

# PRINT

REDEFINING DESIGN 65.1 FEBRUARY 2011

**THE COLLABORATION ISSUE**  
**SPECIAL SECTION**  
**GUEST DESIGNED AND EDITED**  
**BY PROJECT PROJECTS**



**GROUP MATERIAL'S ART OF**  
**ACTIVISM JONAS MEKAS KNOWS**  
**EVERYBODY NEWSPRINT GOES**  
**CHIC ATHLETICS' STRENGTH**  
**IN NUMBERS + STEVEN HELLER'S**  
**MATCHES MADE IN HELL**



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AARON: First, I want to thank everyone for being here. In early 2010, we had a crazy idea: to redesign PRINT magazine and invite guest art directors for every issue. Project Projects was the first group we thought of; when we asked them, they were very excited to both art direct and help edit this issue on "collaboration." Their first suggestion was to propose a roundtable discussion on the subject with a talented group of people from different disciplines. We thought that was a fantastic idea – and here we are now. continues on page 33





Interior of Artists  
Space during exhibition  
installation with director  
Stefan Kalmar seated  
at left, 2010. Photo by  
Henrik Knudsen.

ALEC: But what if you're in a publisher role, what if you're Farrar Strauss & Giroux? It's possible that you'll receive more credit than some of your authors do. Some literary authors will get attention because they're on that imprint. Same goes for a gallery or museum that's showing a certain artist.



What happens when you ask a curator, a graphic designer, and a group of architects to reinvent an essential New York alternative art space?

# Sweet Are the Uses of Adversity

TEXT: ADAM KLEINMAN  
TITLE TYPOGRAPHY: PLAN GROTESQUE STENCIL  
BY NICOLA DJUREK  
PHOTOGRAPHY: HENRIK KNUDSEN

Founded in 1972 to promote emerging and potentially marginalized art practices, Artists Space became a stalwart of the alternative New York art scene. The institution played host to many iconic exhibitions, such as 1977's *Pictures*, curated by Douglas Crimp, which canonically announced artists like Sherrie Levine and Robert Longo to a wider audience—and helped influence a whole generation of artists concerned with what is now called the “postmodern image.” As a touchstone of such programming, Artists Space has been the epicenter for landmark, if not iconoclastic, displays covering themes such as identity politics and the culture wars, the AIDS crisis, and the institutional recuperation of the avant-garde. In recent years, however, the program has faltered a bit in presenting field-defining exhibitions.

In an attempt to redefine its image and position, Artists Space recently brought in a new director, Stefan Kalmar, who, in turn, signaled the establishment of a “new era” by redesigning not only the program, but the actual physical space of the gallery, its offices, and its website, as well as Artists Space’s print media and style guide. To achieve this monumental task, Kalmar brought in a mix of provocative designers—ultimately, Common Room, ifau + Jesko Fezer, and Manuel Raeder—

DAVID: But the thing is, I would say that the presenting institution, the press or the museum or what have you, or the label, isn't in any kind of competition for space or prestige with the artist who's being presented. I mean, that's symbiotic. But to me, collaboration would be two people who can make an equal claim to artistic credit.

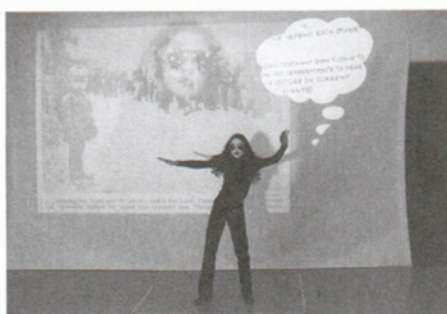


to think about how this branding could function symbolically as well as on a day-to-day basis.

Wherever these ideas led, the realities of use and budget became a filter dictating the final product, not to mention the delicate negotiations that take place when drawing together multiple partners. The resultant package has been universally lauded in the press; *The New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith went so far as to equate this bottom-up restructuring with the revolutionary setup that Alfred H. Barr, Jr., used to found the Museum of Modern Art.

