

A COL- LECTIVE RESOLVE

Growing evidence suggests that in the last few years there has been a secret competition between the authors of public sector tender documents. Though we cannot be sure, this surreptitious literary contest appears to be centred around who can use the words "community" and "co-design" as many times as possible without condemning their respective documents to syntactic annihilation. The winner, it has been said, achieves ever-lasting glory, being immortalised as a sideways-lying statue in City Hall, co-designed by inter-local communities from across the Londonosphere; from Mile End to Ealing, from Brixton to Bounds Green.

HAS IT COME TO THIS?

London's recent industrial fetish for the word 'co-design' is in many ways positive. Yet, by relying on the term as a *deus ex machina* for a history of remarkably unco-design, built environment professionals obscure not only rich, pre-existing discourses surrounding the benefits and criticisms of co- and participatory design across the world, from Lima to Cape Town to Bangkok, but also the inextricably, perhaps even banally, collaborative nature of creative practice itself. Sharing resources, knowledges, and skills, designing and un-designing in ways that work synergistically, and leaning heavily on the guidance, critique, and intellect of others is arguably seminal to most creative practices, all the more so when we practice not just collaboratively but collectively.

For the team at RESOLVE, our practice owes a considerable amount to 'the collective'. We work with and learn from many collaborators, but it's important for us also to acknowledge the messiness of even the most ostensibly straightforward collaborative relationship and appraise the moments in which these become porous; leaking into and drawing from the others we practice around and even those that practice around them. These moments outlive 'productive spaces' – offices, studios, miro boards, zoom calls – and pervade through to the first days of Steam Down in Buster Mantis, skanking under those brick vaults, our moving bodies like figures in a Jacob Lawrence painting. It

melts into afternoons at the Black Cultural Archive with Farouk Agoro, half working, half bredding half the room. It disperses to become gatherings in the closing hours of a Skin Deep 'Sonic Transmission' in New Cross, the jokes buss at MAIA's Yardhouse in Ladywood, or a conversation between oldheads and youngers at Zakia Sewell and Tej Adeleye's 'Carnival Stories' in the Stuart Hall Library. It implodes into the living rooms, front rooms, and garden marquees of aunties, cousins, mandem's mandem, and distant family friends whose names we've forgotten. It's reading Khidr, OOMK, EYESORE, Muslim Sisterhood; it's watching tOtis Mensah, Lula Mehbratu, Amina Jama, Tomorrow's Warriors.

The lines drawn between which processes are inherently participatory and which are in need of participation are not hallowed. They are often produced and maintained by siloed disciplines, professional interests, and socio-economic asymmetries that render all intellect 'property', conceptually and fiscally distancing the everyday mediations of people from the rarefied act of design in their environments. Offering some counter-action to this, are the lessons to be learned from practicing collectively and the charge to revalue the inherent messiness of creative action. In the appraisal of collectivist approaches to design, the task is not to 'co-' perfunctory modes of designing our built environments but to recalibrate and equitably value the social production of our habitats. With this comes a host of extraordinarily complex short- and long-term challenges; from the reorganisation and remuneration of labour, to the prefigurative work required to address socio-economic, gendered and racial divisions, to difficult determinations around institutional validity. And yet, however insurmountable these often seem, it is important to remember that our capacity to address these challenges and the capacity of those that have addressed them before is and was rooted in a collective resolve. For all its complexity, it is a question that itself reveals the answer: in this effort to work collectively we are working, neither with novelty nor toward it, but together.

