

Collective Communities:
The Autonomous Fabric
of Rotterdam

Counter mapping autonomy workshop

natalia sorzano + arvand pourabbsi

Countering Autonomy
&
Self-organized Initiatives

Thursday 26 of Oct. 10hr - 13hr

Introduction

What is the Autonomy Research program?

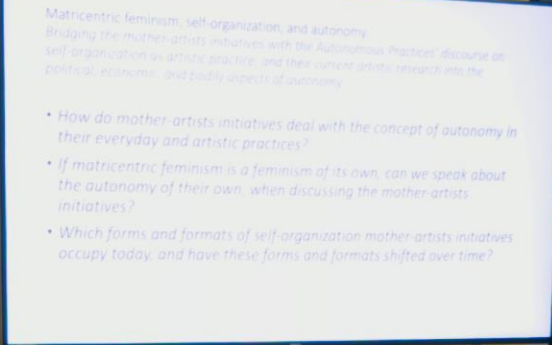
The AUTONOMOUS PRACTICES research program investigates new concepts of “autonomy” in the arts that shift from, critically revise, or even break with, traditional Western notions of aesthetic and artistic autonomy.

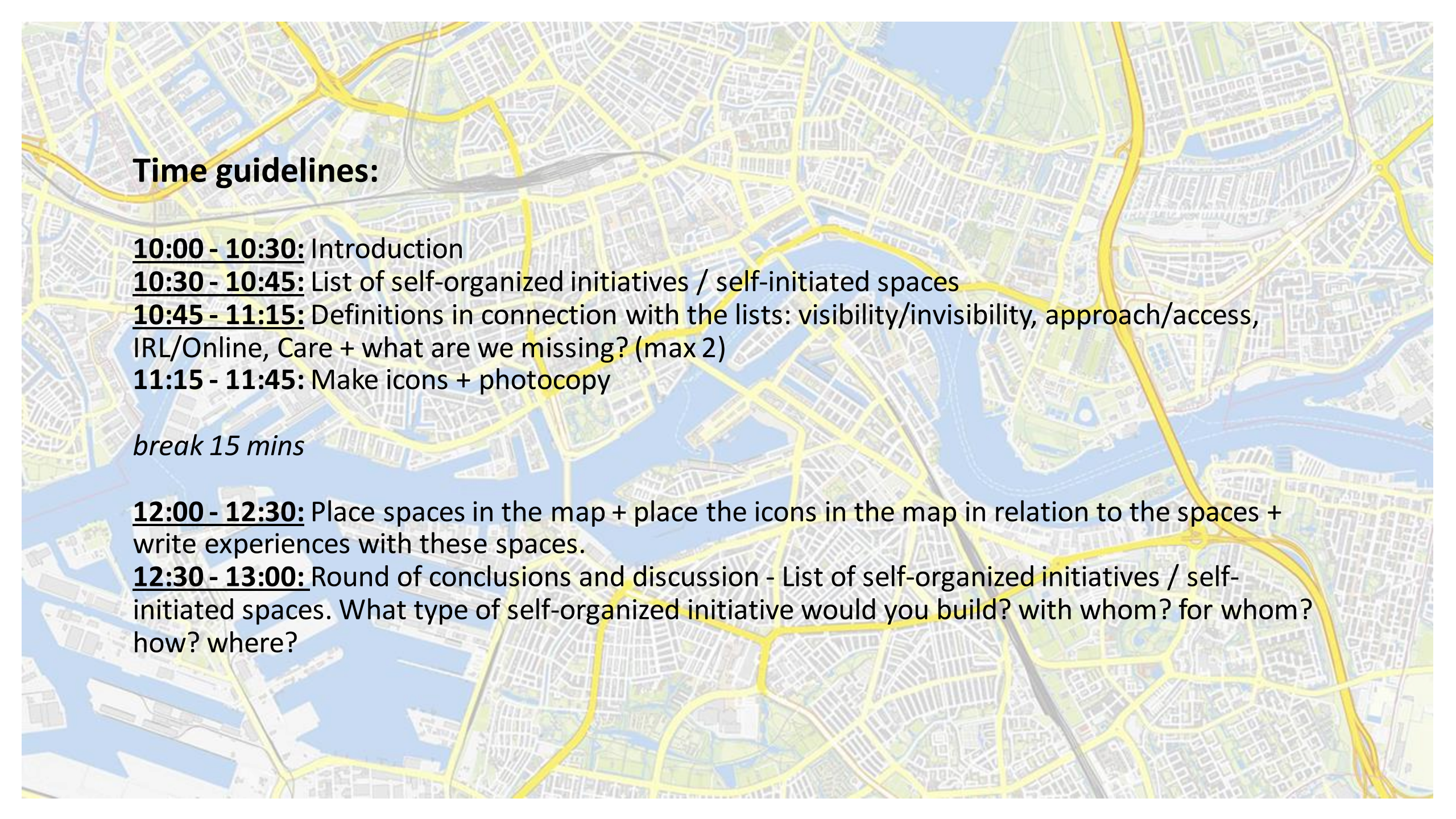
What is Autonomy? by Florian Cramer:

“‘Autonomy’ is a semantic rabbit hole. When discussing the term from the perspective of the arts, speakers of different languages may believe they mean the same thing while they are actually talking past each other. In the Netherlands and Flanders, for example, ‘autonome beeldende kunst’ (literally: ‘autonomous visual art’) corresponds to what is called ‘fine art’ in English-speaking countries, and ‘free art’ (‘freie Kunst’, ‘arts libres’) in German- and French-speaking countries. In the German philosophical tradition, the notion of ‘autonomy’ is intrinsically linked to aesthetic theory rather than artistic practice, while in Italy and the English-speaking world, it is chiefly associated with political activism.”