To get to the heart of this possibly historic process, I spoke with various players to uncover how their ideas were made manifest. What follows is an impressionistic collage of these multiple voices, which together trace a tale of how all of these sometimes contradictory thoughts were distilled into a functional framework.

Collaboration—All together now?



LANA: I was thinking of a totally different arena, which is psychoanalysis – psychoanalysts often think of this analysis as a collaboration. I don't know if the analysand thinks of it as a collaboration, because there is a power relation, but, in fact, isn't the author of the analysis the analysand? Does there have to be a product or profit?

MICHAEL: But then that shared purpose would have to be implied. In your analysand example, you and your analyst are working together to heal; there's an economic exchange, but you share that purpose somehow.

PREM: It's funny because at another moment in time, a group of people sitting in a room like this would have simply been called "sociability," or "discourse," not "collaboration." It would have been something else. But nowadays, at least in New York, we assume that a group of people sitting in a room will lead to an outcome – a kind of work.

MICHAEL: Yes, is it that there has to be some sort of task at hand that you feel you're equally in charge of solving or addressing?





This spread, left to right: Greene Street facade, New York, featuring lettering by artist John Baldessari. Interior during a screening in the 1970s, New York. Adrian Piper performs at Artists Space in the 1970s, New York. Historical identities for Artists Space from the 1970s and 1980s. View of the group show, *Pictures*, at Artists Space, New York, 1977. Interior of Artists Space before its renovation, 2009. All images courtesy of Artists Space.



CARIN: What if it's not a task, but an interest?

TINA: In German, the word for collaboration is "Zusammenarbeit," which means "working together." In the example I brought up with the artist Sarah Morris, what is so wrong that somebody produces and somebody designs? That's a collaboration because she couldn't have done it without us, and we couldn't have done it without her. It doesn't need to be a product. It can be a goal or it can be an idea, or it can be a statement...

MICHAEL: Would all the workers at the Ford factory be collaborating to make that Taurus?

PREM: Is collaboration intrinsically equal, or is there a distinction between equal collaboration, in which investment and power are equally divided, and another form of collaboration that you described, like the Sarah Morris sweater?

Around May we were all asked to meet together and to have a completed project by a fixed end date, the opening of the first show, September 10, 2010. Also, the budget was very small, only about \$100,000 USD.

There are no rules in design. The photographer, of course, knows more about a given picture than I would even dare to imagine. So, often we remove ourselves so that the expert can determine the reception or use of something.

We had worked with Jesko previously on the Wyoming Building in New York, but we did not know everyone that was brought together for this "think tank" meeting.

Stefan knew us from a project we did with him in Munich for the Kunstverein. There, we put a large table in the center of the space that could be used as a bar or café. This communal table was a natural outgrowth of the large tables you have at beer halls in Munich. However, the large table could also be reconfigured and used as a stage, for example.

There wasn't much said of display during the first meeting; most of the desire was to create the space as a kind of generator with an open or common area at the core. On top of that, there was a desire to bring the office area into view so that the visitors and the staff would see each other.

I drew a kind of diagram of overlapping circles, with one representing a library, another the office area, and another the exhibition space, and so on, so as to create zones of contact between these usually discreet aspects.

I didn't really understand the teams. There was a lot of interest for collaboration, but there was little discussion of how this would result. So we just went off from that meeting and thought about the project independently.

Before the renovation, the space was a bit moribund, which paralleled the state of the institution: 30 percent of the floor space was used for storage, and another 30 percent was taken over by administration, in particular, a large corner office for the director. Basically the space began to mimic a kind of corporate institution.



Just gut the place, and be through with it. Then you get a kind of 1970s SoHo artists loft, much like what was around at the time the institution originally opened.

Well, the demo idea might have been a more a strategic move than a design move—a kind of let's-do-it-and-see, but also more as a *fait accompli* requiring new architecture.

At this point we thought that the loft idea is sort of untrue, I mean, as architects you're not really doing anything with this situation.

