



“It’s necessary to begin again to understand the nature of the political through a practical return to the most basic relationships and questions; of self to other, of individual to collective, of autonomy and solidarity, and conflict and consensus [...]”

- Grant Kester, FIELD editorial, Spring 2015

In this resource, you will find a list of steps that you can take in order to act with others towards change. It is by no means an exhaustive list, but merely a proposition for how one could begin the process of ‘acting in common’. These are followed by a number of case studies of current collective actions - how different groups of cultural workers organised and why, what they stand for, what they change. Finally, a list of further reading and resources are available for anyone who is interested to explore the topic further.

Top Tip

Start by imagining a different kind of ‘art world’ ideal - one that is truly democratic, inclusive and generous to us all. Then consider how we can form our own support structures, sharing resources and skills to resist the existing sense of precarity and injustice. We definitely believe that it’s possible!

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What is Collectivising?

We understand collectivising as acting in common, but without losing one's own voice. We can organise ourselves into a group, or act as individuals under a common 'umbrella'. There is no rule for how to do it right or how to begin, as collective efforts take multiple forms and grow out of different seeds. What will inevitably happen when we begin to act as a group, is that our different ideas, priorities and personalities will begin to rub against one another often producing frustration, insecurity and sometimes conflict. On the flip side, the outcome of collective success can feel ecstatic and lead to real change, which makes it worth pulling our sleeves up and working through hard moments.

But there is more at stake than our sense of self-achievement. As artists, we exist in a system that directs us towards the 'singular dream' of a solo show. How can we resist supporting such a system that is essentially based on purely capitalist values, while creating and perpetuating highly precarious conditions for cultural workers? How can we begin to change it? What concrete strategies can we bring in? How can we begin constructing alternative ways of making and showing art? Many alternatives already exist and we can simply choose to connect ourselves to those if building anew feels like a project too big to start with.

How to Collectivise

When beginning to collectivise it's worth taking some time to reflect on the position which we speak from, as artists/ cultural workers. Social Constructivist theorists proposed that we see the world through a prism of past experiences. Our interpretation of situations and other people's behaviours is informed by how we were brought up and socialised, as well as our cultural setup. As collectives we also form a shared perception and a system of norms based on who we are - so it is important to put some effort in and collectively agree on how to ensure heterogeneity: by building across gender-, class-, ability-, nation- religion- and ethnicity-based divisions we are actually contributing to a grand re-make of our social and political reality. We are the stimulus which can ignite change.

Some tips on how to consciously and productively collectivise:

- Choose the art world you'd like to work in and feel comfortable in - there isn't just one!
- Externalise the problem: 'the person is not the problem, the problem is the problem' (White, 1988/9, 2007) - aim at the problem, not the person.
- Identify the change you'd like to see - if something doesn't feel right, investigate and imagine alternatives.
- Share with others and invite others to share with you - be genuine, but don't expect to please everyone.
- Identify your allies - think of where to find and how to reach out to those who are not in the room. Don't create monolithic spaces.
- If you can't already see a group lobbying for the change you want to see, don't be afraid to find people to start something new.
- Reach out beyond the art world and/or your familiar networks.
- From the very beginning try to build strategies collectively - it's about real co-creation, which involves sharing control over the outcomes, negotiating and



Fig 1-4

compromising. This is not an easy part, as you will need to negotiate with people who have different ideas, views and personalities. But these discussions and negotiations are a crucial part of the process! Check our resources on narrative mediation for further material on this topic.

- Don't double up the efforts - build on your previous work and the work of others. Try to connect with those who use similar methodologies or have similar aims.
- Try things out and take risks - don't worry if the change you make is tiny or not visible at first - you are still building the base from which to act in the future.
- Act against the status quo if disrupting narratives means fighting for justice.
- Follow your instincts - if you feel uncomfortable at work, in a project or collaboration, it might help to talk to someone you trust. Collectivising is a process that needs constant re-evaluation and reflection.
- Build shared narratives based on more than just your point of view.
- Even if physical meetings are not possible, find alternative ways of being together.