(...)

"At its root, the term ‘autonomy’ is political in nature. The Greek word ‘nomos’ means ‘law’ or ‘norm’, while ‘auto’ means ‘self’. ‘Auto-nomos’ thus refers to anything that follows its own law. Since laws in most cases aren’t individual, but are written by some government or statehood, radical claims for autonomy will, by definition, clash with higher legal authorities. However, autonomy does not need to be understood as absolute. There is, for example, relative autonomy wherever the law provides no regulations of its own and leaves room for individual or community policies. Common examples are house rules in bars, shops and schools (including those rules that are typical of squatted ‘autonomous’ spaces, such as a ban on sexist and racist language, which otherwise would still be protected by freedom of speech)."





Time guidelines:

10:00 - 10:30: Introduction

10:30 - 10:45: List of self-organized initiatives / self-initiated spaces

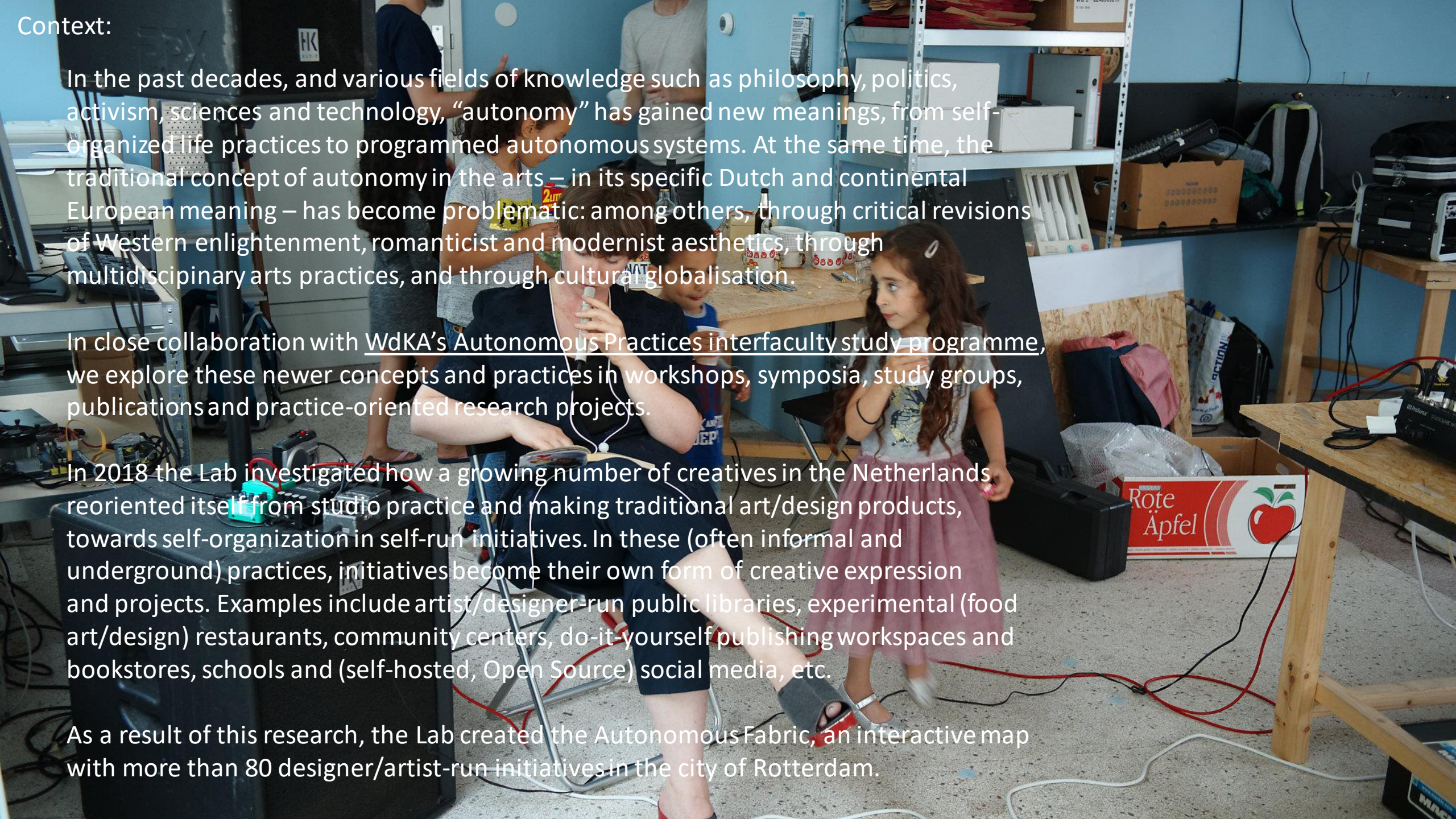
10:45 - 11:15: Definitions in connection with the lists: visibility/invisibility, approach/access, IRL/Online, Care + what are we missing? (max 2)

11:15 - 11:45: Make icons + photocopy

break 15 mins

12:00 - 12:30: Place spaces in the map + place the icons in the map in relation to the spaces + write experiences with these spaces.