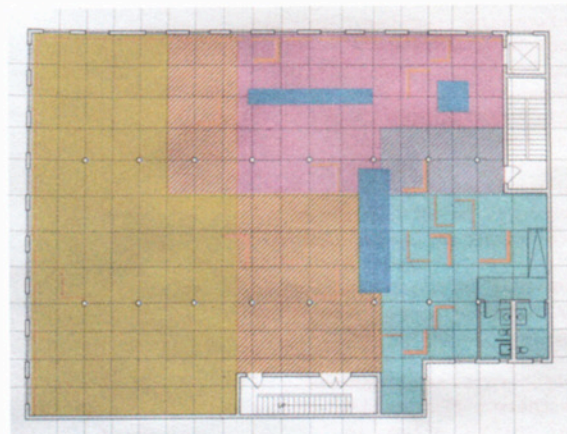
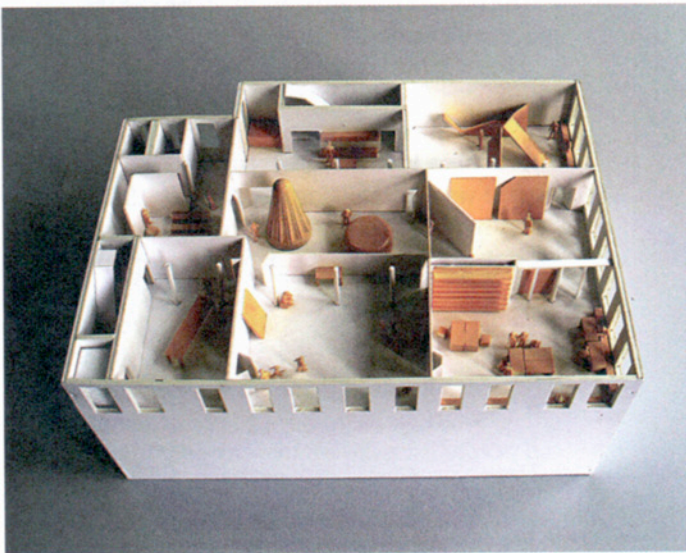
At the second meeting we came back with a proposal. Okay, build in nine spaces with 20 doors between them, as a counter-proposal to the wide-open space idea. This way you preinstall a setting that is rigid, one that is very rich as you move around in a nomadic way over time.

We weren't sure what to expect from the second meeting, so we just came back with a programmatic diagram superimposed on the gutted space. This grew out of the use diagram given in the first meeting.

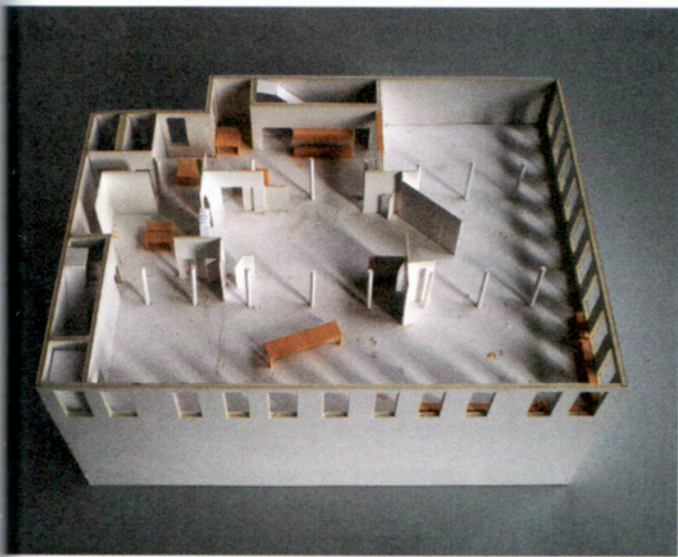
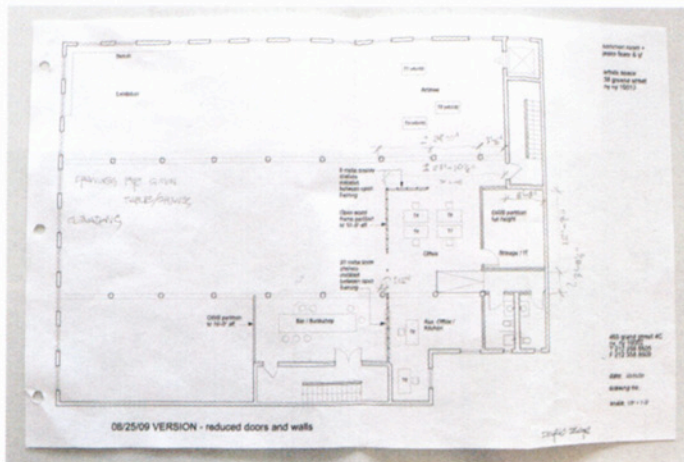
It is more dramatic to show change from within. Before their removal, the existing walls had congealed to define the cramped context of the exhibition space, which was something to move away from. So, the idea to take out walls just to put in new walls...



