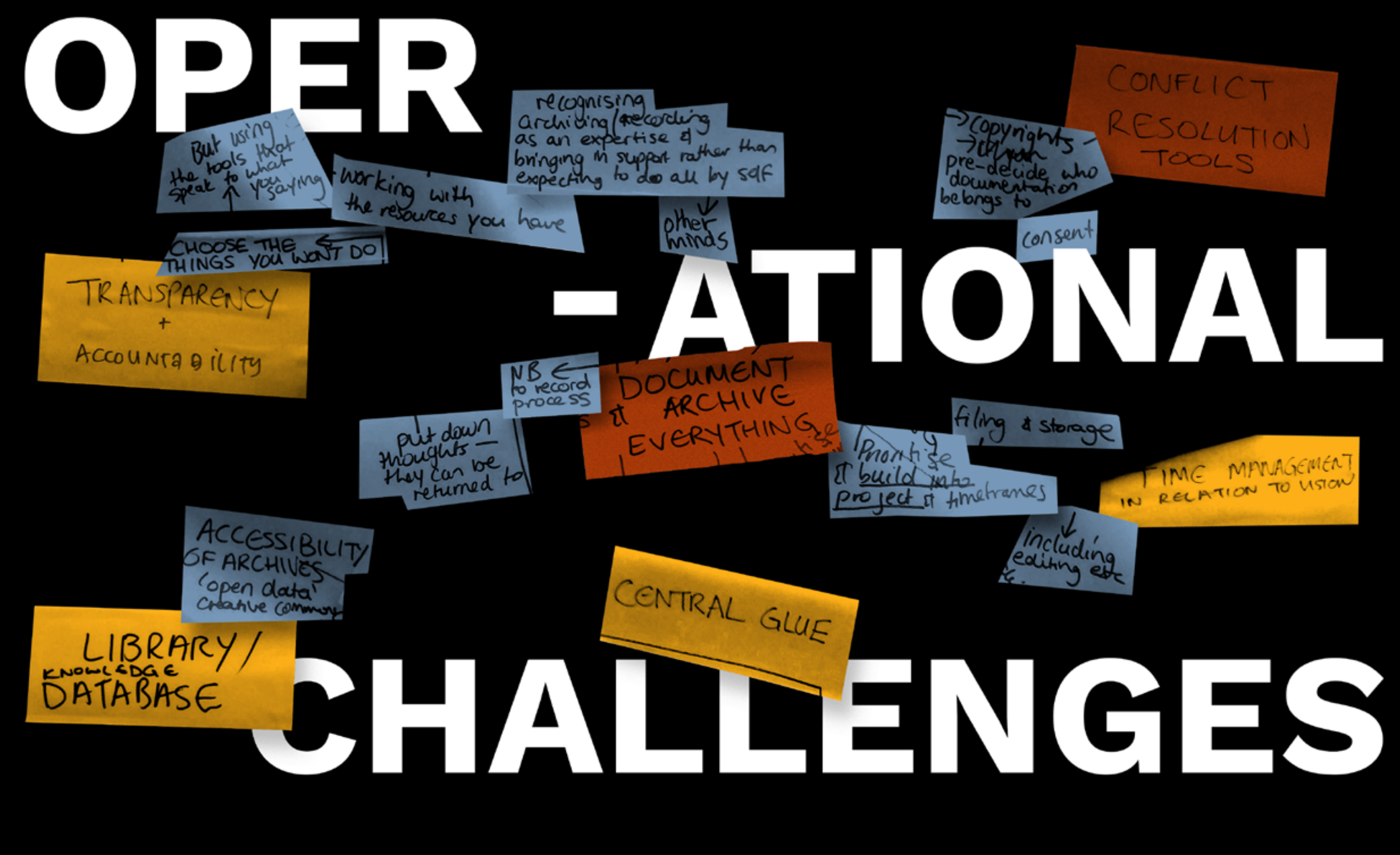
For many groups, the approach towards non-hierarchical and informal structures means that no conflict management mechanisms exist, and conflict management has been identified as a key challenge. The commitment many of these organisers have to the intention of the work, and the personal contribution (financial, time, creative) creates a higher personal investment, resulting in highly emotive conflict processes.

Importantly, the initial purpose for which these groups were created often serves as the primary pivot point for conflict, and 'careerism' of individuals over the greater good of the group or the 'work', is often seen as significantly destructive. Whether providing space for long-form writing, enabling support for LGBTIAQ practitioners, or creating alternative dance forms, 'the work' is really what brings people together. Within the limited funding and infrastructural support framework of the Southern African region, this often relies on self-funding, sweat equity and affective labour – effectively organisers put in their heart and soul for the love of the work. Under such circumstances, conflicts become a personal affront when not everyone pulls their weight or is equally committed.

The nature of affective labour – work done more out of relationship and care than for remuneration – is partly what makes it possible for these groups to fill the infrastructure gap. However, affective labour can result in organising burnout and major conflict within the groups. When asked about conflict mechanisms, many organisers interviewed referred to "being like a family" and therefore determined that the affective nature of their work equated to affective strategies for conflict management. But at a deeper level, for many that would otherwise work alone with limited access to networks and resources, being together is much more than a job – it is a form of social relation. A strong example of this is Inkanyiso, who referred in their interview to the personal and emotional support they give one another particularly in the face of ongoing discrimination and violence to their community.

The affective nature of this work can seem at odds with career development. And yet, support and skills sharing are consciously part of the work. For Thajib, writing about affective labour in collective practice in Indonesia, this effectively places "collaboration into a longitudinal project of the becoming of an artist" (2016, p5). In the place of limited infrastructure to develop careers, collectives and collaborative work can be the primary way to do this, and a significant marker of their impact. However, its often unusual for groups to have come to terms with this, and determined a collective position on this, therefore resulting in conflicts.

We identified a few cases in which conflict management strategies are integrated into the groups' operations. Poetavango, a spoken word poetry platform in Maun, Botswana, has a counsellor as one of their organisers. KinoKadre has a complex framework for conflict management called Fresh Air Circles that are entirely about creating the space and mechanism for people to raise emotional and personality issues that would otherwise never make it onto the everyday working agenda.


OPER
-ATIONAL
CHALLENGES
But using the tools that speak to what you saying
working with the resources you have
recognising archiving/recording as an expertise & bringing in support rather than expecting to do all by self
other minds
CONFLICT RESOLUTION TOOLS
copyrights
pre-decide who documentation belongs to
consent
CHOOSE THE THINGS YOU WANT DO
TRANSPARENCY + ACCOUNTABILITY
NB to record process
DOCUMENT & ARCHIVE EVERYTHING
put down thoughts — they can be returned to
filing & storage
Prioritise & build into project timeframes
TIME MANAGEMENT IN RELATION TO VISION
including editing etc
ACCESSIBILITY OF ARCHIVES 'open data' creative commons
CENTRAL GLUE
LIBRARY/ KNOWLEDGE DATABASE

1. Consciousness

Working

2. Circle

3. Choice

with those

4. Open

5. Flat

6. Autonomous

who are present

7. Trust

8. Truth

9. Outcomes

Eugene Paramoer,
Cape Town

When KinoKadre speaks about the “violence of process” and the “violence of hierarchy” it is a notion or rather linked out to the process of project results. So we don’t believe that activists should be harassed, chased or seduced to meet deadlines, we put notions and reasons out there and invite people, so they can choose where they want to situate themselves in the circle, using the process of working with the people who are present. Working with those who are present simply means all activists have the democracy to share their choices and information but ultimately if they chose not to be involved directly in the work, they allow others to continue with the work. This process is based on the autonomous perspective which believes that people have the power to chose their own destiny, once that autonomous process is shared in a space people chose themselves. The activist artists’ circle are situated inside the community to serve the community. There is no pressure on the activist to do work aside from their own consciousness and choice.