12:30 - 13:00: Round of conclusions and discussion - List of self-organized initiatives / self-initiated spaces. What type of self-organized initiative would you build? with whom? for whom? how? where?



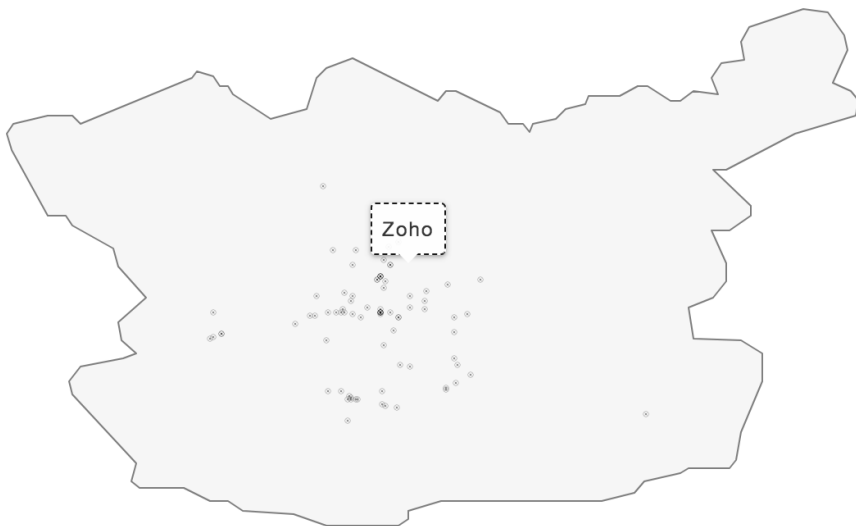
Context:

In the past decades, and various fields of knowledge such as philosophy, politics, activism, sciences and technology, “autonomy” has gained new meanings, from self-organized life practices to programmed autonomous systems. At the same time, the traditional concept of autonomy in the arts – in its specific Dutch and continental European meaning – has become problematic: among others, through critical revisions of Western enlightenment, romanticist and modernist aesthetics, through multidisciplinary arts practices, and through cultural globalisation.

In close collaboration with WdKA’s Autonomous Practices interfaculty study programme, we explore these newer concepts and practices in workshops, symposia, study groups, publications and practice-oriented research projects.

In 2018 the Lab investigated how a growing number of creatives in the Netherlands reoriented itself from studio practice and making traditional art/design products, towards self-organization in self-run initiatives. In these (often informal and underground) practices, initiatives become their own form of creative expression and projects. Examples include artist/designer-run public libraries, experimental (food art/design) restaurants, community centers, do-it-yourself publishing workspaces and bookstores, schools and (self-hosted, Open Source) social media, etc.

As a result of this research, the Lab created the Autonomous Fabric, an interactive map with more than 80 designer/artist-run initiatives in the city of Rotterdam.



☐ BLANK
☒ ROTTERDAM
☒ 2023-10-23

CLICK TO SELECT A DATE

10/23/2023

get a map for the selected date

https://pad.xpub.nl/p/Autonomous_Fabric_of_Rotterdam

SUPPORT and RESOURCE pad for self-organized initiatives in Rotterdam (and beyond) in times of social distancing. You are welcome to add your thoughts and/or links to the pad!

Binna Choi

Some words and readings for #AutonomousFabric
As we redefine our perspective on autonomy and self-organisation,
and distance ourselves from the notion of autonomy as the
establishment of a small, free enclave, let us first consider this
passage from *On Complexity* by the philosopher and sociologist
Edgar Morin:

Ceci n'est pas une école d'art?

Fw: Invitation / uitnodiging for symposium and workshops

Monday, September 11, 2023 at 15:10

Beste mensen, dear Varia people,

As the WdKA research program Autonomous Practices (WdKA Research Program Autonomous Practices) we're planning a third symposium "Collective Communities/The Autonomous Fabric of Rotterdam" on November 16th at Roodkapje Rotterdam. Since Varia participated in previous editions, you may be familiar with the overall concept of looking at the self-organized spaces and initiatives of artists/researchers/activists in Rotterdam. But this year we want to focus on the increasing precarity of, and pressure on, these spaces, with three thematic focuses: (1) gentrification/housing, (2) decolonization/changing demographics of practitioners, (3) dependence on digital platforms.

Our question is whether Varia - and, if you wish, other collaborators from your network - would be interested and available to lead the workshop program (3). This would involve

1. a preparatory workshop for/with students at WdKA before the symposium, with the goal of already introducing people into the subject matter and possibly have them as your workshop co-hosts on november 16th;
2. a 2 ½ hour workshop in the early afternoon on november 16th + participation in the symposium wrap-up roundtable (max. 1 ½ hours).