This spread, left to right:  
An early model for Artists Space containing nine rooms. Photo courtesy of ifau+Jesko Fezer. Proposed programmatic scheme for the space. Photo courtesy of Common Room. Demolition of existing walls as part of renovation, 2009. Photo courtesy of Artists Space. Revised model for Artists Space showing a large gate in the center of the gallery, 2009. Photo courtesy of ifau+Jesko Fezer. Annotated plan for Artists Space, 2009. Photo courtesy of Common Room.







MICHAEL: The question is: Is collaboration a certain state of grace which is different from all other work? Is it a special condition of work, unlike division of labor, for instance? You know, division of labor is essential to modern capital. It is the coordination of specialized activities that allows a modern product to be produced. But that's not necessarily collaboration.

DANIEL: I think collaboration is a way to describe a labor relationship that recognizes elements of social reciprocity rather than command and control. But, then again, if you pursue equality, you'll never get it. When you described the sweater project, I thought of your role as being this filter, a gatekeeper. That's an important position because you're a curator who decides there's an input and there's an output. What about the Coalition of the Willing, the people who wanted to invade Iraq? Is that collaboration? [General laughter]

MICHAEL: Coercion, I think.

DANIEL: Yeah or coordination. They're definitely there together, but they're not collaborating.

The idea of the nine rooms was rejected.

At some point, a member of the board, who was an architect, came in to see if we could actually complete something, and on time. I think there was some nervousness about what we were doing.

Some members from the original "think tank" team had already dropped out by now, probably because there wasn't enough structure.

The point of design is to take seriously the daily use, and not to just leave gestures. You could put in an open office in the space, but what if a screening room was needed? Further, what happens in the future when a new director comes in? There needed to be some base structure from which the space could logically adapt instead of falling back on the ad hoc.

We decided to pare down the room idea to match it with the open-room idea in a way that could serve as a backdrop for all of the mixed events in the future program: exhibitions, performances, talks, films, etc.

The walls were taken out, but we wanted to keep the doors from the first proposal, as a door is more expensive to build than a wall, if either should be needed.

This large door/gate idea was a kind of weird addition; what does it say about "transparency" to have a large door looming in the space?

As a compromise, posts were put in to establish a coordinate grid that matched the outline of the rejected rooms. This way, there would be some anchors that could define the space, but also so that some coordinates could be set up to build off in the future.

These coordinates would be slightly askew from the column grid so that they would read as something different.

Going back to the diagram, an office was needed, but one that could allow the staff and the visitors to see one another. So a series of screens grew off our anchors that could frame the space but keep it open.



With their exposed studs, without dry wall, the screens have the actual qualities of a wall but also allow for shelving to store the library and archive around the office.

There was a lot of interest in having a kitchen, although there wasn't enough money for that. Instead, the coordinates mapped out a space that a kitchen could go in, so we also factored in the plumbing and gas to make that option more feasible at a later date.

The screens themselves are based just on the module of the wood, which set up the clear story of the office. Likewise, the distance between them is dictated by the function of the shelves and circulation.

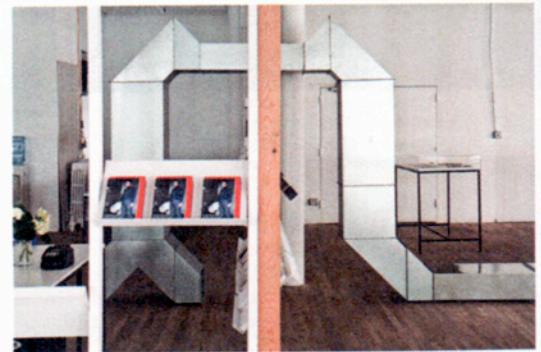
There was then a long discussion on whether to paint these screens, as painting could create some form of hierarchy. In the end, it was decided to leave them blank.