Inevitably we disagree, misunderstand or need to find middle spaces in the way we work. Conflict will happen – it's a question of how we handle conflict with care.

Conflict

What it includes

Fighting, arguing and/or tension

Some in the group feeling over stretched and/or like others aren't playing their part

Some in the group growing silent and distant

Ways it happens

Burnout and stress make it more difficult to find solutions and remain calm under challenging circumstances.

Busyness and hyper-productivity give little time to attend to differences, feelings and more nuanced needs.

Our core values may be in common, but how these play out practically may differ and result in miscommunications and differences.

We generally don't have high communication skills, conflict management skills and facilitation skills which results in shying away from difficult conversations or undertaking difficult conversations in ill-suited ways.

Care

Ways to attend to it

KinoKadre uses an “open air circle” strategy to air difficult conversations. They describe it as follows:

KinoKadre asks people to reflect on their work and share the truth. The Open Air Circle clears space for your own process. Still geared towards your work, but portraying other ways of being and doing work. The truth moment is a non-threatening space where one is able to reflect, self-critique and speak openly about their struggles, difficulties and challenges regarding being involved in the circle.

Below is a similar model taken from “open space” technology which is useful for conflict resolution but also for strategic direction setting, collective planning and deep learning.

Principles of Open Space

1. Whoever comes are the right people
2. Whenever it starts is the right time
3. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have
4. When it’s over its over

General Flow of an Open Space

Meeting: The group convenes in a circle.

A facilitator is selected and provides an overview of the process and explains how it works.

The facilitator invites people with issues of concern to come into the circle, write the issue on a piece of paper and announce it to the group.

The convener places their paper on the wall and chooses a time and a place to meet.

This process continues until there are no more agenda items.

The group then breaks up and heads to the agenda wall, by now covered with a variety of sessions.

Participants take note of the time and place for sessions they want to be involved in.

The host of the group captures the important points on a report sheet of paper.

All of these reports will be harvested in some way and returned to the larger group.

Following a closing or a break, the whole group comes together for convergence, a process to bring the essences and wisdom form the small sessions back to the whole group.

Depending on the focus of the whole open space, you might want to invite the group to develop action plans to put the collective wisdom into action.

The group then finishes the meeting with a closing circle where people are invited to share comments, insights, and commitments arising from the process.

extract from https://aohathina.com/

Documenting & Archiving

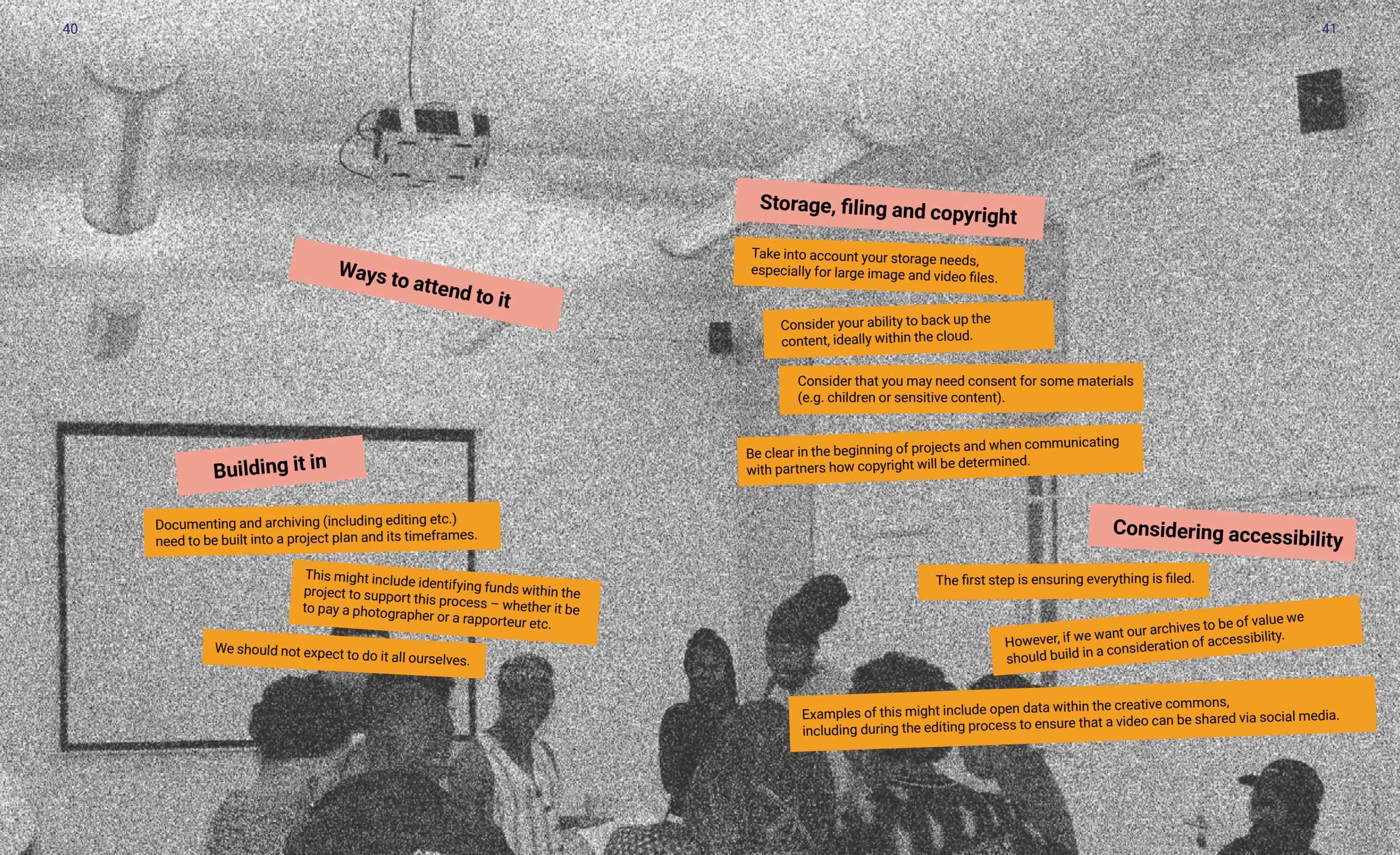
What it includes

- Putting down thoughts
- Photographing processes and events
- Collecting perspectives, descriptions of processes and evaluative reflections
- Collating materials to be accessible in future

Building a knowledge database for recollection, further learning and sharing with others.

