

~~After commercializing the early~~  
~~books of AIW~~ focused  
on address & reception  
who speaks, and to whom  
who is studying and who  
is teaching

James

# The demand for Collaboration A Constructed World

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## 1. The demand for collaboration

*This year some residencies accepted only collective applications which was the first time for them, In terms of income it's not really advantageous to work with several people. The remuneration is always to be divided by two, three, or more depending on the number of your collective. A collective can simply be group of people who decide to get together to share a common workspace. I have a group I intermittently work and converse with in Bruxelles but I was told this wouldn't be possible.<sup>1</sup>*

We come to witness the demand for collaboration and submission to it during neo-liberalism: it is demanded by; institutions, companies, elected infrastructures, foundations and the like. What does the other want? And what is it in the name of? We see approved lines of collaborative funding policy, criteria and actions. You *should* collaborate.

In 'neo-liberalism's stealth revolution' we are the most individual we have ever been, organised as single subjects, facing the point-of-sale, services, menus of choice, consumer goods... But maybe it's cheaper for artists to collaborate, less space and resources or no doubt their disagreements may keep them more quiet? Consider the work of Clara Mattei on YouTube: *How Economists Invented Austerity & Paved the Way to Fascism*<sup>2</sup> 'austerity has been so undetectable that we rarely call it by name, cuts, coercion and consensus', only forty seven views of this professor from the New School in New York when last I looked. If our speech as-a-group is obscured perhaps we can consider 'What is our common shared experience of individuality?'<sup>3</sup> How do we manage our accursed share and sacrifice neo-liberal capitalism rather than ourselves? In the field of contemporary art there is a narrowing of art and artworks that can today be seen everywhere: a narrowing and defining of the object and it's reception for it to be thereupon consumed. To make it more advantageous for the individual artist to reach that target consumer. Everything is increasingly complaisant to this urgent moment. In art centres, museums, art fairs, galleries and now even in alternative or informal spaces this tightening is felt. So, presumably, people collaborate to break with this exaggerated individualising of the object and the consumer or audience, to get-out-of-cultural-loneliness, to show that there are many more authors than we had thought, to have more fun? Yet neo-liberalism also seriously encourages a taboo to trust:

*Care rhetoric often conceals systems of authority...via emotional manipulation and covert coercion framed as collaboration or teamwork. And talk of care, in the arts—like ... relational aesthetics—echo the benevolent language that similarly glosses tyrannical HR bureaucracy,...with fuzzy talk of relationships, bonds, and community...we don't need to "care about"—or even respect—other people to understand that they deserve equal rights, opportunities, and protections. Moreover, what is the point of art if we're not making 'stuff'? Friendships aren't artwork. At least, they probably shouldn't be.<sup>4</sup>*

Collaboration has also frequently, in previous decades, been treated with a suspicious derision as though multiple speakers might lead to art-by-committee, death-of-the-author, and a kind of slackening of quality. In fact the collection *Ideology and ACW*<sup>5</sup> includes vile screeds by those who misunderstood or attacked our collaborations and sharing over a long period. So if there is now a demand for collaboration, what is the role of the institution or foundations in ushering in togetherness? Is the demand to collaborate to help prevent collapse? Maybe collaboration can be prosecuted as well as encouraged? Yet there is seriously no way to reform in favour of the group because the idea of the individual author and its structural limits, defend us from each other so ubiquitously through copyright.

<sup>1</sup> From an email from a recent French art graduate, currently living in Marseille

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofFR1mD2UOM>, now 512K views!

<sup>3</sup> Paraphrased from Joanna Picciotto *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* Harvard University Press, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Tara Heffernan, from a review of Boris Groys, *Philosophy of Care* Verso 2022). <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/5003/double-the-care-philosophy-of-care-and-care-ethics/>

<sup>5</sup> See #36 *Collaborating is easy, the art world is hard* p350, 2015 <https://www.lespressesdureel.com/EN/ouvrage.php?id=6590&menu=4>

Butler Vulnerability  
Resistance

Berdugo:

The Virus took over Collaboration  
- the case where the virus is  
in search of collaborators -  
fascists -

vulnerability and resistance  
war on interdependency

Conditions - to think  
to ~~steal~~ back time and  
think.

