TOWARDS PERMACULTURAL INSTITUTIONS:
EXERCISES IN COLLECTIVE THINKING

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of art exhibitions on plants and other more-than-human beings accompanied by a growing interest in environmental thinking, traditional ecological knowledge, and various forms of collective work in art institutions. At the same time, there has been a growing disillusionment with the art world itself. The western art system too perfectly seems to mimic the neoliberal economy that we all live in.

Intensifying climate change makes it clear that the cultural sector, along with all other parts of society, cannot continue in the same way as before. The ecological catastrophe that we are facing triggers a strong impulse for change. In response, the summer seminar Towards Permacultural Institutions: Exercises in Collective Thinking" reflected on how plants and permaculture can inform curatorial and institutional work beyond the superficial application of sustainability guidelines.

The publication brings together essays, reflections, exercises, prompts, recipes, reading lists and other materials to move towards relational and reciprocal practices in the art field and beyond.

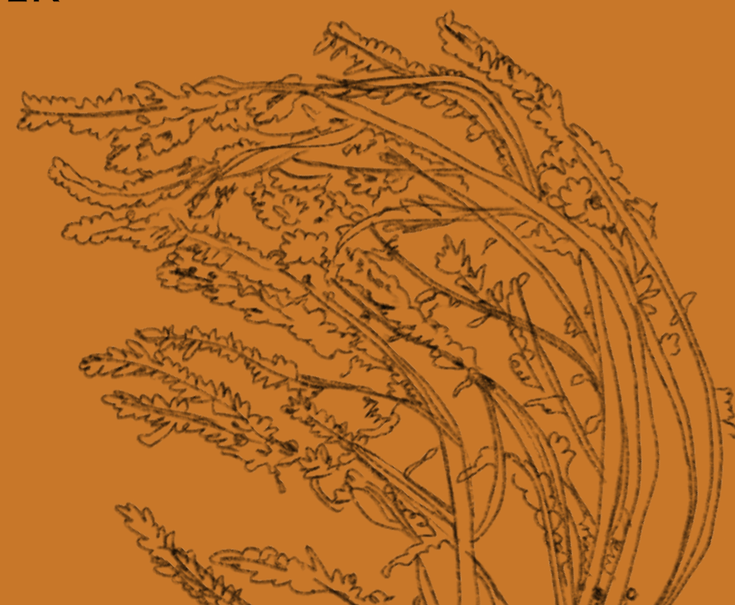
STIFTUNG KÜNSTLERDORF SCHÖPPINGEN
ISBN: 978-3-937828-38-1

EDITED BY JULIA HAARMANN AND NADA ROSA SCHROER

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PERMACULTURE IN RESIDENCE

—JULIA HAARMANN

Thinking together, relating to each other and acting for each other allow for frictional forces, embrace diversity and pave a way for new practices. It is not at all difficult to derive this way from the intensity and also the intimacy of the encounter of a group of strangers that are doing cultural work under very different conditions. I personally found the gathering and exchange during the seminar inspiring, strengthening, enriching, challenging and energising. It provided space for grounding work, reflection and renewal.

When trying to put the outcome of the seminar Towards Permacultural Institutions: Exercises in Collective Thinking into words, the vocabulary changes. It seems that a certain wording is no longer appropriate, connotations are no longer desired, goals are no longer the same. Rather, the focus was less on concrete results and more on the way of being together and being in relationship. When we focus on where we are, and how, the answer to the question of where we want to go automatically changes.

Cultural work has the potential to question, expand and sharpen our view of the world and our being in it. For people in the cultural sector, this work therefore entails a constant relating and readapting. Questions about the relevance of content and the methodical implementation of one's own work are on the agenda of artists and curators alike. Too often, the “what” is still disconnected from the “how” and poses challenges when working in the arts. Collegial exchange in non-competitive spaces is essential to this ongoing process of realignment, but is unfortunately rare.

Artist residencies are places that offer such a (protective) space. As facilitators of artistic development, they can become strategic incubators for new practices in art and culture in general. They challenge our imagination, are breeding grounds for collective models of thought and provide the context for new routines. They are much needed sites for connections – within one’s own work and directed outwards. These connections are important because they strengthen relationships, reciprocity, reflection and responsibility, and ultimately draw attention to the “how."

The most lasting effect our fellows describe as a result of the residency is the re-positioning of their own work. For some, this means a reconfirmation of previous practice; for others, it entails a meaningful correction. Almost always, however, the view of one's own work expands in connection with others. In this context I think of the fourth principle of permaculture, “Apply self-regulation and accept feedback”. This is particularly productive in engaged exchange within a temporary community.

Also from our gathering in July 2022, an international community is growing that is part of a global change. I am grateful for the enrichment through these encounters and discussions. At a time of substantial realignment of the Künstlerdorf, they have broadened the view of the curatorial framework and thus also prepared the ground for future fellows

at Stiftung Künstlerdorf Schöppingen. Just a few months after the meeting, it became vivid what reverberations the ideas of the summer seminar have in the work on site, when the seeds that fellows had sown in the first half of the year were transferred to the self-organised group exhibition *The Harvest*.

I remember the pattern of the spiral, as a symbol of change and return. The spiral, with its cyclical character, is the symbol of infinite movement and developmental processes. And so, the ideas discussed here run their circles. I remember another image that one of the participants of the seminar had shared: “hope as an active verb."

If I were to summarise the outcome of the seminar, it gave hope in times of change. Hope for a more connected, related and responsible world. Hope that, if we nourish it, will bear fruit.












PHOTO CREDITS

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"What Is Magical Is Hidden Too: An Exploration of Zone 00," photos of the workshop by ARCC (Art Residency Research Collective), pp. 17–18

Annalee Davis and Yoeri Guépin at Sharjah Biennal, 2022, p. 32

Cocoa tea ceremony with Annalee Davis and Iyawó (Holly Bynoe), detail photo by Nada Rosa Schroer, pp. 64, 66

Portraits, photos: Camilo Pachón, pp. 73–76
Portrait Camilo Pachón, photo: Sara Alvarado, p. 73
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THANK YOU

The seminar was curated by Aneta Rostkowska, Nada Rosa Schroer and Julia Haarmann.

It was developed in collaboration with the CCA Temporary Gallery/Cologne and is part of the CAP (Curating for Advanced Practices) programme of the Stiftung Künstlerdorf Schöppingen. CAP aims to develop new strategies and structures in the arts and for artistic practices and to negotiate their implementation and production conditions.

With kind support from the Kunststiftung NRW, the Friends of the Künstlerdorf Schöppingen Association and the International Visitors Programme of the NRW KULTURsekretariat (Wuppertal).

Stiftung Künstlerdorf Schöppingen

Temporary Gallery

Kunststiftung NRW

Förderverein des Künstlerdorfs Schöppingen e.V.

NRW KULTUR INTERNATIONAL

The contributions to this publication were supported by the Islands of Kinship project and co-funded by the EU.

Co-funded by the European Union

IMPRINT

Towards Permacultural Institutions: Exercises in Collective Thinking
Editors: Julia Haarmann, Nada Rosa Schroer
Layout: Pema Domingo-Barker
Schöppingen, 2022
Edition: 500
ISBN: 978-3-937828-38-1

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