Ways it happens

- Writing reports in ways that are also valuable to the organisation
- Working with resources you have – cell phone cameras and recordings, etc.
- Making sure data is saved, archived and backed up
- Finding ways to sort through archives, processes and share the learnings. This might be through external student projects or research, specific archival internships etc.



Ways to attend to it

Building it in

Documenting and archiving (including editing etc.) need to be built into a project plan and its timeframes.

This might include identifying funds within the project to support this process – whether it be to pay a photographer or a rapporteur etc.

We should not expect to do it all ourselves.

Storage, filing and copyright

Take into account your storage needs, especially for large image and video files.

Consider your ability to back up the content, ideally within the cloud.

Consider that you may need consent for some materials (e.g. children or sensitive content).

Be clear in the beginning of projects and when communicating with partners how copyright will be determined.

Considering accessibility

The first step is ensuring everything is filed.

However, if we want our archives to be of value we should build in a consideration of accessibility.

Examples of this might include open data within the creative commons, including during the editing process to ensure that a video can be shared via social media.

Gender

Sub-Saharan Africa has one of the worst rates of gender parity in the world. Southern Africa's rates vary by country but do not fare well by international standards. Issues such as women in the labour force, women in leadership in government and health standards for women are measured by the United Nations to calculate gender parity. Southern Africa is in the bottom third of the world. It is no surprise then that gender would be a key challenge in organising in the region. It seems very little amelioration is happening within the creative expression space. While the organisers interviewed for this research were almost equal numbers in terms of genders interviewed, there was clear indication that organising roles played particularly by women, are not equal.

Only two of the groups interviewed were all female, while four were all male – with a distinct emphasis for male dominated fields such as street art. Within groups that were mixed gender, there were more males in each group. This speaks to international trends in creative expression where men are more successful within the arts. Southern Africa presents similar patterns; male practitioners account for 72% of professional practitioners in Zimbabwe[3] and this is confirmed through anecdotal evidence throughout the region. Importantly, education and training environments often have closer gender parity. However, once within the professional arena a combination of social expectations for women and family, gender pay gaps and preferential employment of males result in women spending less time within the professional creative environment[4]. Research in the region similarly identifies that women exist in quite high numbers in support roles within the workplace but at low numbers in senior management roles[5] (importantly this differentiates significantly between white and black women in South Africa). Even as project managers or middle management, within the case studies of this research, women tended to take on gender specific roles such as cooking or childcare responsibilities amongst the groups, over and above their organising roles.

Women Creative Wednesdays, an informal session arranged by the female managers of Shoko Festival – an event that forms part of the broader Magamba Network in Harare – is an interesting response to these challenges. Its two leading staff are women and expressed frustration at ongoing discrimination, particularly from funders and authorities they work with to arrange the festival. In response they created Women Creative Wednesdays, a space for mentoring, advice, skills-sharing and confidence building between women, aiming to boost and foster a sense of camaraderie to combat intimidation.

It is noteworthy that while gender parity remains a significant challenge among organisers, experiences of trans and gender non-binary organisers was not raised through the research. Apart from Inkanyiso's work, none of the other respondents referred to issues of homophobia and transphobia. Homosexuality remains illegal or discriminated against – mostly in the form of colonial era 'sodomy laws'– in all countries in the region except South Africa and Botswana as of 2019 and this is of course a key issue.

[3] Culture Fund of Zimbabwe Trust. Baseline Study on the Culture Sector in Zimbabwe: Culture Fund Research Programme Supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (2009).
[4] Human Sciences Research Council. An assessment of the Visual Arts in South Africa (2010).
[5] Human Sciences Research Council. An assessment of the Visual Arts in South Africa (2010).

The life cycles of these groups was another issue identified. The dissolution or closure of groups is often seen as a failing of the group and/or its organisers. They are not often established as formal NGOs with succession strategies or intentions. However, the nature of their formation usually dictates how long they deem themselves valuable and viable – which is usually not very long in the financial and infrastructural environment of Southern Africa.

Lifetimes

While affective – and often unpaid – labour is in many ways the lifeblood of these groups, it is significantly unsustainable long term. Where practitioners have 'day jobs' to finance programming it is impossible to maintain energy and time to continue working at a high-quality level. External funds obtained are too often project-based or short term, and dry periods are inevitable within the funding landscape of the region. As with much of the rest of the grant dependent sector, available funding is often entirely for project production and not for its organisers, resulting in significant overworking, challenges of maintaining life balance and – in alarmingly high numbers – total burnout.

Under such circumstances, organisers often seek out different modes of working – as a response to limitations or difficulties of collective organising. An example of this is a number of street artists who still collaborate on works and particular programmes after being part of the now defunct TK Street Art Collective in South Africa. This is indicative that while some of these groups may never become long-standing institutions, their impacts, connections and intangible resources remain even after they close down. For many groups, this is understood as enough of a reason to not need to be sustainable and to consider life-cycles in much shorter terms, and potentially even to plan for the end.


SELF -
COUNTER-PRODUCTIVITY
Culture of care in the team/collective
COLLECTIVE PROJECT
VISION
FOCUSED
END GOALS
PURPOSE
NOT JUST THE NEXT PROJECT
LIFE
SPAN
LINE
LEGACY
SUSTENANCE
Set ground rules. Determine the culture.
pre-empt the drama
SPACE FOR DEBRIEF BUILT IN
Difference as productive
AUTONOMY
- creative voice
- funder
CHECK-IN
RELEVANCE
IDENTITY
- BEING aware OF one's POSITION
others
understand the different ways people work.
REALISTIC EXPECTATION
decide which pressure you will answer to
COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY
CHOICE
CONSENSUS
AGENCY
Build steps into the project
TRUST
LOVE
GENEROSITY
UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU BRING TO THE PARTY
PERSONAL
DEEP MOTIVATION
COMMITMENT
/RESPONSIBILITY
PULSE TAKER
SELF-REFLEXIVITY
Being able to say when it's not working
THE WORK CONTINUES WITH THOSE WHO ARE PRESENT & ABLE
WHAT IS A COLLECTIVE?
IDENTITY. PRINCIPLES. ROLES
INCLUSION
-
ALL HAVE A ROLE
CARE

Self-care

1. There's a need for new thinking in the training, creation and production of art. Old existing structures have failed younger generations because they are still stuck in outdated modes of thinking and doing art. This is specifically in observation of the Namibian landscape, in which a few cases are toxic, patriarchal, elitist and misogynistic spaces.

2. As a result of this, a generational conflict will erupt, to the detriment of the work that needs to be done.

3. In these cases, feelings of frustrations, anger and inadequacy build up within the psychological, physical and crucially spiritual practice of those involved on the ground.

This happens because a true artist is a highly passionate human being. She sees herself as gifted. And oftentimes artists are gifted, creative beings and any blockages to this truth within them can run amok on the totality of the (artist) human.

4. In conclusion, the artist must be provided with safe platforms to practice her own methods of self-care throughout any process of creating and producing art. Particularly in spaces with a large number of personnel when she is centre-stage.