For the symposium, we received a project grant from Fonds Pictoright (which supported our previous symposium). We can offer a honorarium of 600 Euro (incl. VAT/BTW) for the prep workshop at WdKA and a honorarium of 1200 Euro (incl. VAT/BTW) for the workshop at Roodkapje on 16th November. This is based on a hour tariff of 50 EUR, where we principally calculate 6 hours for two people (3 hours preparations + maximum 3 hours workshop) for the prep workshop and 6 hours for four people for the symposium, although you're free to divide these hours differently as long as 50 EUR/hour (respectively EUR 41.32 + VAT) remains the honorarium. Essentially, you would have a budget of 1800 EUR/36 hours for everything.

In terms of content, we would very much like to share your Fediverse expertise with symposium attendees. It is a reality that many, if not most, people in the arts/culture sector - and that includes even people in my research group - do not know what the Fediverse is, and that there are functioning alternatives to corporate (and extractivist) social media platforms. Ideally, we want to use the symposium to educate cultural workers, self-organizers, people working in arts institutions, etc. about these alternatives in a practical way, but also to honestly discuss the limitations and caveats of the Fediverse, rather than promoting another form of solutionism. This includes issues that you raised in your previous workshop at the Autonomous Fabric symposium, with the reading of the platform manifesto written by CONSTANT, such as the (currently lacking) responsibility of the subsidized cultural sector to support FLOSS and Fediverse by hosting and maintaining servers. However, before issues can be discussed, it would be most important that symposium attendees receive accessible, practical introductions to Fediverse (and/or other FLOSS network services such as Jitsi), and that no prior expertise is required.

- Another question is whether Varia would be principally available for a [radical] redesign of our online map autonomousfabric.org. The current mapping is highly outdated, although it has become a historical document of pre-pandemic times that we want to preserve as such. For a new mapping, we - on our end - want to radically rethink what counts as a 'self-organized space/initiative'. On the design end, I would also prefer to get of the current online database dependency & platform creation and think, instead, of an offline HTML map [or alternatively a map using an existing FLOSS infrastructure such as openstreetmap.org]. Unfortunately, we only have a small budget of 1500 EUR from Pictoright, but could scale this up from our regular budget if necessary.

I'd be available to discuss the details of everything with you any time, and could also come over to Varia for this purpose. But most of all, I hope that this is of interest to you, and that you will be able to be part of our symposium!

Context:

In the first semester of 2023 the Research Center intended to give continuation to that research and attend the changes and transformations caused by COVID-19. Therefore, it begun to develop a research project that would lead to a symposium with self-organized initiatives in Rotterdam. In this gathering the focus would be on the increasing precarity of, and pressure on, these spaces, with three thematic focuses:
(1) gentrification/housing, (2) decolonization/visibility of diverse demographics of practitioners,
(3) dependence on digital platforms.

Having returned from the summer holidays, the coordination of the research center sent an invitation to the artist-run space Varia to participate in this symposium. Varia declined; this was their response:

Re: Available for workshops on the Fediverse? - new Autonomous Fabric symposium

Wednesday, September 13, 2023 at 11:55

This message is flagged for follow up.

This is a collective response to your invitation for Varia to participate in the symposium "Collective Communities/The Autonomous Fabric of Rotterdam". We discussed how to respond to this invitation, and have decided to decline. To begin with, we feel that an acceptance would mean that Varia would help promote the Willem de Kooning Academy. This is something we do not want to be complicit in, for reasons we will expand on below.

In praising efforts of local initiatives, the institution will use the work of self-organised spaces, such as Varia, to bolster its own position and relevance in the cultural sector. This act hides issues that persist within the school itself. While the topics you suggested Varia to address (fediverse, autonomous spaces, self-organising, dependence on digital platforms) are things we engage enthusiastically with, the symposium host, Autonomous Practices, does not provide adequate support for these issues to be consistently included within their ever-changing syllabi due to unstable team composition and the resulting incapacity for tutors to engage in the long term with their program. We don't wish to present our self-organised efforts to those who aren't committed to the values they ask us to represent. The labour of others becomes tokenised (again) by an institution that does not turn their questions back towards themselves.

This symposium intends to discuss gentrification and precarity within self-organised spaces and cultural work in Rotterdam. Simultaneously, the institution creates precarity within the cultural sector and gentrifies the city through the significant part it plays in the future Cultuur Campus. The housing crisis will be debated while many WdKA students study through homelessness, and international students continue to call for an increase in support and guidance from the institution.

The programme will address changing demographics of practitioners when those who do bring diversity in the WdKA workforce face ongoing racism, ableism, sexism, ageism and bureaucratic discrimination. For those with non-EU backgrounds who tried to join the institution, this translated in the absence of support in specific cases and continues with a hiring policy that excludes non-EU freelancers from ongoing employment beyond a very limited number of hours per year. The recent loss of teaching staff in the institution has further reduced diversity in the workplace. How can decolonial pedagogies be imagined and attempted when diversity is conditional to budget handling? What space is allowed to critical voices within an institution that has silenced them for so long? While we recognise that the symposium topics are valuable for students, we could only imagine participating in such programme if it was set in a non-extractive way. We urge the WdKA to resolve internal issues before proposing such an initiative, otherwise its actions become performative.