Case Studies

Sol Syn - a solidarity syndicate!

makeitclear.eu/posts/sol-syn



Who they are

“Sol Syn is a collective action which was formed organically as a response to the Arts Council England

Emergency Funding failure to support all artists at the time of COVID-19.”

What they do

Under the terms of the Arts Council England Emergency Funding many artists, who should be eligible for it, were not able to apply and only very few managed to eventually receive the Emergency Fund. Solidarity Syndicate (SOL SYN) was a collective action initiated by a small group of cultural workers who came together with the support of Keep It Complex, aiming to start a discussion about “solidarity economies in the arts”. They invited artists to form small groups to support

each other in their application process and make funding accessible to more artists. If they were lucky and someone in the group was successful they should pool the money and split it between them.

Resources

- Sol Syn: [ACE “Emergency” Funding vs ACE Regular Funding](#)
- [The year I stopped making art](#) - Paul Maheke

Migrants in Culture

migrantsinculture.com



Who they are

“Migrants in Culture is a network of migrants organising to create the conditions of safety, agency and solidarity in the culture sector for migrants, people of colour and all others impacted by the UK’s immigration regime.”

What they do

Migrants in Culture platform and develop educational campaigns around the experiences and needs of migrant culture workers. Working to collate research, and hosting workshops and events, they aim to share knowledge of the UK government’s Hostile Environment Policy and its damaging effects on health, education, housing, employment and the creation of culture. They are advocates for an arts sector that is accountable to, and actively supports migrant culture workers, through provision of access to legal advice, mental health support, and more. They aim to connect migrant culture workers to a national migrant movement that recognises migrant justice as inextricably linked to racial, class, disability and queer justice.

“We work with migrant peers and allies to listen and learn collectively [...] We organise to create a collaborative rather than competitive sector [...]”

Resources

- Migrants in Culture Research Report: [What is the impact of the Hostile Environment on the Cultural Sector?](#)
- Migrants in Culture: [A Culture Sector Recovery for Migrants](#)
- [Digital assets](#) to share

United Voices of the World

uvwunion.org.uk



Who they are

“United Voices of the World is an anti-racist, member-led, direct action, campaigning trade union and we exist to support and empower the most vulnerable groups of precarious, low-paid and predominantly BAME and migrant workers in the UK.”

They were the first union in the UK to beat outsourcing.

What they do:

UVW campaign for all members to receive at least the London Living Wage, contractual sick pay, safe conditions, and other rights. They also challenge the practice of outsourcing staff to save costs, which often generates two-tier workforces. They coordinate street campaigns and strikes, host weekly meetings and skill-sharing, undertake casework and negotiation, and facilitate legal representation. They aim to act in solidarity with struggles

of all magnitudes, joining forces with other grassroots groups, trade unions, progressive politicians and journalists to push for change.

Resources

- [UVW for Designers & Cultural Workers](#)
- [What Does It Mean to Unionize When You're Your Own Boss?](#)
- [UVW successful campaigns](#)

Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet (Women's Strike)

strajkkobiet.eu

[instagram.com/strajk_kobiet](https://www.instagram.com/strajk_kobiet)



Who they are

“We are a grassroots, independent social movement of pissed off women and supporting us men. We protest and work for the rights of women, democracy, Poland for all, mobilizing in over 150 cities in Poland - 90% of which are towns with less than 50,000 inhabitants, which is

our greatest strength and pride.” Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet (OSK, or Polish Women On Strike) is a radical multi-dimensional women's movement in Poland, protesting against further restricting the right to terminate pregnancy and calling for the separation of the Church and the government. The movement can also be seen as a political revolution that seeks to overthrow far-right agendas of the current government, which dehumanises LGBT+Q communities, migrants and those seeking asylum in Poland. For many, participation in OSK was the first time they took matters into their own hands and made the first step towards change.