This is crucial to the artist, to develop her own way of dealing (confronting) with what's at stake, unpacking and eventually unlearning in a safe and open space.

In so doing, she is ultimately healing herself holistically to have the mental, physical and spiritual basis to do the work that needs to be done.

Trixie Munyama,
Windhoek

Self & Collective Care

What it includes

- Culture of care within the team
- Culture of care within the team
- Agency
- Being able to say when it's not working and when we need care

Ways it happens

- We set realistic expectations
- We prioritise self and collective care in the development of a project
- We decide which pressures we will answer to and when
- We set ground rules ("alternative labour laws") to determine the culture of a process or project
- The work continues with those who are present and able

Finding ways to guard our well-being and the well-being of others.

Ways to attend to it

Making the means by which we work consistent with what we want to create.

If we want to enable creative and supportive spaces for the arts, then we need to be creative and supportive to ourselves, to others, and in our mode of working.

The CREA Self-Care and Self-Defence Manual for Feminist Activists suggests that each person should be guided to take personal agency and autonomy for care, and should consider first how well they take care of themselves.

Below are some of the questions we might ask ourselves to begin to determine whether we are in a good place to prioritise a culture of care – based on our level of care for ourselves:

1. Do you rest sufficiently when you are tired, exhausted or sick?

2. When you are resting, do you just rest or use the time to do things you are unable to complete during your working day?
(Such as, checking your e-mails, correcting a document, planning an activity for the following day, or calling for a meeting.)

3. How frequently do you work over weekends? Do you make up for it during the week?

4. When was your last real break (holiday, extended time with family and friends)?

5. Do you ask for and take time off when you need it or only when it is given to you?

If our answers determine we're not prioritising our own care and well-being, then it is necessary to embark on a process using the following:

1. Develop awareness of your self

2. Recognise and express your feelings and emotions

3. Recognise and accept your anger, aggressiveness and frustration

4. Develop your autonomy

More detail is available in the free to download manual at genderit.org

Counter-productivity

What it includes

Busyness, to the point of burnout

Taking on more projects and losing track of our organisational focus in the process (mission drift)

Prioritising larger numbers, bigger budgets and hyper-productivity as opposed to prioritising quality, creativity, independence and/or depth of projects (bigger, better, faster paradigm)

Centralising, controlling and micromanaging rather than decentralisation, delegation, devolution and succession/death planning

Ways it happens

The paradigm of success: growth informs most areas of our lives, often including vision and mission statements, funder requirements and societal pressures.

Funding is area specific and so we end up tweaking and changing our projects to better fit the funding call to receive the funding, this goes on for so long or so far that we lose track of our initial intention and values.

We lack the skills to coordinate and communicate in ways that strengthen decentralisation and autonomous decision making.

We don't have the time (because of busyness) to think about the bigger picture, the long term, and/or better strategies of working.

When we become "productive" in ways that do not fulfil our mission, serve our needs and intentions, or support our sustainability and well-being.

Degrowth

Degrowth is defined as “a form of society and economy which aims at the well-being of all and sustains the natural basis of life. To achieve degrowth, we need a fundamental transformation of our lives and an extensive cultural change.”

This would include attempting to reframe our definitions of success, our focus on sustainability as meaning perpetual existence, and our perceptions of value.

This would require us to continually self-check our tendencies towards a success=growth mindset, and negotiate and persuade those around us (including funders) of the need for other ways of thinking about “impact” and “indicators”.

Ways to attend to it

Developing strategies and clear frameworks for more open decision making and responsibility

In formal organisations we often use unquestioned hierarchical models, many of which are automatic and legislatively required when we register organisations with local authorities.

In less formal organisations, decision making processes often emerge organically and without specific and collective agreement on these processes.

A number of existing strategies for decentralised decision making and accountability exist that can be easily researched and tested for clearer decision-making processes that more directly enable devolution and delegation.

Importantly!! – these processes will take practice and patience because we are more used to a hierarchical and controlling paradigm, and therefore need to unlearn old ways and adapt to new skills.

Regular check-in

Setting up and sticking to regular self and collective check-ins to monitor busyness, decision making processes as well as group and individual well-being is a valuable strategy.

WHERE WE FIND A DIFFERENT WAY

This final section looks to describe just some of the contributions this form of organising is starting to make. We consider here, the nature of the ways practitioners and organisers are working, the creative work immerging out of these spaces, and the impacts that are starting to happen. In effect, under very challenging financial, infrastructural and historical circumstances, and with significant challenges in the practicalities of organising, a space is being slowly and methodically cleaved out of the arts landscape for an exciting, necessary and forward-thinking form of creative practice.

Infra-

A number of research process have been undertaken to ascertain the value of – and therefore the need for – small arts organisations in the 'global north'. Size Matters[6], by the small arts organisations network Common Practice in the United Kingdom, is an example of one. The research found that small organisations play a vital role in experimental and developmental licence for practitioners, enabling growth and critical exploration that feeds into larger formats and more formal institutions, both locally and internationally. Without them, there is very little space for testing work, a luxury not possible on larger stages. US academic Abdoumaliq Simone,[7] has written at length in a broader, more social science context, about the nature of human infrastructure as a stand in for limited physical infrastructure across the African continent and other 'global south' areas. Where formal infrastructure with curricula, standardised testing and quantitative results (physical building, formal funding, education, throughput rates and contributions to GDP by the creative economy for example) might be easily evaluated and its value calculated, the informal human infrastructure that Simone describes, and that we discuss in this publication, provides a range of intangible and informal contributions to the sector that happen in almost invisible ways.

One example of this is Village Unhu in Harare. The collective serves as an informal training, studio and creative community space for many young practitioners. While studio space is rented, Village Unhu organisers regularly arrange alternative payment strategies or negotiate for collectors to sponsor studio space. As successful artists themselves they leverage their own networks to expand access for many of the new voices in the broader Village. The space is also an experimental gallery, giving young studio practitioners their first group exhibitions within a supportive environment and again, leveraging their own professional reputation as individual artists to garner associative value for their community.

The intangible assets and services the groups referred to in this study provide – often as an additional aspect to their core work – offer significant value to the sector. However, because these are often not formalised it can be difficult to determine the value they bring. Informal apprenticeship and mentorship, skills sharing and support to young practitioners are all areas of infrastructure that are primarily, an infrastructure of people.

[6] Thelwell, Sarah for Common Practice. Size Matters, Notes towards a Better Understanding of the Value, Operation and Potential of Small Visual Arts Organisations (2011).
[7] Simone, Abdoumaliq. People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg. Public Culture 16(3): 407-49. Duke University Press (2004).

structural space

As part of the shift in the way groupings understand what it means to organise, there is the inherent interlinking and entanglement of the infrastructural, the aesthetic and the social.