In June 2023, staff concerned over "inequalities, structural overwork, lack of EDI framework, lack of safety, lack of transparency, and lack of accountability from the side of management" organised a strike [<https://www.doorbraak.eu/casual-wdka-organizes-grading-strike-at-willem-de-kooning/>]. There has not yet been any resolution or attempt for reconciliation from the side of the management in response to the demands made by tutors.

By saying no, we stand in solidarity with Varia current members, previous members, our peers in the cultural scene and staff of WdKA. People who have been, and continue to be, treated unethically by its management. We stand in solidarity with the students of WdKA. Their education could be different.

In response to Varia's decline letter, the Autonomy Lab decided to postpone the symposium and instead rethink its framework and relationship with self-organized initiatives in the city of Rotterdam.

The Autonomy Lab is now invested in rethinking what counts as a 'self-organized space/initiative', and what 'autonomy' is in the context of artistic and design practices. Therefore, we intend to create a new map under a new set of parameters that addresses the conditions under which this fabric of initiatives co-exist. This includes new social, political and financial determinants derived from a post-pandemic period; the input/needs/perspectives of students; the problems, obstacles, difficulties self-organized initiatives face today; and the growth in visibility of spaces that show, and have as audiences, underrepresented minorities in the city.

How should we approach self-organized initiatives as an institution? What are the criteria for recognizing one as a self-organized initiative? How can we decolonize and rethink the existing Autonomous Fabric map?

To answer this set of preliminary questions, we approached a cartographer collective from Argentina, Iconoclasistas, who will help us tackle these questions .

However, in order to be ready for Iconoclasistas workshop the Autonomy Lab planned three preparatory workshops for three *vraagstuk*: Public and Private, Critical Studies and Hacking. These preparatory workshops will lead to a new map we will create together with Iconoclasistas on 16th of November in Roodkapje.

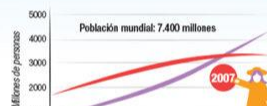
The main idea of this map is that it serves as a tool for students, so we wonder what is the map missing?

Today, we will use one of Iconoclasistas manuals, "Manual of Collective Mapping" for creating a counter-map of the Autonomous Fabric map with you.



Megaciudades y crisis ambiental

En 2007, por primera vez en la historia, la población residente en ciudades es mayor a la población campesina. Aún así, en las zonas rurales viven unas 3.400 millones de personas que se dedican a producir alimentos y más de la mitad son mujeres. Ellos sostienen al mundo.



Trabajo rural y doméstico

Estas 1700 millones de mujeres representan un 25% de la población mundial, y alimentan a un 70% de los habitantes del planeta. Las mujeres rurales, además del cuidado de sembrados, la obtención de agua y leña y la cría de animales, realizan un trabajo



Éxodo rural y represión

El sistema alimentario agroindustrial, basado en monocultivos y dominado por transnacionales, alimenta a un 30% de la población mundial, y emplea en condiciones miserables a una infima parte de los trabajadores rurales. Destruye el medio



Soberanía alimentaria y cultural

Las mujeres rurales, mediante prácticas de defensa de los bienes comunes, de protección de la cultura popular y solidaria, y de respeto hacia la naturaleza; aseguran la agrodiversidad frente al avance del despojo neocolonial. Cuestión, además, las más de 7 mil



Definitions and certainties

We conceive “mapping” as a practice, an action of thought in which the map is only one of the tools promoting an approach and deep analysis of social, subjective, and geographic territories. Added to this, another series of resources have been named “multiple devices” consisting of graphic and visual means and creations. These, when mixed with ludic dynamics, become intertwined to promote areas for socialization and debate, becoming triggers and challenges in constant movement, change and appropriation. In this way, we try to build a space for discussion and creation, not closed in itself, but placed as an available starting point for anyone to recur to, a proper device that builds knowledge, fostering the organization and the generation of liberating alternatives.

This is the reason why we sustain mapping is a means, not an end. Mapping should be part of a wider process, “another strategy”, a “means for” thoughts, the socialization of knowledge and practices, a boost for collective participation, a challenge to hegemonic areas, the driving force for creation and imagination, a deep analysis of key issues, the visualization of resistances, the mark highlighting power relations, among many other aspects.