Resistance -  
social movements

## 2. what-can-we-say?

If we are in a group what can we say? And what might even likely be the premises of what we are, collectively, talking about? Melbourne writer Justin Clemens 'says, 'the thing I hate about the US is they value opinions over facts'. In defence of freedom-of-speech John Milton wrote in 1644 'opinion in good persons is but knowledge in the making'. Yet even in places of learning facts and knowledge are currently being flipped by power. Unlike the 'Speech without doors' in the 1600s that Wither and Milton imagined to liberate or merge the everyday speech in and out of a partitioned parliament of privileged speech, we have inherited a premise salad<sup>7</sup> where we could all be talking about something different, for both similar and divergent purposes, mostly at the same time.

Take for example, the Judeo-Christian tradition,<sup>8</sup>presumed an international ethical bedrock, yet it was first used only in the 1930s in the US where 'Conservatives interpreted the idiom to argue that only Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism could inoculate American society from the dangers of Marxist secularism'.<sup>9</sup> The term was not ecumenical and used as exclusionary leverage against other conspicuous religions. This is now expressed as Christian Nationalism. Similarly in western democracies leftist thinkers often excused deeply rooted prejudices against Jews, dating from medieval times, as opposition to the modern state of Israel. Consider Paolo Uccello's famous predella in six scenes *The Profanation of the Host* from 1465-8 in Urbino. Based on a supposed event in Paris in 1290 it depicts a woman who steals the precious host from the church and takes it to the Jewish pawnbroker who gives money then attempts to melt it down. Both are apprehended, the woman is hung and angels and devils debate over her soul, the Jew and his family are burned at the stake. Sent to oblivion. Likely a commission by Duke of Montefeltro of Urbino to vilify the Jews. Just recall this repetition over the centuries. It turns out the Judeo-Christian tradition is based on Christians killing Jews.

*I hope West knew what he was doing. I think West knew what he was doing. I'm pretty sure West knew what he was doing. I think I know what I'm doing. I hope I know what I'm doing. I'm not sure if I know that what I'm doing relates to West at all. I hope there is a shared way of thinking of the world with some, with West,...<sup>10</sup>*

It seems almost unthinkable, that Kanye West/Ye, unrelated to any kind of material politics, could return to make use of this assigned oblivion? In *The Rapids: Ways of Looking at Mania* writer Sam Twyford-Moore earlier in 2018 wrote the above and that 'He wants to be understood but doesn't trust that people follow his logic...West knew what he was doing'.<sup>11</sup> It's really hard to tell, sanction or excuse what the most famous rapper in the world is talking about? All these things were duly critiqued within rap circles from 2009 up to *The Life of Pablo* in 2016:

*His anger is steeped in envy rather than reform...a public display of internal conflict consisting of Fanon's "dreams of possession" and Dubois' double consciousness. Ultimately, he cares more about having a seat at the table with the same people he accuses of racism and classism, than bringing about change.<sup>12</sup>*

In 2022 maybe Ye is next about to insist he is a Rabbi himself or maybe he is the moose head mounted on the wall in the restricted exclusive New York Athletic Club in Woody Allen's stand-up *The Moose* from 1965<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> left wing savant Justin Clemens by telephone early 2022

<sup>7</sup> premise: a basis, stated or assumed, on which reasoning proceeds

<sup>8</sup> So much of collaboration in contemporary art has its roots in the protestant collectivism of Christianity: groups like Diggers, Levellers and Ranters during the interregnum, Congregationalists and notably the Shakers, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century well documented in Dan Graham's *Rock My Religion*.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/08/the-judeo-christian-tradition-is-over/614812/>

<sup>10</sup> Sam Twyford-Moore, In *The Rapids: Ways of Looking at Mania* New South Press, 2018, p110

<sup>11</sup> Ibid p103 & 110

<sup>12</sup> Fahamu Pecou, *Off Da Chain: Kanye West, Frantz Fanon, and the Slaves' mentality*, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFaP-BJhZg8>

Jane Bennet

Martin is Design. Shakers tree.