The social

vs

the aesthetic space

A publication by collective KUNCI Cultural Studies Center, based in Indonesia[8], refers to the need to tease out and consider what it means for collaboration to exist within a discursive stream that defines art as indispensably social. Editor of the publication, Ferdiansyah Thajib, states;

"Doing so does not imply that we desire to prolong the confusion between art's autonomy (its position dissolved of social role and function) and heteronomy (the collapse of art and the social) here. Nor that the aesthetic dimension of a collaborative artwork needs once again to be downplayed for its social efficacy. (In fact, the deployment of notions of efficacy, ways of working and intentionality as criteria of judgement on what 'good' collaborative art should look like, may fall short against multiple modes of working together that have historically and effectively developed in the different locals delineating Southeast Asia as well as Indonesian collective art production.) We are more interested instead in engaging with a holistic approach that will allow us to consider the different junctures where the multiple aspects of a collaborative artwork meet: the aesthetic and the social folding into and out of each other as the work continues to unfold across time and space." (p.5)

This is pivotal because it speaks to how the very nature of organising brings the creative expression process into the social, and therefore also into the political. As stated by Thajib, this is not about creating a differentiation between autonomous and heteronomous practice but as an important point in which intersections exist. In addition, the research done on organising in Southern Africa points to a further intersection with infrastructure – the creation of infrastructure in place of what is currently lacking. For the groups and organisers surveyed in this research, the ways they function, the work they do and their purpose, are all integral to one another.

Inkanyiso is a South African cultural expression activist organisation that deals with LGBTIAQ issues. The form of the collective, which is non-hierarchical, fluid and very tight-knit, is integral to the work it does to support LGBTIAQ people, particularly young people, regarding issues including self-expression, collective action and bullying. The nature of the close-knit and socially supportive group upholds the collective's values and ethics, creating necessary infrastructures for their community: safe spaces and social support. Importantly, the need for creative expression – primarily through photography – particularly for young black queer and trans womxn, becomes a radical act in the increased silencing of expression of gender and sexuality through violence and intimidation in many of the places these practitioners come from. Likewise, Toyitoyi Artz Kollective, a street art collective based in Harare, operate in an entirely non-hierarchical, anti-authoritarian and autonomous model in correlation with their activist programme towards social justice. Furthermore, their street art and creative collaborations across the African continent link into their political agenda, focusing on public, accessible and anti-authoritarian creative expression.

The combination of the social, the aesthetic or creative and the infrastructural become one and the same. As stated by Thajib above, these forms of organising do not necessarily attempt to create particular arguments for creative expression's role in the world but see their own role and that of creative expression as interconnected. The limitations of funding, the need for collectivising resources and skills, together with the limitations of formal structures such as the NGO, means that these organisers must seek alternatives that respond to their immediate needs as well as their obvious limitations. What we see is the inherent collapsing of forms that luxury might afford one to separate out. Where 'art for arts' sake' becomes an improbability in relation to their locus of practice and livelihood.

[8] Thajib, Ferdiansyah et al. Holopis Kuntul Baris: The Work of Art in the Age of Manifestly Mechanical Collaboration. Published to accompany Discipline No.4, Spring/Summer 2015 (2016).

Learning

The groups surveyed also play a key role in supporting young practitioners, young practice and new voices. As noted previously, there is extremely limited formal infrastructure for young practitioners to enter a professional arena or the workplace. While some educational support exists in most countries in the region, it is not necessarily for all disciplines and seldom educates students to function as practitioners in the 'real world' after graduating. For many young practitioners, entering an existing group, collective or collaborative practice, or even creating a new one, is the only way to navigate the professional environment, create networks and develop a career.

This is visible at the Henry Tayali Art Centre in Lusaka. The artists that use the space have become its organisers, creating non-hierarchical and lateralised organising structure, including the informal mentorship and apprenticeship of younger artists. Enabling support for young practitioners is key for these groups – even where practitioners can't access formal training, very few can be said to be 'self-trained'. As Andrew Mulenga, writer and chronicler of the Zambian visual arts scene explains:

"There is a crop of young artists who are, for lack of a better term, trending right now. You can't really say they are self-taught. There is an informal system of apprenticeship, which is very encouraging. Especially if you pass through the Art Academy Without Walls [based at the Henry Tayali Art Centre] you will find an artist who is more established who will have three or even four younger artists there, training under him informally. Not doing exactly what he or she is doing, each has their own style."

space

By comparison Johannesburg-based Counterspace is a collective of young practitioners who developed a practice together after finishing university. They have created a space of relative experimentation around subjects of keen interest that are not currently financially viable. Each has a 'day job' and they collectively fund their work, accessing further funds and in-kind support through broader networks and collaborations. Counterspace serves as an open space for their own professional research and investigation to develop their particular professional voices and areas of expertise. These groups create a sense of professional experimentation, support and collective learning – for organisers and their broader collectives. Within these groups, organisers learn, partly from each other and simply 'on the job' as practitioners trying to make things happen for themselves and others. This correlates with the inherently social nature of how these groups choose to work, understanding a multifaceted approach to the advancement of their fields.


MENTORSHIP
PEER MENTORING
– NON HEIRARCHY
NON DEIFY
LEARNING
TEACHING
UNDERSTANDING
– DRIVE YOUR OWN MENTORSHIP
→BE READY TO DO THE WORK
L→ARTICULATE WHAT YOU NEED
COACH
LEARNING
DIALOGICS
SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
→SOMETIMES MORE RELEVANT
EVERYONE IS A RESOURCE
RECOGNISING WHEN YOU NEED ADDITIONAL SKILLS & FINDING IT (IDEALLY INTERNALLY)
– JUST ASK
HOW TO SELECT?

Mentorship and (un)learning

Andrew Curnow, Johannesburg

I had been looking to get a mentor, someone with a lot of experience in the music industry that could help guide me through some of our challenges around financial viability, business models, access to industry gatekeepers, conceptualising and implementing global and local strategies. When I expressed this at the workshop, Eugene Paramoer responded by saying he didn't subscribe to the assumptions of hierarchical expertise that mentorships imply. But rather that 'mentors' often have a lot to learn from those they mentor and vice versa. Rather, he said, I should look to connecting with a range of people and at a more horizontal level who might have something to share with me, and to whom I could contribute to as well. This made a lot of sense especially because we aren't really an average model and needed quite a wide range of advice so it was unlikely that we would find one person with all that knowledge.

I haven't actively sought out to look for this range of horizontal 'non-mentors', but I think it's been in the back of my mind. And over the past couple of months I have successfully formed meaningful relationships with a number of small independent record labels in the UK and USA that I think are doing really interesting work, and that are maybe a few years ahead of where we are. Specifically, we have formed strong bonds with On The Corner Records in London and International Anthem Recording Co. in Chicago, both of which have recently won the coveted "Label of the Year" award at Gilles Peterson's Worldwide Awards. We are all able to assist each other in different ways and exciting collaborative projects with both labels are in the pipelines. Apart from being able to pick their brains about various issues we encounter, these relationships have opened doors for us that we have been knocking on for years with no success. For instance, they assisted us in securing a manufacturing and international distribution deal with !K7 Label Group, which is the distributor we have wanted to work with since the inception of Mushroom Hour. They have also connected us to good PR teams in the USA and the UK, which will have a big impact on our future releases.

Learning

Seeking knowledge and skills for oneself or through others.
How we share skills, grow skills and share the load.