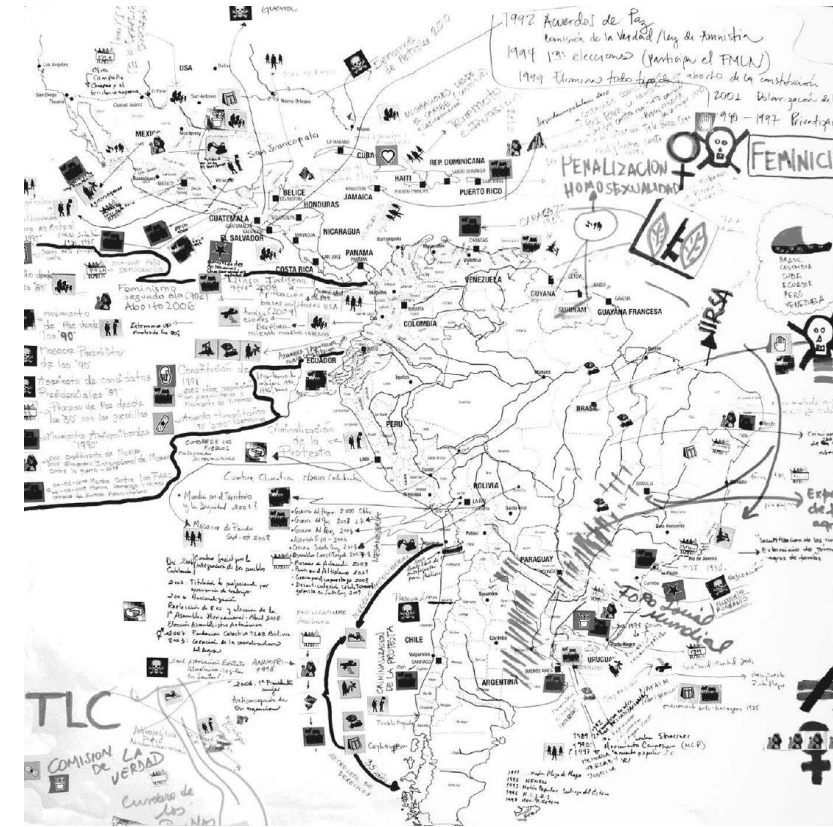
In this way, mapping does not lead to transformations by itself. Mapping is connected to an organizational process by way of collaborative work in graphic and visual platforms. And this work must be strategically spread: all the information included must be agreed by consensus with everyone taking part of the process and should bear a communicational aim, having in mind that this should not menace nor damage participants.

Projections and limits to mapping

“Maps are not the territory”: they are static images that cannot capture the constant changes to which territories are exposed. Maps do not contemplate the subjectivity of territorial processes, their symbolic representations nor the imaginaries about them. The people who inhabit the territory are the ones who can really create and transform them, they shape them every day by inhabiting them, going through them, perceiving and creating them.

Mapping is a tool providing a snapshot of the moment in which it was taken, yet it does not recover completely a territorial reality, which is always problematic and complex. Drawing collective maps transmits a specific notion on a dynamic and constantly changing territory, where borders, both real and symbolic, are continually altered and exceeded by the actions of bodies and subjectivities.

Drawing a map involves a way of creating collective accounts on what is common to us all, this builds a platform rendering visible certain contacts and consensus without reducing diversity, for this is also depicted. Brewing the common, i.e., to produce the common that joins us and that we recognize, or rendering it visible spontaneously or from the unknown, but having from the beginning clear aims, constitutes a way to fight against the individualism and segregation in which we are immersed as inhabitants of this world.



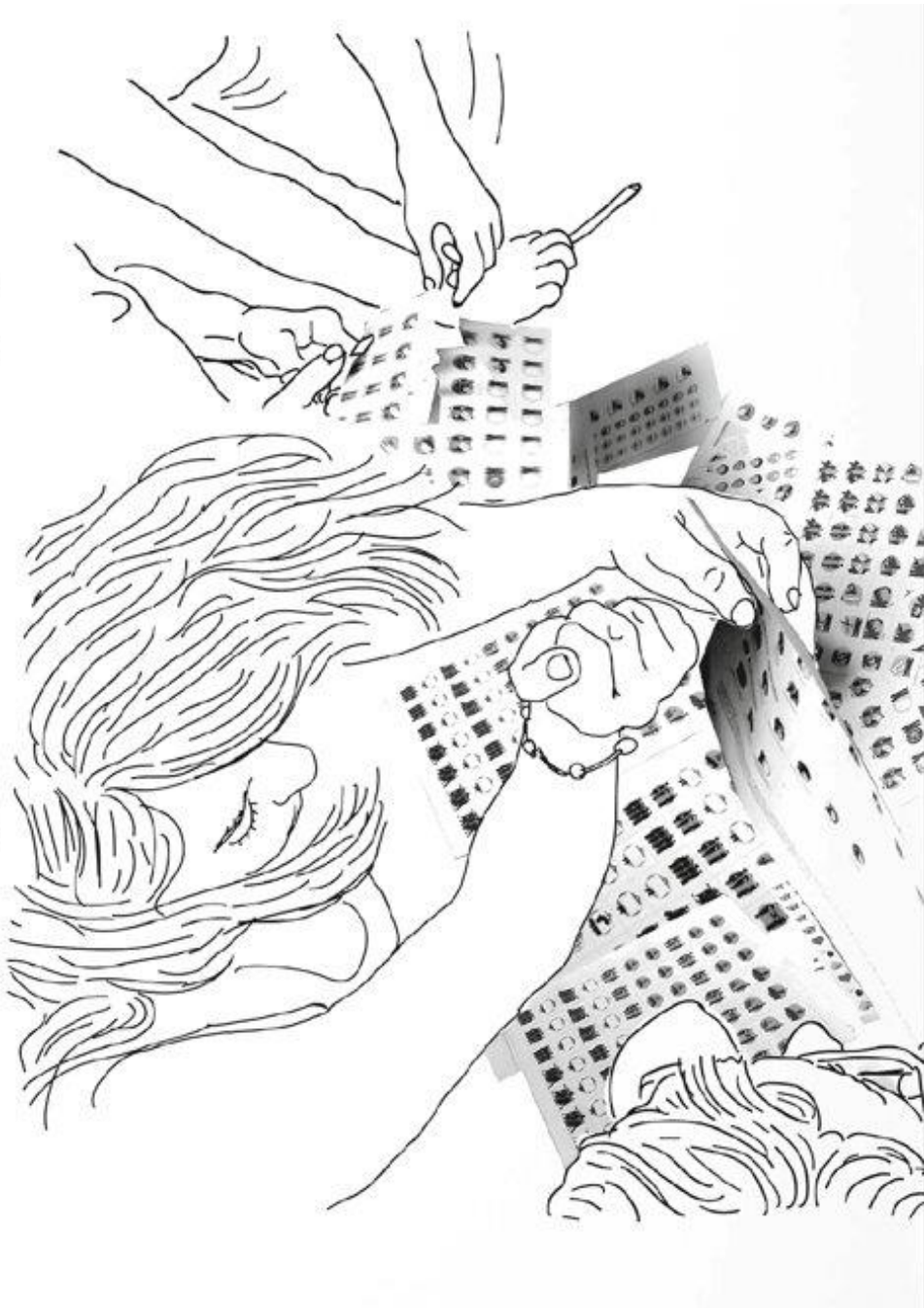
Excerpts from "How to Become an Occasional Cartographer?", This is Not an Atlas, A Global Collection of Counter-Cartographies Edited by KOLLEKTIV ORANGOTANGO+, 2018