What they do

Since 2016, women in Poland have been using the support of the movement to organise hundreds of protests across Poland and abroad - including in large cities and small towns. Recently, OSK established the Consultative Council (Rada Konsultacyjna), bringing together representatives of different social movements, unaffiliated politicians and activists to start working on more progressive social and political programmes for Poland, such as education, climate, women's rights, free media and courts. The online communication platform Loomio was translated to Polish to allow hundreds of thousands of OSK's members

to share ideas and contribute to these programmes. It's important to note that many of those organising protests today did not have any experience in activism when they started collectivising.

Resources

- Amnesty International: [Poland crackdown on Women's Strike protests continues unabated](#)
- The Guardian: [Poland abortion ban sets stage for Women's Strike showdown](#)

Artists' Union England

artistsunionengland.org.uk



Who they are

“Artists' Union England is a trade union for professional visual and applied artists. They aim to represent artists at strategic decision-making levels and positively influence the value and role artists play within society.”

What they do

Artists' Union England is an active trade union engaged in campaigning,

producing resources and signposting opportunities. They offer their members Public and Products Liability (PPL) insurance, legal advice, training and study opportunities, tax guidance, and access to sector-specific resources. They champion collectivity as a means for a better working arts landscape.

“Through listening to artists, and evidencing the need for a collective voice, we can act together to negotiate recognition with funding bodies, galleries, other employers and policy makers.”

Resources:

- [Rates of Pay](#)
- [Mental Health and Wellbeing Resources](#)
- [For Artists from the EEA Living in the UK](#)
- [A Copyright Guide for Artists](#)

More Projects and Organisations

Keep It Complex - Make It Clear!

makeitclear.eu

‘We collaboratively run events, curate workshops, facilitate discussions and create campaign materials.’

Past activities, including ‘[Migrants Make Cultures’ activation day](#)’ are documented on their website, which is also a great resource if you want to find out about other collectives and initiatives.

Migrants Organise

migrantsorganise.org

‘Migrants Organise is an award winning, grass roots platform where migrants and refugees connect, build common ground, organise for dignity and justice for all.’

The Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM)

firmcharter.org.uk

‘The Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM) unites a call for humane immigration and inclusion policies that can truly reflect our society’s democratic values, and that draws on a distinguished history in Britain of standing for the dignity and justice of all.’

Cooperation Town

cooperation.town/about

‘Cooperation Town is a new network of community-led food co-ops, organising on streets and estates across the country.’

W.A.G.E. Working Artists and the Greater Economy

wageforwork.com

‘Working Artists and the Greater Economy is a New York-based activist organization founded in 2008. Our mission is to establish sustainable economic relationships between artists and the institutions that contract our labour, and to introduce mechanisms for self-regulation into the art field that collectively bring about a more equitable distribution of its economy.’

Museum Detox

museumdetox.org

‘We’re a network for people of colour who work in museums, galleries, libraries, archives, and the heritage sector. Museum Detox champions fair representation and the inclusion of cultural, intellectual, and creative contributions from POCs. We challenge and work to deconstruct systems of inequality that exist to enable a sector where the workforce and audience are reflective of the UK’s 21st century population.’

Political Education Resources

Another Europe is Possible

anothereurope.org/our-strategy

Another Europe is Possible was formed in February 2016 to campaign for a Remain position in the EU referendum from a specifically left, progressive perspective.

The World Transformed

theworldtransformed.org/resourcehub

The World Transformed supports, develops and delivers political education across the UK in order to build a movement capable of radically transforming society, through a resource hub, events, and an annual festival.

Further Reading and Resources

Radical democracy

- Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power And Bare Life*. 1st ed. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998. Print.
- Chantal Mouffe, [Agonistic Democracy and Radical Politics](#). Pavillion journal for politics and culture, 2014.
Chantal Mouffe's and Ernesto Lacan's concept of 'radical democracy', proposes to value conflict, as a progressive component of democracy. Mouffe after publishing with Lacan 'Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics' in 1985 went on to propose a model of democracy based on 'agonistic pluralism', which 'means that within the 'we' that constitutes the political community, the opponent is not considered an enemy to be destroyed but an adversary whose existence is legitimate.'
- Paul Hirts, *Associative Democracy: New Forms of Economic and Social Governance*. 1994.

• Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. 1st ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. Print.

• [This Ain't Democracy! A Post-Election Teach-In](#), 2020.