What it includes

- Apprenticeship
- Mentorship
- Skills barter and sharing
- Education and training
- Unlearning

Ways it happens

- Peer mentoring
- Seeking out a more experienced person to give you guidance or just to have a coffee with
- Taking young people into the collective space to share skills, resources and collective learning processes
- On the job
- Google

Ways it to attend to it

Recognising when you need additional skills

Self-awareness and openness to not having all the answers enables us to learn faster by seeking the skills we need from others.

Everyone is a resource

Sometimes the skills we seek, and the contribution we need, is already in the group or at its edges and being underutilised.

Perhaps the feedback someone is giving that isn't being taken seriously, is exactly what we need.

When asking for help

- Just ask!
- Articulate what you need, drive your own learning process
- Be ready to do the work

Creative space

Every group surveyed for this research is enabling a different kind of creative practice otherwise not possible outside of the collective pooling of minds, resources and knowledges. A notable example of this would be Mushroom Hour Half Hour.

Mushroom Hour Half Hour is a Johannesburg-based music collective that brings together unusual collaborations mostly around music production intertwined with visual imagery. The group functions primarily online, with live events when possible. Though it is made up of two organisers, they work with an array of musicians in producing mixtapes of new music. Mushroom Hour Half Hour's role is significant as they specifically commission and produce new music – outside of what might be marketable. Mushroom Hour Half Hour is financed mostly by the two organisers who both work full-time, one of which works as a lawyer. This funding model, they explain, enables flexibility, playfulness and the ability to take their time and focus on the creative process.

What is significant in these two examples is the space – intellectual, creative, online, physical and international – that these organisers make for new, experimental and important narratives to emerge. Space in its various forms, and as a stand in for infrastructure, is a key part of the overall ecosystem for creative expression that these organisers negotiate for and hold.

A natural inclination in these groups that mostly already work collectively and collaboratively is to further connect, network and collaborate in the process of production. These groups are able to connect to a radical sharing and anti-competitive approach precisely because of the limited infrastructure and resources available to them, working against the idea of competition often engendered in limited funding environments. This networked approach can be referred to as rhizomatic, resulting in independent capacity and programming through lateral creative connections. This rhizomatic approach is the only way of working with limited capacity and limited resources but with the intention to expand the impact and reach of the work.

These groups extend further into networks, collaborations and interconnectivity in order to multiply their impacts. This means stretching existing limited budgets to reach a wider range of practitioners, a networked and therefore more effective labour pool, and the ability to share their work's outcomes and impacts more widely. Increasingly this means an internationalised perspective and often, global exposure – despite the highly localised realities of how they work. For organisers, the ability to link into other groups, practitioners and fields is a key motivator for the purpose of their work.

Collaboration and multiplying impacts

This multiplication of impacts through collaboration has another, vital point – that of the support, engagement and creative challenge to the limited existing formal infrastructure. It is important to state that, where some level of functionality exists within formal infrastructure, as mentioned previously, the groups all work with it as part of their collaborative strategies. Precarious and informal groups therefore invest in and are dedicated to the ongoing development of formal infrastructure – partly out of necessity (particularly regarding space) but also through instinctive practice of support, sharing and development.

Although these groups might fill the gaps of formal infrastructure, it is incredibly important not to view them as alternatives or to imply that formal infrastructure isn't necessary. The functionality and role of formal infrastructure remains an imperative part of creative expression's ecosystem and should be supported and encouraged as much as possible.

The National Galleries in Harare and Bulawayo, examples of formal state infrastructures, serve as key points of collaboration for some of these groups. Village Unhu, Magamba Network's MotoRepublik and the National Gallery in Harare and others recently worked to support Chinhoyi University graduates' final year exhibitions[9] – an extraordinary example of forms of infrastructure and creative expression support and crossover collaboration. Johannesburg-based poetry group WordnSound referred to the long-term relationships they build and maintain to enable the use of state infrastructure for performance space. Many of these spaces were built at very high quality and can, if maintained, support better quality practice and performance – something that WordnSound expresses as part of their developmental role, to raise the standards of poetry practice and appreciation in South Africa.

[9]http://www.pressreader.com/zimbabwe/the-heraldzimbabwe/20160613/281977491898902

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

On Collaboration

Lineo Segoete,
Maseru

"There's power in numbers,
it's how nations were formed...
and torn down.

We can't work
effectively in silos,
there's too much to do.

Our mutual
human experiences and yearnings
make room
for so much possibility

to create together
and have fun while doing it."

Conclusion

In response to the current state of creative practice, the kinds of practitioners that have come before, and the flows of popular and state feeling on the arts, artists are having to read their situation, weigh up their options and in many cases make new decisions about how they will function. Importantly this research looks to identify the ways the state of infrastructure and support for artists has impacted creative practice and, in such cases, where it has meant innovative strategies for alternatives beyond the status quo – in terms of sustainability, pushing creative boundaries and determinations of success.

While there is the need to not glamorise the challenges and limitations of the sector, there is also the requirement that we recognise what works, how innovative and important work is happening, and that we are responsive to support creative practice in Southern Africa on its own terms.

Importantly it is primarily these organisers themselves who will need to drive better working conditions, stronger organising methodologies and the discourse around this practice. What this excerpt seeks to do is enable talking points for key issues that organisers need to address. From issues of registrations and policy, to plugging the gaps for young practitioners, to internal labour concerns and potential for burnout, there are strong possibilities in sharing best practice and finding future ways forward – together. Organising is, inevitably, a complex, taxing and highly skilled capacity, and more needs to be done to enable these organisers.

Ferdiansyah Thajib

Beyond aiming to die:

Hosting group conversations and reflections on self-organisation and collectivising has been more of an(un)learning exercise for me than an occupation. This predilection grew out of a habit of working through dynamics within the collective KUNCI, in Yogyakarta, that I have been involved in for the past 12 years. And then it got further nourished through KUNCI's involvement in Arts Collaboratory, a self-organised network of twenty-five arts and cultural organisations in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and Europe.

These experiences have shaped the pathway for my own individual practice in hosting collective sharing and exchanges around these issues, which mainly took form as workshops. I have been privileged enough to travel to distant places and meet different people from various backgrounds, struggles and histories in order to host such workshops. To illustrate some differences: in Berlin I met art educators to explore ways of dealing with conflict in a queer feminist context; in Rotterdam I held a workshop with art students discussing the limits of individual autonomy and challenges in self-organisation; in Zagreb I was involved in a workshop with public librarians to think through the demands of building a community of practice. While they all may appear quite different in content, the common thread between these invariable encounters is the domain in which these activities mainly took place: the field of artistic and cultural productions. For a number of reasons (Thajib 2016), artists and cultural producers have been increasingly intimating notions of self-organisation, collaboration and collectivity as a part of their conceptual and concrete engagement with the world.