The floor was left unfinished, just sanded down. This was pragmatic, as there was little money, yet it is also risky as you think of maintenance long term.

All in all, the idea is to have something that is not finished, to have something that has the quality of a wall, of a shelf, that could be added to in the future. Also, this allowed a relationship to be established where we would be working on the project over a longer time, together.

New York is unique because it has three generations of artists living and working side by side. So there was also an idea to get these people talking, but how could design be used as a tool to open up new questions?

The calendar and announcements needed to be clear and consistent. So the mailers are designed on a serial leporello format that allows for variation, but could also be collected to form a book. That is, they create their own archive. Also, when they are unfolded, they become a poster, which fits evenly on the screens in the office area. This way, there is an extension of the 2-D into the architecture as the posters fill out the library.







DAVID: But let me ask again, what's the value in calling that a collaboration rather than "working together on a project"? We're using "collaboration" as a special term, and Tina is defending what she did as a collaboration when, in fact, it could be described as, "I contracted this sweater from Sarah Morris" or "I commissioned this sweater from Sarah Morris" or "We were hired to do this." But we're calling that a collaboration for a reason, and my question is why? What's being added when you do this?

ALEC: I think the important idea is that it wouldn't have existed otherwise. There's a band, Animal Collective, who just made a shoe. They would not have made shoes unless a shoe manufacturer came to them and said, "Come to us, design a shoe, and we will put it out there."

DAVID: Does the world need Animal Collective shoes?

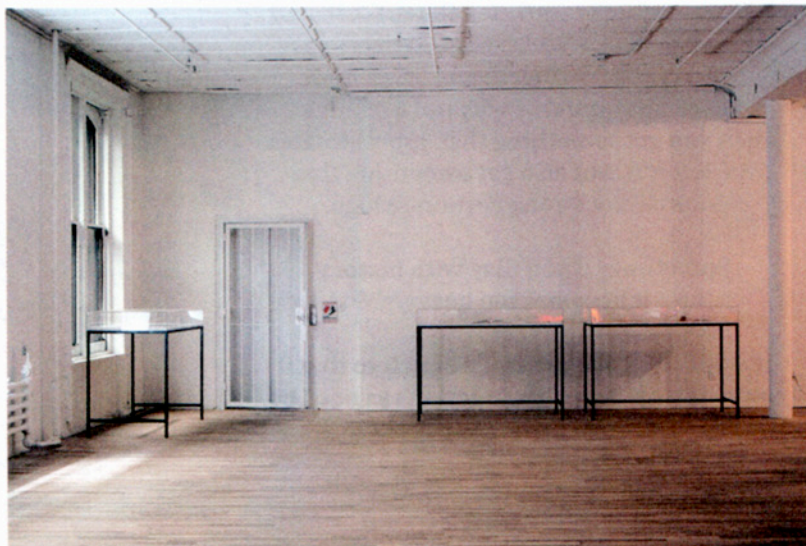
ALEC: I think that's a better question.

PREM: Going back to the question that David brought up before: If we were to ban the word "collaboration" from our speech, how would we define these situations?

ANGIE: But I think the only tractable question is how the word is used. We cannot say what collaboration means. There wouldn't be a talk here if it weren't for the fact that the word is being used in a variety of different ways.

ROB: Sometimes, the word is used in a way that makes work feel not like work. As work becomes more socialized, there is less of a division between the office and the home.

ANGIE: But I think that's where it can be very coercive. Whose purpose does it serve to call something a collaboration and in what particular context? Where do you stop defining where collaboration ends in any kind of production?