In this post-election teach-in, Kali Akuno, Klee Benally, Shanelle Matthews, Adrienne Pine, and Marzena Zukowska imagine and plot a revolutionary response to the U.S. Elections. Organized by PM Press, Radical Communicators Network, American University Department of Anthropology, and California Institute of Integral Studies Department of Anthropology and Social Change.

• Sara Ahmed, *Complaint and Survival*, feministkillyjoys.com, 2020

Hybridity

- Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location Of Culture*. 1st ed. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Paul Meredith, [Hybridity In The Third Space: Rethinking Bi-Cultural Politics In Aotearoa/New Zealand](#). Te Oru Rangahau Maori Research And Development Conference. New Zealand: N.p., 1998. Web. 15 Jan. 2017.

Theatre of the oppressed

- Augusto Boal, *Theatre Of The Oppressed*. 1st ed. London, UK: Pluto Press, 2008. Print.
- Forum Theatre and Newspaper Theatre were created by Augusto Boal as part of the 'Theatre of the Oppressed'. It is an interactive form of theatre that encourages audience interaction and is a powerful tool for exploring solutions to difficult social problems.
- Implicated Theatre. *What Country Friends Is This? - A performance at Serpentine Gallery*, 2014. [Video documentation by Hydar Dewachi](#).

Narrative mediation theory

Narrative mediation proposes that knowledge is constructed through social processes, specifically through daily interactions with other people. Our current accepted ways of understanding the world, or what we commonly regard as 'truth', are products of the social interactions people engage in on a daily basis. It proposes that people live their lives according to stories they create and conflict emerges

from incompatibility of these stories, as something rooted within people's shared social and cultural fabric rather than in their inner drives. Through techniques such as deconstruction, externalising conversations and restoring practices, we can create space for a discursive shift.

- [Michael White Archive](#), Dulwich Centre

Grant H. Kester on socially engaged art

- Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces*. 1st ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. Print.
- Grant H. Kester, Editorial. [FIELD: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism](#). 2015. Online.

More food for thought

- Nick Davies, [Flat Earth News](#). 1st ed. London: Chatto & Windus, 2008. Print. An analysis of news production and global media.
- Steven Lukes, *The Curious Enlightenment Of Professor Caritat*. 1st ed. London: Verso, 1995. Print. A novel of ideas.
- Thomas More, *Utopia*. 1st ed. London, UK: Penguin, 2003. Print.
- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, [Outside In The Teaching Machine](#). 1st ed. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak on politics of language and translation: "In my view, language may be one of many elements that allow us to make sense of things, of ourselves...Making sense of ourselves is what produces identity...For one of the ways to get around the confines of one's "identity" as one produces expository prose is to work at someone else's title, as one works with a language that belongs to many others. This, after all, is one of the seductions of translating. It is a simple miming of the responsibility to the trace of the other in the self...The writer is written by her language, of course. But the writing of the writer writes agency in a way that might be different from that of the British woman/citizen within the history of British feminism, focused on the task of freeing herself from Britain's imperial past, it's often racist present, as well as its 'made in Britain' history of male domination."

- Legacy Russel, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, London: Verso Books, 2020

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Case study logos copyright Sol Syn, Migrants in Culture, United Voices of the World, Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet, and Artists' Union England

WeHybrids is a collaborative, participatory and multidisciplinary project, aiming to bring together diverse creative voices to explore the relationship between art and democracy. The WeHybrids participatory performances explore the relationship between physical objects, bodies and movement in space borrowing elements from Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre, the history of art protest and radical concepts of political theory - such as 'radical democracy' and notions of 'hybridity'. They invite the participants to collectively reflect on the role art and artists can take in evoking a sense of political agency and imagining a more just society.

wehybrids.org

Founded in 2013 by Croydon locals, Turf Projects is the first entirely artist-run contemporary art space in Croydon, South London. A registered charity (#1160527), Turf has supported the work of over 400 artists to date through a programme of free public exhibitions, workshops and events.

turf-projects.com // [@turfprojects](https://www.instagram.com/turfprojects)



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