My involvement in these different interactions, and especially due to KUNCI's collaboration with VANSA as part of the Arts Collaboratory network, had given me the opportunity to host the workshop on Organising in Johannesburg in October 2018. To reflect on the meanings and values that were articulated by the participants during the 2-day workshop, I want to juxtapose them with some of my previous encounters with these issues in their many faces. This is not to say that I am comparing the articulations of the different communities involved. This would be counterintuitive as each moment carries its own measures of historical context and local dynamics that cannot be compared against each other. Instead what I want to do is to understand better how certain aspects of self-organisation and collectivity take centre stage in the discussion in Johannesburg and how it is tied to like-minded conversations in different local ecosystems.

The afterlives of sustainability

I am referring particularly to the term “aiming to die” that circulated during the Joburg encounter. This provocative statement points to a complex layer of experiences that were shared by some of the workshop participants around the call to sustain one’s artistic practice and socio-political engagement in an exploitative environment. These experiences include moments of physical and mental burnout triggered by incessant pressure to produce and stay busy; feelings of ennui and oversaturation caused by endless cycles of funding commissions; constant realisations that sustainable communal engagement cannot be achieved through result-oriented, project-based framework and funders’ surveillance; and disillusionment in dealing with institutional walls and bureaucratic burdens. Some of the participants were on the brink of closing down their initiatives altogether, literally taking “an institutional suicide”. Others were seeking new ways of thinking about sustainability beyond the dominant model that only measures success and growth, while ignoring exhaustion, failure and its exploitative dimension.

These articulations become more compelling when I try to connect them to what has been said by communities in different localities regarding engagement with issues of sustainability. In a place where funding infrastructures are scarce, such as in Yogyakarta, sustainability becomes a horizon in which self-organisation and collective practices are cultivated in order to move beyond mere survival towards common well-being. In a socialist society such as Zagreb, where state funding comes hand in hand with rigorous control over content has prompted new quests among local cultural practitioners seeking for alternative support infrastructure. On the other hand, in a context where state-based funding is quite established such as in Rotterdam and Berlin, a different set of problems arise. This does not only refer to how public cultural sector is bearing the brunt of austerity measures, but also to how the undergirding neoliberal values of that system perpetuate a climate of individual competition, invisible labour and economic precarity. What we have is then a translocal panorama of people in their political struggle with issues of sustainability that are striated by heterogenous temporalities – from engaging with questions on how to achieve sustainability, how to maintain it, and how to unlearn it through self-organisation and collectivity?

Although the “aiming to die” narrative might evoke some sense of gravity it need not be read as fatalistic. To me it suggests what might be to come after the “sustainable turn” in neoliberal times. It points to the problems of celebrating continuation for the sake of continuing, without paying heed to regenerative challenges, depleting resources, bodily vulnerabilities and ongoing structural violence. It reintroduces a hopeful engagement with present and future imaginations without surrendering to blind optimism. It grounds artistic engagement and cultural activism closer to the life course of the persons behind them. It paints a picture in which the lines between alternative visions and established (institutional) practices are constantly destabilised through an everyday scuffle between contingency and shifting embodied capacities. It serves as a reality check when the strive towards sustainability reaches an impasse: Do we duck and dive in the face of it? Do we endure despite all harms done? Or do we die because of it?

Even if the only possible answer is the last one, as implied by the participants of the workshop hosted by VANSA, dying is never an easy matter either way. Ending as a process that requires its own time usually also means having to confront ourselves with a whole set of ethical questions on responsibility and accountability. How do we die gracefully? What would be our last word? What traces could be left for those who will come after us? How do we want to be remembered? And what would emerge from our remaining ashes? The answers might well not be ours to figure out in the first place, but it surely makes us still wish for a little more time for dying.

Thajib, F. (2016) Introduction: Holopis Kuntul Baris: The Work of Art in the Age of Manifestly Mechanical Collaboration. Published to accompany Discipline No.4, Spring/Summer 2015 (2016).

Participants in Organising,

a working session hosted by VANSA

Facilitated by Ferdi Tahjib, KUNCI Cultural Studies

Ba re e ne re	Maseru	Lineo Segoete
Beyond Entropy Africa and Colectivo Pés Descalços	Luanda	Paula Nascimento
Counterspace	Johannesburg	Sumayya Vally
Inkanyiso	Johannesburg	Lerato Dumse and Zanele Muholi
Invisible Cities	Johannesburg	João Orecchia
Kaleni Kollektiv	Windhoek	Trixie Munyama
KinoKadre	Cape Town	Siphokazi Gwapi and Eugene Paramoer
Mushroom Hour Half Hour	Johannesburg	Andrew Curnow and Chumisa Ndakisa
Poetavango Collective	Maun	Legodile Seganabeng
Village Unhu	Harare	Misheck Masamvu

Ba

Ba re e ne re is a registered educational non-profit organisation whose mission is to enrich the lives of Basotho people by promoting initiatives that support improved critical literacy and creative platforms for expression. Through their work, Basotho youth access training and outlets to practice literacy and share the authentic stories from and about Lesotho with local and international audiences. Translated from the Sesotho language, the phrase “Ba re e ne re” is a Sesotho equivalent of “Once upon a time…” and it is how folktales begin.

re e ne re

Beyond Entropy

Beyond Entropy is a research-based studio network practicing architecture, urbanism and cultural analysis. Beyond Entropy uses the concept of energy as a tool to conceive new forms of architecture beyond the rhetoric of sustainability and operates globally in situations of territorial crisis. Beyond Entropy Africa focuses on Luanda, Angola as a paradigm for urban conditions in sub-Sahara Africa and has developed several research-based projects, from books to curatorial projects to cultural projects.