What is collective mapping?

Collective mapping is a creation process subverting the place of enunciation to challenge dominant narratives on territories. To do so we recur to everyday knowledge and experiences of participants. On a graphic and visual means the most acute problems of the territory are rendered visible identifying responsibilities, reflecting upon the links to other topics, and marking consequences. This viewpoint goes along with the process of remembering and marking experiences and areas of organization and transformation so as to spin a web of solidarity and affection.

While the hegemonic representation might become the starting point for workshops (when using, for example, a printed cadastral map with its predesigned borders), during the process of exchange of knowledge a critical look over the territory is built as a result of the various opinions and thoughts shared. Therefore the first representation is transformed due to the fact that hidden questions or those which are not simple to represent are now included.

If there is time during the workshops, maps can be drawn freehand. This becomes an opportunity to play with borders, senses, and shapes. In each case, we must keep in mind that maps are only one tool among many others. When drawing maps is part of an organizational and collective process, this activity promotes the diagnoses and drawing up of participatory projects expected to be developed throughout the time.



Excerpts from "How to Become an Occasional Cartographer?", *This is Not an Atlas, A Global Collection of Counter-Cartographies* Edited by KOLLEKTIV ORANGOTANGO+, 2018



Workshop

10:30 - 10:45 (15 minutes):

Make groups of 5

List of self-organized initiatives / self-initiated spaces

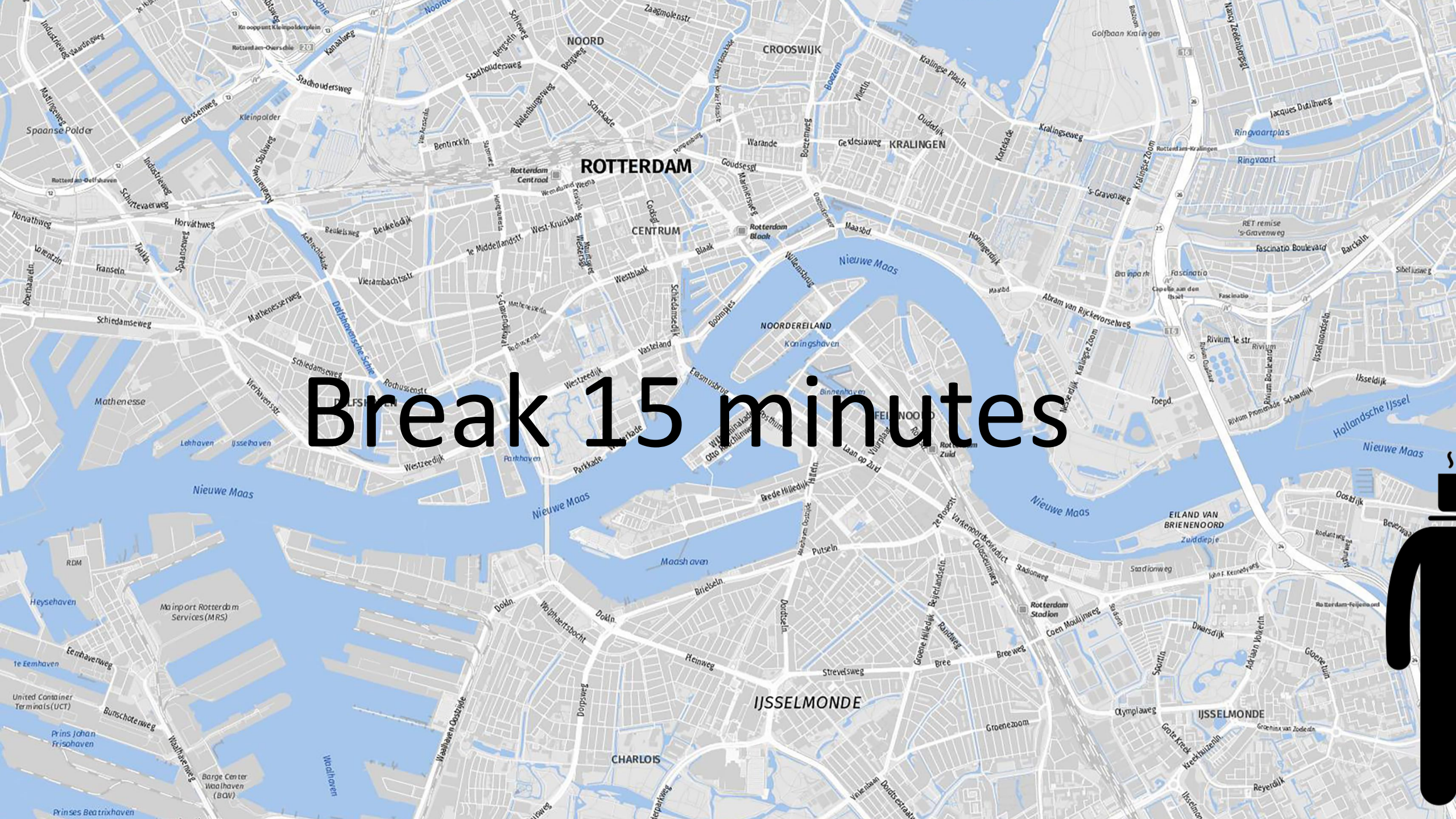
- Students make a list of what they consider self-organized initiatives and spaces.
- You can look at the list from Autonomous Fabric if it is needed.
- You can also look at Fucking Good Art and Groot Atelier Rotterdam.