Opposite, top to bottom: Artists Space under construction, featuring exposed studs as "screens" for shelving and office use. Photo courtesy of Common Room. View of brochures on display, with Charlotte Posenenske installation behind. Photo courtesy of Manuel Raeder. Artists Space brochures in leporello format. Photo courtesy of Manuel Raeder. Artists Space vitrines in finished space. Photo courtesy of Common Room.

**In the Wyoming project we decided to put in a facsimile of Aldo Van Eyck's "ring" in the central exhibition space. This ring, which Van Eyck developed from looking at the form of the circle in various anthropological studies, serves not only as a platform or meeting place for communal exchanges, but also as a support that could be used in various ways. For example, a plank could be placed across it to form a table.**

**There was an idea that various barriers could work as a kind of hindrance so that contingency can set up a starting point for interaction. In other words, make something that someone has to deal with, as well as a base from which some form of context could be established. These coordinates play into that, however, we felt there should be a greater intervention.**

**The idea for interpretation was carried on in a design for a bench. This bench, much like the bar in Munich, could be used for people to meet.**

**At first the bench was to be placed in the corner where the old director's office was removed to show the transformation from a private closed space that approximated a corporate model to a now open and generous one.**



It's funny: The identity for the space began as a kind of joke. In the past, Artists Space had a circle for their brand, then there was later a square, so why not a triangle? Then you get something that approximates the letter A, but also get something that looks like a strong corporate logo.

Sometimes if you play with history it becomes too heavy.

It was decided to unfix the bench so that it could be used for other functions as need be, and not serve as a souvenir of a past memory.

Although the triangle brand has a clear form, the color often changes. It will stay like that for now to establish the identity, but in the future it will probably get played with, and it should mutate.

The bench has moved around over the last few months. For a while it was in front of the office, however it wasn't used much.

We hear through the grapevine that things have been changed or that new furniture has been built, but we seldom get that information first-hand.

Well, the design was kind of reused again in another project, and I feel a bit cheated by this.

We are happy that it is unfinished, but would be unhappy if it stayed this way. o



Above and below:  
Foil stamped business cards and stickers for Artists Space, employing a triangle in flexible usage as a mark. Photo courtesy of Manuel Raeder.



DAVID: It would be good to track some basic contexts where the word is used. Your collaboration is different from a graphic designer's collaboration, which is different from a collaboration in theater.

ROB: Right. I was talking to a friend of mine who was an assistant director on Law & Order who says he's taking out the trash, but at the same time, they're calling the project a "family" and a "collaboration." Using the term might suggest you're not at work even when you are. In order to not feel as if one is not working all the time, one makes the claim that some work is "collaboration" whereas other work is just "work." What is working with your friends when they're under contract? Which brings us back to the topic of weak ties: Is participation enough? Is knowing your colleagues enough to collaborate with them or does it require more than that?

LAN THAO: It requires a lot more. In my experience, it takes much longer to finish a project with five collaborators than if I completed a project myself. In my mind, it would be perfect, right? I have this vision, I have this idea, let's say it's a sweater, and I could do it, and it would be perfect. But then when you introduce collaborators to the discussion, the process is challenged, so it takes four times longer for the sweater to happen. Students often ask, what's the secret? And I say, be prepared that it will take a lot longer. Working together is great, sure, but there are a lot of ruptures.

MICHAEL: Why do you tolerate it? There has to be something on the plus side.





Above, clockwise:  
Interior of Artists Space  
office area and desks,  
2010. Photo by Henrik  
Knudsen. Installation view  
of Danh Vo, *Autoerotic  
Asphyxiation*, September  
15–November 7, 2010.  
Photo by Daniel Pérez.  
Courtesy of Artists Space.  
Installation view from  
*Charlotte Posenenske*,  
June 23–August 15, 2010.  
Photo by Daniel Pérez.  
Courtesy of Artists Space.

LAN THAO: Well, this particular collaboration [referring to Lin + Lam] works for me. Each time we begin a project, it's an agreement. On each project, my collaborator asks, why is your vision perfect? And that is the moment that I come back to myself and am challenged and grow.

LANA: I think it's discursive. You're offered another voice outside yourself but one that's not on equal ground.

MICHAEL: So it's therapeutic?

LANA: It can be but, as I said before, it's a kind of productive antagonism.