Africa

Colectivo Pés Descalços

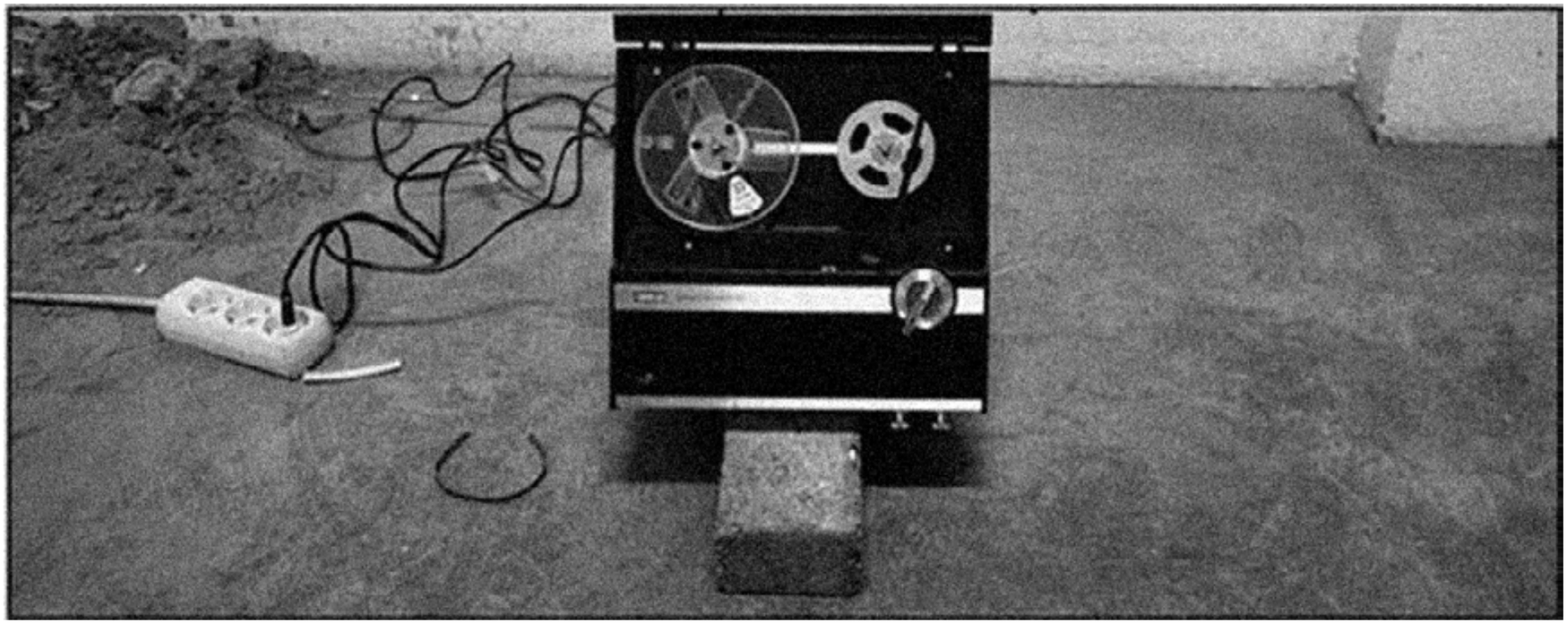
Colectivo Pés Descalços is a cultural and philanthropic collective working for the development and promotion of cultural projects with an emphasis on the visual arts. Its objectives are the creation of collaboration, sharing and education platforms and the development of local projects with regional and global focus, at the same time empowering the cultural scene in Angola. CDP formed in 2012 and its members are Januario Jano (artist), Paula Nascimento (architect and curator), Suzana Sousa (art historian and curator), Ngoi Salucombo (photographer), Adalberto Cawaia (lawyer) and Natacha Mendes (cultural producer).

Counter-space

Counterspace is a Johannesburg-based collaborative architectural studio, directed by an all-women team of Sumayya Vally, Amina Kaskar and Sarah de Villiers. The firm is dedicated to architectural projects, exhibition design, art installation visualisation, public events curation and urban design, which are often rigorously research-based. Counterspace uses Johannesburg – its landscapes, systems, people and rituals – as their main inspiration for creating and approaching projects, with an aim toward developing a uniquely Johannesburg and African design language. Their work is predominantly concerned with identity, otherness and imagining new futures; using image and narrative as a means to deconstruct and reconstruct their city.

Inkanyiso was conceptualised by the visual activist Prof. Sir Zanele Muholi in 2006. The organisation was registered with the Department of Social Development in 2009. Inkanyiso is a response to the lack of visual histories and skills training produced by and for LGBTI persons, especially artists – in the form of photography, film, visual arts and multimedia. Inkanyiso has had many contributors (collective of creative thinkers) participate in their initiatives over the years.

Inkanyiso



Invisible Cities

Invisible Cities is a long form music and arts festival in the form of 8 once-off events set in the empty and unused spaces of Johannesburg. It is an experimental collaboration which marries architecture, art and music in celebration of Johannesburg's mercurial vista. Transitional spaces that are no longer what they once were, and not yet what they will soon become. Rooftops, hallways, stairwells and facades are transformed into snapshots of a possible Johannesburg.

Kaleni

Kaleni Kollectiv is a collective of Namibian and German artists with an interest in creating an artistic research lab and space for new, innovative and transgressive art. Kaleni Kollectiv initiated the Owela Windhoek Festival, a weeklong festival showcasing artistic and theoretical positions about the ‘future of work’. Based on the artists’ lived experiences and research from Namibia, the Kollectiv creates artistic positions through performance, installations, happenings, theatre and talks.

Kollectiv

Kino Kadre

KinoKadre is a national collective of film artists obsessed with the craft of cinema. The word “kino” is Russian for “cinema” and reflects KinoKadre’s commitment to the classical film disciplines. “Kadre” is a French word that first emerged in Vietnam literally meaning “soldier and organisation”. This African kino movement is guided by the understanding that story drives all processes in the world of film. KinoKadre screens classical films which they then interrogate, analyse and discuss. The group serves as both a crafting and support initiative for filmmakers and film enthusiasts.

Mush-room Hour

Mushroom Hour Half Hour is an experimental music imprint based in Johannesburg, South Africa. With its ear to the streets, an artist-centred ethos and the mobility to record music where it happens, they often catch avant-garde sounds as they come into being, as the recently released debut albums of percussionist Thabang Tabane and guitar savant Sibusile Xaba can attest to. Run more as a grassroots organisation than a label, the imprint records with musicians from its own community and then works to find equitable, sustainable and profitable methods of publishing, exhibiting, broadcasting, promoting, disseminating and distributing the work.

Half Hour

Poetavango

Poetavango Collective is a registered community-based arts organisation in Maun, Botswana. The organisation's major mandates include the development, promotion and enhancement of the arts – performance, literary and visual. Poetavango has been in existence since April 2008. In 2011, the Collective started the first Maun International Arts Festival (MIAF), a gala that celebrates the arts in their entirety.
Today, the MIAF is an eight-day festival that brings to the country refined artistic expressions in the forms of comedy, theatre, poetry, live music, dance, visual arts and literature. Poetavango works closely with the Maun community to strengthen arts, culture and tourism networks between locals and other communities

Collective

Village Unhu

Village Unhu is an artist-led project space that officially registered with the laws of Zimbabwe in 2012. Under Misheck Masamvu and Georgina Maxim, its activities commenced as a studio in 2010. The collective project is critically engaged and curatorially focused on offering strong frameworks for artists and audiences. Artists have been drawn to Village Unhu because they offer a platform for experimentation, the opportunity to sharpen critical and professional skills and for the support of all forms of art practice and artists of all ages and stages. Village Unhu is about saving a way of life and about saving lives.

KUNCI

KUNCI Cultural Studies Center inhabits a precarious position of belonging to neither this nor that within existing disciplinary boundaries while aiming at expanding them. The collective's membership is open and voluntary, and is so far based on an affinity to creative experimentation and speculative inquiry with focus on intersections between theory and practice. Since its founding in 1999 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, KUNCI has been deeply preoccupied with critical knowledge production and sharing through means of media publication, cross-disciplinary encounter, action-research, artistic intervention and vernacular education within and across community spaces.

Ferdiansyah Thajib is a researcher and educator who focuses on the transformative potentials of self-organisation and collective practices. His lifework is situated in the intersections of theory and praxis, with specific interests on queer modes of endurance and forms of affective entanglement in everyday life. He is currently a PhD candidate at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Freie Universität Berlin.

Since 2007 Thajib has been a member of KUNCI Cultural Studies, a research collective formed in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, which focuses on critical knowledge production and sharing through cross-disciplinary encounter, artistic practice, action-research and vernacular education within and across community spaces.

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