10:45 - 11:15: Definitions in connection with their list:
visibility/invisibility, approach/access, IRL/Online, Care +
what are we missing? (max 2)

- Each student writes one definition for each theme.
- As a group, you narrow these definitions to max. 3 definitions per theme.

11:15 - 11:45: Make icons + photocopy

- Make visual Icons for each topic/theme and photocopy the icons so there are enough to be placed on the map.
- If the theme/topic has more than one definition, make a variation of your icon so that we can distinguish each category you have made.

A detailed map of Rotterdam, Netherlands, showing the city's layout with its characteristic canals and bridges. The map is centered on the city's core, with labels for various districts including Noord, Centrum, Kralingen, and IJsselmonde. The Nieuwe Maas river is prominent, flowing through the center. A large, bold, black text overlay reads "Break 15 minutes", positioned centrally over the map. The text is in a sans-serif font and is the most prominent feature on the image.

Break 15 minutes

12:00 - 12:30: Place initiatives in the map + place the icons in the map in relation to the spaces/initiatives + write experiences with these spaces/initiatives.

- Locate the self-organized initiatives/spaces on the map. If the location is not in the map, you can draw on paper and enlarge the map.
- Place the icons in the map in relation to the initiatives/spaces.
- Place your legend on the map (icons and their definitions)
- Write your personal or group experiences in these initiatives/spaces.

12:30 - 13:00 Round of conclusions and discussion -
What type of self-organized initiative would you build?
with whom? for whom? how? where?

Check out and Share:

What type of self-organized initiative would you build?

With whom? For whom? How? Where?

What information would you find helpful to start your own initiative?

A detailed map of the United States showing the territories of Federally Recognized Tribes. The map is a Voronoi diagram where each polygon represents a tribe's territory, colored in various shades of red, yellow, blue, green, and pink. Black dots are placed within each territory, likely representing the tribal headquarters. Dashed lines indicate state boundaries. The word "Thanks!" is centered in the middle of the map.

Thanks!

Siyon ng lugar o espasyo. Ito ay isang pulitikal na dokumento at kadalasan ang mga personal na kuwento o ala-ginagamit ng estado o ng mga kor-ala na nag-vulat ng pang-aabuso, pangapangamkam ng lupa, o iba pang karahasan na teritoryo. Hindi nasasama sa mga mapang ito ang pagpagsasanay gumawa ng Counter-Map:

1. Isuhit ang general na ideya ng lugar. Maaari magsimula sa mga kalsada, ilog, sapa.

2. Isuhit kung saan nakatira, nagtatrabaho, nakakakuha ng pagkain, tubig, iba pang pangangailangan at mga importanteng lugar.

3. Pangalanan at isulat ang mga karanasan dito. Partikular ang mga lugar ng takot, pangangamba, sakit, hirap.

4. Detalyehan ang mapa na para bang kaya



Invisible/visible:

- What is happening behind the scenes? What sustains those spaces? Who is supporting and helping in those initiatives that is not necessarily visible to the audience?
- Under-represented social groups. Whose practices do we see in those initiatives and whose practices do we not see?
- What is considered to be worth exhibiting and what is not?

Approach/Access:

- Where do you see your practice or work fitting?
- Are these initiatives accessible to you?
- What are they? Ex. Art Institution, community centre, collective, education.

IRL/Online:

- Is the initiative visible/tangible? Nomadic platform? Network?

Care:

- Are these initiatives supportive of your identities, your practices, your experiences?
- Do you feel safe/brave in these initiatives?
- Do these initiatives practice solidarity towards specific groups of people or causes?