'Out for a walk in the Middle Voice'

materiality → architecture — art  
materialisms → practice most

burden with  
world...

the way architd

discourse opens itself bringing materials  
and the sensation

to diff uses of  
materiality of being in dom

to become materializing mater idls

this new discourse =

Juliana Bruno



### 3. What do I want what should I want

There is currently a mood in podcasts that have hundreds of thousands and millions of views that radical thinkers are obscuring the opinions and rights of those in the centre. People need to listen to each other and share views in the centre. It is true that listening is the most radical act, but what are these radical positions that are so derided? One can see so many excitable views are continuously exposed from the right, but wokeness often doesn't connect to socialist theories, considering the main and necessary plank of left wing thinking is the redistribution-of-wealth. The policies of redistribution of income and the reduction of economic inequality have been left behind, even erased during neo-liberalism in mainstream parties in most countries so it could only be radical thinkers that could propose such views of the left. These views rather than infesting government thinking have been lost in administrative whirlpools of avoiding the consequences of unintended actions of good people and the malevolent plans of others. Nearly any view can be cancelled: if you disagree theoretically it can be argued that the holder of an exasperating view is a good person, or a person's bad character may lurk under any clearly articulated view. We have never been so radically individual, eagerly, compellingly separate from others. Yet as well as being alone we unmistakably feel together in the places where we collectively labour to generate statistics and data, for those we can't sense or see.

So what is it that we actually want? A life partner, a hookup, a new phone or car, home ownership, fervour for a brand? In psychoanalysis Lacan has generally said that 'desire is the desire of the other', we can never fully know what-we-want, perhaps someone is asking us to-want? There is fresco in the duomo of Prato in Italy about the *Dance of Salome* by Fra Filippo Lippi from 1460. It is set in a cinematic sequence from left to right: the beheading of John the Baptist, the dilemma of Herod; the dance of Salome; the celebratory banquet, the confusion and uncertainty of the presentation of the head to Herodias and depicted on the right is some diaphanous, secret, whispering that though illegible, nearly visually exceeds the rest of the picture.

*For when Herodias's daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you." And he vowed to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you" And she went out and said to her mother, "For what should I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." <sup>14</sup>*

It seems what-we-should-want can be diabolical or banal and potentially not based on our own interests at all. What do we want to say?<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Mark 6:21-28 English Standard Version

<sup>15</sup> It is curious to see such a similar quandary talked through in the HBO series *Euphoria* 2019-21

M: There's a difference between what you think you should want and what you actually want

K: How do I know what I want?

M: You don't

K: Then what's the whole world all talkin' about?

....

M: It's just that it's hard and confusing. The last thing is that you feel worse because you're not feeling something you're supposed to feel. Do what feels good for you.

K: (laughs)

....

M: you know what would feel good? ... Dancing with me on my birthday

Covid-19 is the perfect Neo-liberal virus  
It divides and individuates, it makes  
Single what might have been together  
solo rather than collaborative

Did we experience something  
collectively — NO because the virus  
made gathering in groups impossible  
it stops any kind of being in a  
group, so aggregating..

We all spent a lot of time  
cruising the internet  
working for Google for free

What did we experience as  
artists / as mediators / as teachers  
as speakers?

4. who speaks  
objects, things, *anguilla anguilla*, anguille, eel

Since 2004 ACW have been speaking to eels with guests; firstly as *explaining contemporary art to live eels*, in aquatic environments in art centres, then to a cast bronze eel on a staff and to various bodies of water that eels inhabit. There was also a blue resin cast eel.

If you were to ask somebody 'would you like to come and speak about your area of expertise or concern in an art centre for five to ten minutes to an audience of one hundred people? Most people would answer 'who will be there? What is it about? What do you mean contemporary art? But if you were to ask 'to come and speak about your area to eels' 90% of people have said 'oh, ok yes'. Even if the same one hundred people are there.

In this case it was Sebastien Pluot who recognised that instead of the art work speaking to the people (like for instance a Rothko), the people would come to the art centre to speak to the artwork (the cast eel). When people speak to eels in the Canal Ourq or the Loire River they are invited to talk into a *speaking device*: this includes a short history of microphones; an underwater speaker; a mussel microphone; a tin can telephone and various other receptors and transmitters. The speaker can choose. The mussel microphone doesn't really work it's an act of instinct or intuition that something may happen. Recently at the *Artissima* Art Fair in Turin, two *speaking devices* were exhibited and the bronze eel, which many people asked and chose to speak to. It seems the eel was acting as a listening device, to-be-heard, amongst all the cacophonies. In fact if you want to speak-to-the-eel maybe you can do so from wherever you are simply by committing to that concentration? It's a material act, looking for 'elusive real qualities'<sup>16</sup> just a sliver of a chance that it may just once work. For ACW it was like a kind of *Ok Art Fair*, *Ok Artissima*, our address was more like a museum show in booth number 4 with no narrowing of the object, rather the opposite. There were three different *Partition*<sup>17</sup> talking to each other, and the audience engaged in this criss cross of a 'parliament of things'.<sup>18</sup>

So maybe the question is more who is with us when we are talking-in-a-group.

When we are speaking together who are we together with? 'Reality is always radically different from our formulation of it...the external world exists independently of human awareness'<sup>19</sup>We only have 'partial grasp of the features of a sensual object that is already in our midst'<sup>20</sup>These things are of crucial importance in the arts that constantly aspire otherwise.

When ACW originally made *explaining contemporary art to live eels* it was kind of a parody of Joseph Beuys *How to explain pictures to a dead hare* from 1966 where the audience was behind a glass screen watching Beuys with a gold leaf face explaining important art works to the dead hare he was holding. The ineffability of art, the impossibility of saying leads us to begin to think in oceans of sublime misunderstanding. Yet for us maybe it is possible to listen harder to notice just once that we haven't let a possibility of authentic material reception or communication slip by.

Rather than picking on each other with rigour, perhaps we could begin to think as Bruno Latour continuously incanted how 'to give a much larger role to non-human entities'<sup>21</sup> even though 'for sure we know for sure the bronze eel is not gonna speak back'.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Graham Harman *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* Pelican Books, 2018 p187

<sup>17</sup> The *Partition* series is a comprehensive representation of ACW's performative works each *Partition* reveals the process of making the performance, developing the script, song lyrics, and the direction and placement of people and objects in a given space. And enable the re-activation of the works in other contexts, where the script might be read, the songs rehearsed, performed or reinterpreted by invited guests, or the audience and public.

<sup>18</sup> See the work of Bruno Latour since *We Have Never Been Modern* from 1991

<sup>19</sup> Harman *ibid* p7

<sup>20</sup> Harman *ibid* p7

<sup>21</sup> A sentiment or impulse shared by Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway, Graham Harman and numerous others

<sup>22</sup> spoken by Simonetta Mignano

Donna Haraway Living and dying... in the  
- mvac -  
... connect where I live, immigration, time of  
to leagues my garden  
COVID

The present contains the  
humans and non-humans - who lived  
and who dies - we can connect  
which

'I'm a visitor - I write as a condwibe  
lost to connect through materialities  
she takes so much care of the detail ...

COVID and pandemic challenges

' I feel my social world thinning like gauze  
I try to re-stitch it - through zoom  
etc.

To hold the place open to be  
ready for when things free up.

We can connect carefully, share  
writing -

Wealthy countries buy up the vaccine  
Wealthy nations

hep ti

visual ethics

unknowingly  
remains in  
freak

- ✓ This text was presented live on Saturday 10th December at 3pm in Bendigo as part of *Making Gooc* thru the La Trobe Art Institute with kind support of Amelia Wallin, Bala Starr and all of the other participants and organisers & Léa Blasco